

## Navajo transportation department asks for federal funding

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TSE BONITO, N.M.— Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith advocated before a Resource and Development Committee Breakout Session Oct. 27 for increased federal funding in support of Navajo Nation transportation infrastructure projects.

“We appreciate the consistent support of our Navajo Nation President, Vice President and Council for advocating and allocating funds on behalf of Navajo DOT,” Silversmith said. “However, our transportation inventory is huge and there’s not enough money to address the needs of our Nation.”

The RDC Breakout Session was a part of the White House Administration’s visit to the Navajo Nation, in which White House staff met with all committees of the 24th Navajo Nation Council and representatives from the Office of the Navajo Nation President and Vice President.

As one of the largest Native American nations in the country, Silversmith said the Navajo Nation encompasses over 27,000 square miles and has a vast transportation system inventory that includes 9,500 miles of earth roads, 1,700 miles of paved highways, approximately 178 bridges and five airports.

“Our division receives roughly \$62 million every year through allocations from the Federal Highway Administration, Navajo Fuel Excise Tax Funds, Navajo Nation General Funds and through collaborative projects with New Mexico Capital Outlay,” he said. “This might seem like a

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lot, but at a minimum, we estimate it will take \$2.5 billion to comprehensively meet our current transportation infrastructure needs.”

According to Silversmith, the Nation faces pavement deficiencies, needed repairs and upgrades to the remaining roadway system which includes unpaved, earthen roads, bridges and airports.

“At the rate of our current funding level, it would take approximately 15 years to meet our transportation infrastructure needs,” he told the committee.

Silversmith said his division is currently engaged in 45 different projects with costs ranging from \$30,000 to \$33 million each.

“The Navajo Nation’s transportation network is critical in supporting economic development, agriculture and developing various energy commodities. Yet, our Nation faces unique challenges in resource disparities, safety assurances and infrastructure conditions,” he said. “We seek financial assistance in the amount of \$2.5 billion to bridge the gap that exists in funding projects that will improve the livelihood of our people.”

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said he appreciated the visit by the White House Administration staff.

“We’ll continue to emphasize the disparities that exist between Native American nations and states in the broader scope of the United States,” Nez said. “Whether we’re talking about lack of infrastructure, broadband coverage, or improvements to health care or education systems, these are the issues we face on a daily basis. We need our federal counterparts to step up and recognize their treaty responsibilities as they relate to supporting and engaging with tribal nations.

“These are not handouts. They are federal responsibilities,” he pointed out.

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The RDC Breakout Session was attended by representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Region, federal and regional Indian Health Services and Sean Poole from the U.S. Department of Transportation.