



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

CONTACTS:

Jared Touchin, Communications Director
(928) 274-4275

Crystalyne Curley, Sr. Public Information Officer
(928) 274-2758

nnopvp.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 20, 2021

President Nez pushes for new era in tribal roads and federal relations during meeting with White House officials

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez met virtually with officials from the White House to propose federal policy changes needed to allow the Navajo Nation do what needs to be done to improve road maintenance and construction across the Navajo Nation.

Looking at Navajo roads through the lens of job creation, President Nez spoke of how federal red tape delays infrastructure improvements and deters investments in the Navajo Nation, slows the process of creating jobs and access to broadband, clean water, electricity, education, and other infrastructure needed to support Navajo families, facilities, communities and businesses.

“Investors and entrepreneurs regularly present initiatives in the hopes of creating jobs on the Navajo Nation, but soon leave due to poor infrastructure. Our lack of navigable roads deters economic opportunities. Roads are the key to job creation and we need certain policy changes to help advance new road projects and improve the overall transportation system on the Navajo Nation,” said President Nez.

In April, President Nez also met with U.S. Sec. of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and U.S. Deputy Asst. Sec. for Tribal Affairs Arlando Teller to present the Nez-Lizer Administration’s transportation white paper titled, “Diné Atiin Bahane: Navajo Road Emergence,” which details specific challenges and successes related to recent transportation projects and recommends seven specific federal 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.

The white paper puts forth seven requests for federal agencies, the White House, and other federal government offices including:

- Resolve conflicts in agency authority and jurisdictions in order to protect our people, the environment, and indigenous cultural resources.
- Harmonize agency guidance with federal law to make Diné roads safe.
- Provide flexibility to the Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA) that the BIA uses for road maintenance so that TPA funds may also be used to fund tribal roads.
- Ensure agency practices are consistent with policies to make the Navajo road system equitable.
- Protect the integrity of tribal roads funds so that they do not subsidize non-tribal roads.
- Recognize that tribal bridges and roads present different exigencies of circumstance that require complimentary, not competitive funding sources.
- Promote tribal sovereignty by retroceding Secretarial approval over tribes who have demonstrated their own capacity for federal regulatory compliance.

President Nez concluded his remarks by stating to the federal officials, “I have identified for you today a few systemic problems in tribal transportation that are the low hanging fruit — the problems within your reach to solve. It is important for you to hear from a cross section of Indian Country. Indian Country is comprised of diverse tribes that vary in size, culture, topography and economies. Rest assured that tribal leaders like me and other large land-based tribes stand ready to partner with you to ensure that every dollar you invest in tribal roads can create new tribal jobs. The time is long overdue for the federal government to move beyond its colonial policies and practices that make nation building on tribal lands.”

In previous meetings with federal officials, President Nez has stated that the Navajo Nation has built up its capacity over many years to administer its own transportation programs, to fulfill our self-governance agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, and to put forth specific policy changes that would deliver a safer and more efficient transportation system that supports economic opportunities, emergency response services, access to education, and enhance the Navajo Nation’s overall ability to be more self-sufficient in the long-term.

The Diné Atiin Bahane: Navajo Road Emergence white paper is available online at:
<https://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/News-Media/Latest-News>.

###

For the latest news from the Office of the President and Vice President, please visit <http://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/> or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.