

Navajo Nation benefits from TIGER grant to rehabilitate Torreon Road



Gesturing about the humble beginnings of the Torreon Road is David Rico, Torreon Chapter President. Rico said Navajo families used to gather and travel in covered wagons to attend Zia Feasts, carving out a road in the process. (Sandoval County photo by Sidney Hill)

The community members of the rural northwestern New Mexico town of Torreon have finally earned their stripes.

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program, or TIGER, has funded \$5 million to Sandoval County N.M. for the Torreon Road Rehabilitation project for FY 2012.

The total cost of the project is \$5,740,000 and is a collaborative effort between the N.M. Department of Transportation, Navajo Division of Transportation, and the Mid Region Council of Governments.

After years of driving a bone-jarring dirt road, the community will finally see 11.9

miles of rural road transformed into a paved connector with shoulders, allowing for 55 to 65 mph speeds.

Torreon Road was the only project selected for TIGER grant in New Mexico.

Four chapters of the Navajo Nation and Sandoval County are served by the road, which links Counselor, Ojo Encino and Torreon with U.S. 550.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the road construction took place on April 5 in Torreon, at the intersection of San Luis and Torreon Roads.

Franklin's Earthmoving has been selected to do the construction.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said the new road is

the product of partnership.

"Sandoval County, NDOT, and Navajo Nation have done (partnership) and succeeded. It works, government-to-government," Shelly said. "As we know, roads are bad around here."

He said the importance of paving the road hinged on the need to get school kids safely to school and provide access for emergency services.

Shelly added, "We have to keep those roads where they're good enough to be safe."

J. Don Martinez, division administrator for the Federal Highways Administration's N.M. Division, agreed with the president.

"Transportation is important

to your children. They have a right to be picked up by a bus to take them to school," Martinez said.

He revealed that he was raised in a rural part of the state and was familiar with the importance of transportation services.

In the rural parts of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation, the roads are not in the best condition, Martinez explained.

"You're not asking for much. You're just asking for the roads to be in better condition, so you can have access to those things everyone else has," he said.

Torreon Chapter President David Rico shared a history of the road.

“We used to see a lot of covered wagons on this road for the Zia Feast. The day before the feast, the people would camp on the other side of San Luis. That is how this road was born in the beginning,” he said.

Today, you see headlights in the early morning and in the evening hours as people returned home, he added.

Navajo Nation Council delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca-Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said he used to receive letters from Torreon School.

“The kids were writing letters on this road because they ride on the bus and it’s too bumpy and takes a long time to get home,” Tsosie said.

Donning hardhats and grabbing shovels, the dignitaries broke ground with their shovels and officially began the construction process for the new road.

The road reduces travel distance by 45 miles and will save time and money for motorists. In addition to residents, the road is also used by mining companies in the area.

Families are excited for accessibility to school buses and first responders.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, “The TIGER program enables DOT to use a rigorous process to select projects with exceptional benefits, explore ways to deliver projects faster and save on construction costs, and make investments in our Nation’s infrastructure that will make communities more livable and sustainable.”

TIGER GRANT STATISTICS

- The U.S. Department of Transportation is authorized to award \$474 million in TIGER Discretionary Grants pursuant to the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (Public Law 113-6, March 26, 2013).
- TIGER program funds are awarded on a competitive basis for projects that will have a significant impact on the Nation, a metropolitan area or a region.
- TIGER invests funding in road, rail, transit and port projects.
- Congress dedicated \$1.5 billion for TIGER I. As a result, 51 capital projects were completed.
- \$600 million for TIGER II, producing 42 capital projects.
- \$526,944 million for FY 2011, for construction of 46 capital projects.
- \$500 million for FY 2012, netting 47 capital projects built.
- Each project is a multi-modal, multi-jurisdictional or otherwise challenging to fund through existing programs.



TIGER

U.S. Department of Transportation



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said the new paving project was the result of partnership and government-to-government relations. He said NDOT and Sandoval County will partner again for Red Dog graveling. (Sandoval County photo by Sidney Hill)



The majestic view of Cabezon Peak served as the backdrop for the groundbreaking ceremony at the intersection of San Luis and Torreon Roads on April 5, 2013. (Sandoval County photo by Sidney Hill)



The dignitaries from the Navajo Nation, Sandoval County, State of New Mexico and Federal Highway Administration broke ground to change lives in Torreon. (Sandoval County photo by Sidney Hill)