



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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**Budget and Finance Committee
receive reports, take action on legislation**



PHOTO: NDOT reported before the Budget and Finance Committee regarding the bonding to program to improve tribal transportation across Navajo land on Dec. 3, 2019.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Dec. 10, 2019 – The Budget and Finance Committee convened Dec. 3 for their regular meeting and received a report from Navajo Division of Transportation regarding the transportation bond.

NDOT completed the draft Navajo Nation Transportation Bonding Program on Oct. 31, 2019, with assistance from the Legislative Branch and Executive Branch. The division has presented the plan to Resources and Development Committee and Law and Order Committee. Next, they will report before the Health, Education and Human Services Committee.

Executive director Garret Silversmith said the bonding program covers four major areas across the Navajo Nation transportation infrastructure: bridges, pavement preservation projects, earth

road improvements, and Tribal Transportation Improvement Program shortfall.

“Distribution of the \$320 million is going to be distributed evenly among all five agencies. Each of our main areas is described here, from design on down to actual construction,” Silversmith said.

There is a total of 14,167 roads across the Navajo Nation. The BIA owns 42 percent or 5,994 miles of road. The Navajo Nation owns 34 percent or 4,890 miles of road. The states own 12 percent or 1,645 miles of road. The counties own 12 percent or 1,638 miles of road.

Only 15 percent of the roads maintained by the Navajo Nation and BIA miles are paved or graveled, amounting to 10,884 miles of road. From that amount, 14 percent or 1,500 miles of road are

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paved. One percent or 98 miles of road are graveled. Eighty-five percent or 9,286 miles are dirt roads.

In addition, there is a total of 179 bridges maintained by the BIA and NDOT. From that amount, 38 bridges are eligible for rehabilitation and 28 bridges are eligible for replacement.

The Long-Range Transportation Plan was completed by NDOT in April 2016 and approved by the RDC on Oct. 25, 2016. The plan identified \$1.4 billion in needs to address pavement deficiencies and \$6.5 billion was identified for upgrades to the existing roadway system. The total transportation need is \$7.9 billion.

NDOT receives \$55 million annually in federal funding from the Federal Highway Administration. Additionally, \$6 million is generated from the Fuel Excise Tax. NDOT also receives \$1 million from the General Fund. BIA receives \$6 million annually from the Department of Interior to maintain BIA routes. The total funding for the transportation infrastructure is \$68 million annually, which will take 116 years to meet the current needs.

Several delegates had concerns regarding the plan for bonding of NDOT projects, including Delegate Amber Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadiiahi-To' Koi, Red Valley, Sheep Springs, Toadlena-Two Grey Hills, Tse'alnaozt'i'i') who said a similar bonding effort for the tribal justice centers resulted in a "huge payout" because projects were not shovel-ready.

"This is something that I'd support, but I know there's a financial dynamic that is not discussed in your presentation," she said. Delegate Crotty was especially interested in learning about the stimulus component to their plan that would benefit Navajo small business owners. "What kind of conversations are we having with small business owners

who do this kind of work?" she asked.

Chairman Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tohajiilee) shared similar concerns and said financing of the bond will be a major consideration when the legislation moves forward. He noted that before the start of the meeting, he met with Office of the Speaker and NDOT staff. "NDOT staff wasn't ready. We didn't get anything done. In the future, please make sure your staff is ready to go," Henio said.

Delegate Raymond Smith (Houck, Klagetoh, Lupton, Nahata Dziil, Wide Ruins) made the point that NDOT's plan was from the 23rd Navajo Nation Council. "I'm sure they had different plans and thoughts than the 24th Navajo Nation Council. I think this plan should be reviewed properly before jumping ahead," he said.

Delegate Elmer Begay (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, White Cone) asked why numerous studies are conducted over the same stretch of road. He said Navajo Route 15, from Burnside to Dilkon, is one such road that is dangerous for travelers. Despite several studies, the first seven miles of construction has yet to start, he said. "Everybody's looking at this new project now and how long is that going to take?" Begay asked.

Delegate Begay motioned for a leadership meeting between RDC and Budget and Finance Committee to discuss the bond plan for NDOT. Crotty seconded the motion before the committee accepted the report by a vote of 4-0.

Before ending the meeting, Budget and Finance also heard a report from Navajo Dept. of Justice attorney LaTonya Johnson regarding the gaming distribution plan and approved six legislation items, ranging from approval of changes in project funding, amending project descriptions and approving chapter corrective action plan for audit findings.

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