



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council members push for safer roadway between Navajo Mountain and Oljato communities



PHOTO: (L to R) Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton, Utah State Representative Phil Lyman (R), Delegate Shaandiin Parrish, Utah Representative Doug Owens (D), Speaker Crystalyne Curley, Delegate Shawna Ann Claw, and Delegate Herman Daniels Jr.

OREM, UT – On Friday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council hosted a meeting with Utah State legislators, San Juan County Commissioners and officials, the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition, and Navajo Nation chapter officials during the 17th Annual Governor’s Native American Summit in Orem, UT, to advance ongoing efforts to identify and secure resources to pave a roadway between the communities of Navajo Mountain and Oljato.

The two communities are located in the western portion of the Navajo Nation approximately 30 miles apart. The only paved route to get from one community to the other requires residents and other commuters to travel over 100 miles through rough terrain that often requires the use of four-wheel drive.

Speaker Crystalyne Curley (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain) was joined by Council Delegates Herman M. Daniels (Tсах Bii Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato), Shaandiin Parrish (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), and Shawna Ann Claw (Chinle) for the meeting, which focused on two possi-

ble routes that would improve transportation efficiency, drive economic growth and tourism opportunities, improve emergency response time and access to services, and significantly improve the quality of life for many local residents.

Delegate Daniels, who represents both communities, stated that the project has been in the works for many years and that the initial step is to secure funding for a development plan and to complete an environmental impact study for the project. Due to increasing costs of construction materials, the estimated cost of the project has increased over the years and depends on which route is most feasible.

“Many residents, including elders, commute through these rough roads for long hours each day for basic services and necessities, hauling water for their families and livestock, and going to school and work. If we pave a roadway, it would also increase tourism in the area and create jobs and revenue for the Navajo Nation, the counties, and the entire state of Utah. This project will require significant investments, but it will create additional benefits in the long-term,” said Delegate Daniels.

Delegate Charles-Newton, who chairs the Law and Order Committee, stated that the emergency response time for the impacted region is anywhere from two hours to three days depending on weather and road conditions. She added that the committee continues to gather data, which includes emergency response times during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic to help demonstrate the needs and to identify how many lives were lost during the pandemic due to slow emergency response times caused by the roadways.

Navajo Division of Transportation Roads Manager Joe Peterman was in attendance for the meeting and stated that the Navajo Nation receives approximately \$52 million annually from federal highway funding and that only \$36 million of that amount is for road construction for the entire Navajo Nation, which spans over 127,000 square miles.

According to the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition, depending which route is selected the project would cost approximately \$161 million or \$186 million. The Navajo Nation and other stakeholders are focusing efforts on drawing funds from several sources, which will require support and advocacy from local, county, state, and federal officials.

“The Navajo Nation Council will continue working closely with the stakeholders to secure funds and other resources. To move the project forward, it will be challenging and will require support and input from many of our county, state, and federal partners. We are very grateful to all of the state legislators, county commissioners, chapter officials, and others who were in attendance at the meeting. I commend Delegate Daniels and others who have pushed this initiative for many years,” stated Speaker Curley.

The Navajo Nation Council will meet with the stakeholders and state legislators in the region of the proposed roadway in August to continue assessing the development plan and next steps.

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