



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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President Nez continues to push for federal policy changes to advance infrastructure development on the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Division Directors met virtually with Bureau of Indian Affairs leadership on Friday, to discuss possible solutions to address federal obstacles to infrastructure development on the Navajo Nation, such as BIA's approval process for rights-of-way and environmental clearances.

President Nez stated that the Biden-Harris Administration is proposing funding tribal infrastructure at unprecedented levels to finally provide Native American people long overdue access to water, electricity and broadband.

"This a transformative moment in Indian Country, but federal Indian policy has not kept up with the times. The federal statute for rights-of-way in Indian Country became law in 1948. Policy changes are long overdue to help advance infrastructure development on our own lands. Sooner than later, we want to see a bill passed by Congress to make these changes that we are proposing to the federal government. That's what we are working toward," said President Nez.

He added, "The BIA should be a partner, not a steward, to the Navajo Nation. The relationship between the BIA and large, advanced tribes like the Navajo Nation needs to honor tribal sovereignty and support tribal self-determination. The relationship should enable the tribe itself to move projects to construction and ensure the efficient use of federal funds."

During COVID-19, the Navajo Nation spent approximately half of the CARES Act funds on tribal infrastructure projects due to the time it takes the BIA to approve rights-of-way and environmental clearances. The other half of the funding was directed toward direct financial relief for members of the Navajo Nation.



During the meeting, Division Directors explained how current rights-of-way and environmental clearance requirements make it more difficult to construct projects to provide water, electricity, broadband, roads and even emergency services.

“One cell tower took nine years, and 75-feet of fiber took one year,” said Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Office Executive Director Christopher Becenti.

President Nez also continues to advocate for the Nez-Lizer Administration’s white paper titled, “Diné Atiin Bahane: Navajo Road Emergence,” which requests the federal government to enact seven specific policy changes to improve the Navajo Nation’s transportation system.



In total, there are currently 14,167 miles of roadway within the Navajo Nation, which includes nearly 9,400 miles of earthen roads, 1,700 miles of paved highways, approximately 179 bridges, and five airports. The Navajo Area BIA owns 42-percent of the roads, the Navajo Nation owns 34-percent, the state of Arizona owns 12-percent, and respective counties own 12-percent

“Road projects often wait two to three years for BIA clearance approval. It should not take more than a few months,” said Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith.

During the discussion, BIA officials acknowledged the longstanding challenges and offered their support to work with the Nez-Lizer Administration to develop more solutions. President Nez stated that he will continue to work with the BIA and Congress and that he hopes to soon have an opportunity to go before the White House Council on Native American Affairs to present the policy change proposals.

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