

RDC approves FY 2015 Tribal Transportation Improvement Program



The Navajo Transportation Complex in Tse Bonito, N.M. is the headquarters for Navajo Division of Transportation. The approval of the five-year TTIP will allow NDOT to move forward with more than \$277 million in projects. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK—The Resources and Development Committee of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council approved the Navajo Nation FY 2015 Tribal Transportation Improvement Program on Sept. 2, 2014.

Navajo Division of Transportation submitted a 60-page document to RDC for review and detailed the five-year project listing, which includes preliminary studies, construction administration and roadway improvements.

Roads are a major concern for many Navajo chapters.

NDOT is charged to perform critical functions related to transportation road improvements in collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, local, state and federal agencies for development of a tribal transportation priority listing.

The projects are mandated by 25 CFR Part 170, Subpart D under the Tribal Transportation Program.

Paulson Chaco, director of NDOT, said the FY 2015 TTIP now moves forward to the Federal Highway Administration for final approval. If approved,

the project listing for the Nation will be included in the national transportation improvement program.

He said progress has been swift during this administration, but additional road improvement needs arise during monsoon flooding and the winter season.

“Projects in the five-year TTIP include cultural and environmental impact studies, right-of-ways, centerline surveys and designs,” Chaco said.

Other program funds include safety projects, planning, operation and maintenance. Additionally, two percent of planning funds are used to provide technical assistance to chapters for transportation planning, mapping, roadway data collection and long range transportation plans.

A total of \$277,500,000 has been programmed into the TTIP through FY 2019. The Navajo Nation receives \$55,500,000 annually in funding from the FHWA for transportation projects. NDOT receives \$10 million of that amount, after it entered into a direct funding agreement with the FHWA in

2013.

“The direct funding agreement changed the dynamics of transportation on the Navajo Nation,” Chaco said. “The BIA is now partners with Navajo DOT. They are no longer our oversight. This has strengthened our tribal sovereignty.”

Execution of the direct funding agreement was only one of the directives made to Chaco by Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly when the administration took office in 2011. Early on in the administration, Navajo Nation Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Church Rock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) approached NDOT with the need to repair N7054, a dirt road located in Pinedale, N.M.

The N7054 project is on the five-year TTIP for grade, drain and gravel construction for 3.5 miles of road. This safety project is at a cost of \$3,125,000. Preliminary engineering will be from 2015 through 2017, at a cost of \$325,000. The following two years will be construction engineering and construction, at a cost of \$2,800,000.

However, immediate needs exist for local residents in Pinedale that travel on the road to get to school, work, medical services and other basic needs.

Chaco said the Pinedale project is a two-fold initiative, with efforts to address the immediate need for safety of the traveling public and the other to provide a long-term solution to the roadway.

Yazzie was in attendance for the RDC meeting on Tuesday and stressed the importance of improving the road in Pinedale. In 2012, he requested that the project be placed on the priority listing and staunchly advocated

for its improvement since.

Chaco said, “This road project, like many across the Navajo Nation, has been discussed for years, but actual progress rarely occurs due to many factors, including lack of funding.”

He said the immediate need was to improve the road, which was often impassable because of mud during inclement weather. Because of this overwhelming need to provide residents with a usable road during adverse conditions, Chaco said NDOT has earmarked Fuel Excise Tax fund to purchase gravel for the road in the interim until the long-term project is completed.

A total of 1.4 miles of road will be graveled on N7054. This will require a purchase of 2,651 tons of gravel to complete the road.

We will utilize NDOT equipment and operators to place the gravel, Chaco said. He said the Pinedale project was just one of hundreds across the Nation that require immediate attention.

For now, NDOT continues to assist the Navajo people through FHWA and FET funding, combined with ingenuity and adaptability.

Information: www.navajodot.org

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