

NDOT partners with chapter and county for paving projects



The Navajo Division of Transportation partnered with Tohajiilee Chapter and Bernalillo County Public Works Division to pave two miles of road in Tohajiilee. Above, Medicine Horse Road, providing chapter members with access to Behavioral Health Services and the Tohajiilee Health Clinic, was recently paved by the county. Under terms of the agreement, NDOT and Tohajiilee Chapter contributed asphalt, while Bernalillo County contributed equipment and manpower for the project, which totaled over \$1.4 million. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

ALBUQUERQUE-Partnership is the future of transportation.

In an industry where paving one mile of roadway at a cost of \$1 million is not uncommon, stretching that transportation dollar is more important than ever in this age of sequestration and budget cuts.

Navajo Division of Transportation teamed up with Bernalillo County Public Works Division and the Tohajiilee Chapter to pave two miles of road in the community. The paving project is for access roads connecting the community with healthcare facilities and the chapter house.

On Oct. 25, 2013, all three entities met at the Public Works Division in Albuquerque to discuss progress on the project and to prepare for the final phase of paving.

NDOT director Paulson Chaco said the collaboration with the chapter and county was crucial to providing residents with accessibility to their facilities.

“Partnering with the chapter and county, we provided asphalt, which was utilized to pave two miles of road in Tohajiilee,” Chaco said. “There is still another mile that will be paved.”

Bernalillo County matched NDOT and the chapter dollar for

dollar, with in-kind services to pave the roadway, utilizing their own equipment and manpower.

NDOT contributed 7,360.26 tons of warm mix asphalt at a cost of \$441,785.75 which was paid in Sept. 2013. Tohajiilee Chapter contributed 4,432 tons of warm mix asphalt at a cost of \$295,000 which was paid in July 2013.

The two Navajo entities contributed a total of \$736,785.75 toward the project, which was matched by Bernalillo County for a total project cost of \$1,473,571.50 to pave two miles of road in Tohajiilee and one mile of road owned by the county.

The symbiotic nature of the agreement allowed Bernalillo County to use a portion of the asphalt surplus to pave a one mile segment of a frontage road in their jurisdiction, just off I-40, near the casino owned by Laguna Pueblo.

Laguna Pueblo recently acquired lands in the area outside the Tohajiilee reservation boundaries, near the improved roadway in the county’s jurisdiction.

After the one mile portion of the county road was paved, Laguna Pueblo approached the Mid-Region Council of Governments of

New Mexico to take over the road.

David Mitchell is the department director for Bernalillo County Operations and Maintenance.

Mitchell said the Bureau of Indian Affairs needed to be involved with the project to clear up jurisdictional issues that may arise in the future.

“BIA needs to get involved to say that’s a public road,” Mitchell said. “Of course (Laguna is) interested in taking over the road, we just finished paving it,” Mitchell said.

Chaco said NDOT would share design plans on the chapter access road with Bernalillo County before next paving effort in Tohajiilee.

The partnership formula is gaining traction and becoming more popular, because the cost of construction is divided between all the entities involved.

NDOT has long advocated for partnerships with the tribal, county, state and federal entities for road maintenance and construction.

“The counties have been doing this kind of work for a long time, especially McKinley County and Apache County in Arizona,” Chaco



NDOT director Paulson Chaco, center, said collaborating with tribal, county, state and federal entities has been crucial for road maintenance and construction projects on the Navajo Nation. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

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said. “You’ve got to be innovative with stretching that dollar.”

Tohajiilee community services coordinator Nora Morris was not satisfied with recent developments and demanded more roads be paved for her chapter.

“That’s not my only road. Remember, there’s 68 miles on my reservation that needs to be paved,” Morris said.

For now, NDOT plans on finalizing the Tohajiilee paving project and begin preparation for the snow removal activities that will undoubtedly have the Department of Roads busy for the winter season.

In addition to manpower, Bernalillo County utilized a bulldozer, two motor graders, a compactor, water truck, and several county trucks to complete the paving project near the Tohajiilee health centers.

During recent flooding in Sept., Bernalillo County road crews had to ensure the newly-paved road was not negatively impacted by flood waters.

Mitchell said, “They build a detention basin right in here. It traps the water that’s flowing down. Then it meters out and goes into a 24-inch culvert that’s under the road now.”

If weather permits, Bernalillo County road crews will be back out in Tohajiilee in two to three weeks to finalize the partnership project, paving the chapter house access road and hopefully connecting it to Medicine Horse Road near the medical clinic.

Information: www.navajodot.org



Left, Operations and Maintenance department director David Mitchell lauded the partnership with NDOT and Tohajiilee Chapter. He said it was probably the most cost effective way to pave. Right, Tom, project supervisor, made sure the paving crew stuck to the schedule and scope of work. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



A view of the newly-paved Medicine Horse Road, facing east. Another mile of paving remains to be completed for the Tohajiilee Chapter access road. (Photo by Rick Abasta)