



Navajo Nation approves request to New Mexico for State Highway 371 road repavement and improvement

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Deteriorating road conditions along New Mexico State Highway 371 (NM 371) within the eastern and northern Navajo Nation regions prompted Navajo leaders to approve a formal request and position statement asking Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham for repair and resurfacing of the major route.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, which is empowered to establish the official Navajo Nation position on state and federal matters, approved the request at its Mar. 18 special meeting.

“When the road was first built, it wasn’t built for heavy traffic like semi-trucks,” said Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), sponsor of Legislation No. 0020-21, at the Resources and Development Committee’s (RDC) Feb. 17 meeting.

NM 371 is nearly 109 miles in length running north and south between Thoreau and Farmington, New Mexico.

The road is highly utilized by heavy truck drivers that drive the route to cut from Interstate 40 and Colorado to the north.

Former Navajo Nation Council Delegate and current Becenti Chapter President Jonathan Perry added his community’s support of the position. “Our community greatly supports this legislation. This highway from Thoreau to Farmington goes through several chapters,” said Perry.

Perry said the growth of the oil industry in recent years has led to an increase in heavy truck traffic. The deterioration of the road is also impacted by high rates of tourist traffic destined for the Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness Area and the Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

In its supporting resolution, the Smith Lake Chapter indicated NM 371 is the main artery in the region that connects seven Navajo communities to Farmington, Grants and Albuquerque.

The chapter resolution cited high rates of traffic by private and commercial vehicles and added that “it’s unfortunate the uneven surface, potholes, patches cause liability and wear/tear to the vehicles.”

Rita Capitan, Crownpoint Chapter president, also presented her chapter’s support of the request. “There’s a lot of holes in the highway and the pavement and that’s not good. So it’s about time we get highway 371 redone and resurfaced,” said Capitan.

“I know exactly where all the potholes are,” said Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’áhí, Whiterock). “They seem to come out around this time of year and it gets patchwork.”

Freeland said the highway includes sections that need improvement, especially where the pavement is old.

Yazzie told the RDC he and other Navajo leaders met with the Governor prior to the pandemic. Local leadership expressed concern that the McKinley County hasn’t adequately supported both public safety and highway projects on the Navajo Nation.

Perry echoed similar sentiments about the rural areas of San Juan County. Since Becenti Chapter is in both counties, he said not much work in done in the area.

In response, the Governor asked Navajo leaders to provide a formal Navajo Nation resolution for the request. Yazzie said he is grateful for the Governor’s willingness to begin addressing NM 371 through the approved resolution.

The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee of the Navajo Nation Council voted unanimously Mar. 18 to approve the request with a vote of 21 in favor and none opposed.

The 24-member Naabik’iyáti’ Committee holds final authority for the legislation under the Navajo Nation Code.

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