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For Immediate Release
June 9, 2013

Navajo President Shelly Breaks Ground for Paving of Navajo Route 20



BODAWAY-GAP, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly broke ground on a project that has kept local residents in waiting for about 40 years.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place this in morning for the paving of Navajo Route 20. The ceremony took place at Tsinaabaas Habitiin Elementary School.

Plans call for about 28 miles of N. 20 to be paved and when paving is completed, then the route will serve as an alternative route for U.S. Highway 89 travelers.

The paving project is projected to cost about \$35 million and be ready for traffic by mid-August.

“Navajo Route 20 has been needing improvements for more than 40 years, and now we can begin a new chapter of travel not only for our local residents who will use

the road the most, but for our visitors who help sustain the tourism economy of Northern Arizona,” President Shelly said.

U.S. Hwy. 89 was closed February 20 after a landslide caused the road to partially collapse about 25 miles south of Page. Since then travelers have been detoured to U.S. 160 and north on State Route 98 for access to and from Page. The detour is 115-miles long and adds 45 minutes of travel time.

For local residents in the Bodaway/Gap and Bitter Springs areas, the detour increased a 30-minute drive to an hour and a half for residents to travel to Page, which is the nearest city.

President Shelly said the detour causes stress for local communities because the increased distance in travel results in longer hours for school children and people commuting to work.

“I understood the hardships the closing of U.S. 89 created for our Navajo people. Not only were our children rerouted on longer bus routes and workers had to put in extra hours just to get to work, the local economy also too was affected by the road closure,” President Shelly said.

The groundbreaking was the continuation of months of planning, said Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Regional Director Sharon Pinto.

After the U.S. Highway Administration, Arizona Department of Transportation and the BIA worked together, “this project became a reality,” Pinto said during the ceremony.

Navajo Division of Transportation Director Paulson Chaco said N20 is expected to be completed in mid August with plans to make the pavement suitable for heavier traffic.

President Shelly added that provision for road paving will include fencing to protect travelers and livestock, turning lanes and culverts for drainage.

Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine, Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration Karla Petty, ADOT State Engineer Jennifer Toth and local leaders spoke during the ceremony.

“This new road is a blessing for the Navajo Nation and shows how partnerships with tribal, state, and federal agencies can positively improve the lives of Navajo people,” President Shelly said.

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