



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly announces opening of new Huerfano bridge



President Shelly said the most dangerous bridge in San Juan County has been replaced with a \$2.3 million state-of-the-art bridge that will safely transport Navajo students to school. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

HUERFANO, N.M.—The new bridge is open.

In the eastern portion of the Navajo Nation, residents of the remote chapter of Huerfano have waited for more than two decades for the replacement of a bridge that carries residents across County Road 5150.

The bridge is located about five miles west of U.S. Highway 550, south of Bloomfield.

“The most dangerous bridge in San Juan County has been replaced,” President Shelly said. “This was the first major construction project funded by Navajo Division of Transportation since we entered into a direct funding agreement with the Federal Highway Administration in February of 2013.

“Now, school buses can safely transport children to school,” he added.

In 2013, the FHWA executed a direct funding agreement with NDOT, providing \$10 million to the tribal division annually.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is the other partner in the agreement. The BIA receives \$44 million annually from FHWA to service Navajo Nation roads.

Paulson Chaco, director of NDOT, said the new bridge is a major accomplishment for the Navajo Nation, proving the tribe has the capacity to complete major road projects to meet the needs of Navajo communities.

“This is the first time NDOT took over the reins from the BIA to complete a project of this magnitude from start to finish. We are now partners with the BIA and the direct funding agreement with the FHWA is making a significant difference,” Chaco said.

He said the bridge replacement was an important project the Shelly-Jim administration focused on completing before leaving office.

The bridge opened to receive traffic on April 28. Previously, residents had to travel through a makeshift route down the Gallegos Wash to cross the roadway.

Bridge 8105 was completed at a cost of \$2.3 million. NDOT provided \$1.5 million to replace the bridge and the difference was paid by San Juan County and the N.M. gross receipts tax. For more than two decades, the greatest hurdle to constructing the 356-foot bridge was funding.

The average height of the two-lane bridge deck above the natural channel is 11 to 12-feet. The bridge is constructed of pre-stressed concrete girders on drilled shaft foundations, with a

cast-in-place concrete deck.

The old single lane Bailey bridge that was replaced was constructed in the 1970s. The old bridge was known as the most dangerous bridge in San Juan County because it had a rating of 13 on a scale of 1 to 100.

Of the 18 bridges in the county inventory, it was placed on top of the priority listing for replacement.

Chaco said NDOT and San Juan County are going to announce the official ribbon cutting ceremony for the new bridge soon.

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