



The Navajo Nation  
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**President Nez meets with Secretary Haaland and Secretary Buttigieg to push for inter-agency agreement to improve roads**



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez meeting with U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in Washington D.C. on March 31, 2022.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – On Thursday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez met with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland and U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg in Washington D.C., to advocate for policy changes which includes a proposed inter-agency agreement between the two federal departments that would streamline the right-of-way clearance process to expedite the construction of new roads and improvements on the Navajo Nation. Similar agreements could potentially be used for other right-of-way issues related to water, power, and broadband development.

In 1948, Congress authorized the Interior Secretary to oversee the right-of-way process on tribal lands including those required for road developments. Under current laws, tribes also have to obtain two separate environmental clearances from federal agencies to proceed with most road projects. This process can take several years to complete, stated Navajo Division of Transportation

Director Garret Silversmith, who participated in Thursday’s meeting virtually. Under the proposed inter-agency agreement, the Bureau of Indian Affairs would transfer highway right-of-way and sources of material authority to the Secretary of Transportation, acting through the Federal Highway Administration for the Tribal Transportation Program.

President Nez also highlighted the Nez-Lizer Administration’s transportation white paper titled, “Diné Atiin Bahane: Navajo Road Emergence,” which recommends seven specific federal policy changes intended to improve the Navajo Nation’s transportation system. During Thursday’s meeting with Secretary Buttigieg, officials noted that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill requires the U.S. Department of Transportation and Department of Interior to work together to streamline the approval process on certain projects in Indian Country, reflecting language from the white paper submitted by President Nez to federal officials last year.

“Our technical experts developed the white paper last year and we are pleased that it was used within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that was passed by Congress and signed by President Biden. Our voices are being heard all the way to the White House. The inter-agency agreement is an idea that was previously used by the federal government in the past to expedite infrastructure development. Now, we want that same process to be implemented for the Navajo Nation so we can make greater progress on road construction and improvements. This is an opportunity for the Biden-Harris Administration, through the Department of the Interior and Department of Transportation, to do something extraordinary for Indian Country,” said President Nez.



**PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez meeting with U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in Washington D.C. on March 31, 2022.**

Director Silversmith stated during the meeting that road projects often sit idle for years while the right-of-way and environmental clearances are completed through the federal processes. He also noted that the Navajo Nation currently has over 1,700 miles of paved roads, over 9,500 miles of dirt roads, and 180 bridges – many of which require significant improvements.

“As we move forward with the proposed inter-agency agreement for right-of-way authorities, we will continue working closely with our federal partners. We greatly appreciate Secretary Haaland and Secretary Buttigieg for meeting with us and receiving the proposal. We also thank Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Arlando Teller, for his support and leadership at the federal level,” said President Nez.

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