

Resources and Development approves ADOT easement

ALAMO, N.M.-The Resources and Development Committee unanimously approved the temporary construction easement for the Arizona Department of Transportation on April 30, 2013.

By a vote of 3-0, Legislation No. 0123-13 was approved, granting ADOT an easement to construct, operate and maintain road improvements on Navajo Route 20, located on Navajo Nation trust lands in the vicinity of Bodaway-Gap, Coppermine and LeChee Chapters.

ADOT will pave the existing alignment of N20 as an interim detour route until repairs are completed to the damaged roadway of U.S. 89.

The roadway will now be designated as U.S. 89T for a three-year period. The committee also waived the surface compensation amount because the roadway will benefit Navajo communities.

A portion of U.S. 89 was destroyed during dry slide that occurred near the Bitter Springs-Echo Cliffs area on Feb. 20. ADOT detoured traffic through an alternative route, taking travelers east on U.S. 160, then north on State Road 98 into Page.

However, the detour added 45 more miles and extra drive time.

Paving U.S. 89T would substantially reduce travel time for motorists heading to and from Page.

ADOT has selected FNF Construction, Incorporated as the contractor and the two parties are currently in negotiations for the construction costs associated with paving the roadway.

FNF Construction received

the 2011 Arizona Transportation Partnering Excellence Award for the U.S. 93 Hoover Dam project.

Efforts to pave the roadway have been spearheaded by ADOT, along with the Navajo Division of Transportation, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Federal Highway Administration.

Typically, the process for a construction easement can take months, sometimes even years to complete.

For the paving of U.S. 89T, the process was completed within a month's time, with the cooperation of all agencies involved to address the emergency.

The collaboration between all agencies was acknowledged by legislation sponsor Duane Tsinigine (Bodaway-Gap, Coppermine, Kaibeto, LeChee, Red Lake-Tonalea).

"This will lessen the frustration and stress of the people out there," Tsinigine said.

Darryl Bradley, principal civil engineer for NDOT, said the collaboration served

the needs of local chapters in terms of school bus routes, people traveling to work, medical services, and social programs.

Bradley said, "There's just been a lot of effort and partnership on getting this done in such a short timeframe."

Leonard Tsosie (Baca-Pre-witt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon,



RDC member Leonard Tsosie holds up an exhibit from the temporary easement package from ADOT, a letter from the BIA and lauds the partnership that got the easement completed in record time. (Photos by Rick Abasta.)

Whitehorse Lake) was appreciative of the work that was done.

"From my office to yours, I really want to thank you," Tsosie said. "But especially for Coppermine Chapter. They've been coming to this committee with tears in their eyes asking us to please fix the road."

Negotiations and compromise that led to the inclusion of fencing into the project added permanency to the road structure that will be built, he explained.

"I really appreciate the way all of you worked together to crank it out," he said.

Before voting on the legislation, the committee shared concerns on the archaeological components to the project, which was addressed by the Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department.

In addition to Navajo Nation archaeologists monitoring the construction, ADOT and its contractor will also have an ar-

chaeological team on standby to address any issues that may arise.

Because N20 was surveyed at least twice already, NDOT and BIA staff have already identified the location of all archaeological sites, traditional cultural property and a gravesite found near the roadway.

Because the temporary detour construction is the result of an emergency, the regulations of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation have streamlined the easement process with regard to the normal requirements of a cultural resource compliance form.

RDC Chairwoman Katherine Benally congratulated the efforts of the team.

"I want to take this time to thank ADOT for adding more money. Thank you," Benally said.

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