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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan Welcomes Office of Federal Lands Visitors during a Special TCDC Meeting

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) welcomed special visitors to a Special TCDC Meeting Tuesday morning, Aug. 28 during a Special Transportation and Community Development Committee at the Navajo Nation Museum.

Speaker Morgan thanked John Baxter, Associated Administrator for Federal Lands, and Bob Sparrow from Federal Lands "for taking part in Navajo issues," and begin to improve Navajo Nation reservation roads.

"We have tri-state coverage," Speaker Morgan said. "It's very important to know that our Nation includes the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. When we go back to our chapters, our community people are always talking about roads and road improvements."

Other dignitaries who attending the special meeting include Ben Shelley, Vice-President of the Navajo Nation and N.M. State Sen. John Pinto, District 3, Tom Platero of the Navajo Nation Department of Transportation and Navajo community leaders who each gave a report about road conditions and concerns.

Speaker Morgan said numerous community members ask Navajo leaders, "When is our road to school going to be finished? When is our school bus road going to be completed?"

He said that road improvements and construction one of the top priorities for the Navajo Nation. Other top priorities for Navajo leaders to address are education, resources and water.

Speaker Morgan said that the number of state paved roads is 1,679, and at the county level it is 1,723 roads that are paved, and 9,598 miles are unpaved. He added that there are an unidentified number of 5,000 roads that is 14,598 miles.

Speaker Morgan said that for the Bureau of Indian Affairs roads there is 1,483 miles of paved roads, and 4,498 of dirt roads. He noted that there 138 BIA gravel roads. This is 6,119 miles of BIA roads.

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On the tribal side, there are dirt and paved roads. He estimates this is about 77 miles.

He said that at the state level there are 1,679 paved roads.

Speaker Morgan said this is about 14,598 miles of identified roads on the Navajo Nation.

Baxter wishes to review the success and obstacles facing the Navajo Department of Transportation. He will participate in a two-day tour of the Navajo Nation on paved and unpaved roads with Tom Platero of NDOT and NDOT staff.

Federal lands is an entity of the U.S. Department of Transportation under the Federal Highway Administration.

The Office of Federal Lands provides program stewardship and transportation engineering services for planning, design, construction and rehabilitation of the highway and bridges that provide access to and through federally owned lands. Additionally, the Office of Federal Lands is to provide financial resources and technical assistance for a coordinated program of public roads that serve the transportation needs of Federal and Indian lands.

Sampson Begay, TCDC Chairperson, told the special visitors and others who attended the special meeting that the Navajo Nation's concerns including funding and road maintenance.

The Navajo Nation needs an inventory of roads. The Navajo Nation encompasses more than 25,000 sq. mi. of land base greater than the state of West Virginia, yet the Navajo Nation only receives a tenth of the funds the state receive in federal transportation funding.

Funding must be fair and equitable between small tribes and large-land based tribes for 2007 and 2008.

Issues surrounding the inventory is based on roads that cross over Native American lands and enter through and cross state and Interstate roads.

Re-authorization of the SAFETEA-LU at higher levels of funding should be encouraged during 2009.

Funding recommendations for funding from Congress must include road maintenance, bridges, transportation planning including training.

The TCDC Committee are scheduled to meet Aug. 29-30 during an Intertribal Transportation Association and the Council of Large Land Based Tribes Special Meeting on Re-authorizing SAFETEA-LU in Denver, Colo.

Speaker Morgan is vice-president of the Large Land Based Tribes Council.

The meeting at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 29 is scheduled to meet at the Colorado Department of Transportation Headquarters, Conference Room, 4201 E. Arkansas Ave.

The second day of the meeting at 8:30 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 30 is scheduled to meet at the Denver University Cultural Center.

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The ITA and the CLLB are scheduled to host this special meeting to solicit for grass-roots comments relatives to the federal highway legislation also known as SAFETEA-LU, and the upcoming re-authorization.

This meeting will be a good opportunity for member tribes to be updated with on-going transportation matters.