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SENATE MEMORIAL 30

57TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2026

INTRODUCED BY

Shannon D. Pinto and D. Wonda Johnson

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND THE COMMERCIAL VEHICLE ENFORCEMENT BUREAU OF THE NEW MEXICO STATE POLICE DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY TO STUDY THE VARIOUS PROBLEMS ON UNITED STATES HIGHWAY 491, FROM MAINTENANCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AND THE NEED TO IMPROVE SAFETY FOR DRIVERS, SCHOOL CHILDREN AND OTHER PEDESTRIANS.

WHEREAS, United States highway 491 is the major north-south route through western New Mexico and the eastern Navajo Nation; and

WHEREAS, both a scenic route for tourism and a major commercial trucking corridor from Gallup to the Colorado border, the highway has been used for a thousand years and was known as "the Navajo trail" or, more recently, by its redesignation as "the John Pinto highway"; and

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1 WHEREAS, the route through high desert features a
2 strikingly beautiful landscape of mesas and canyons, with the
3 major junction connecting to United States highway 64 in
4 Shiprock; and

5 WHEREAS, the highway serves as a critical commerce,
6 tourism and daily travel route for the Navajo Nation and the
7 four corners region, and includes school transportation routes;
8 and

9 WHEREAS, the highway is prone to extreme weather events
10 such as sandstorms and blizzards, which affect visibility and
11 safety; and

12 WHEREAS, apparent dumping of sand piles along the highway
13 right of way, including filling in earth depressions,
14 interferes with drainage and results in hazardous road
15 conditions due to flooding on the roadway during heavy
16 rainstorms; and

17 WHEREAS, the highway received major upgrades in 2003
18 through 2014 with crucial safety improvements added, including
19 widening sections from two to four lanes, which helped lower
20 the high fatality rate on the road; and

21 WHEREAS, with greater safety also came significantly
22 increased commercial truck traffic on the road; and

23 WHEREAS, many regular travelers on United States highway
24 491 feel that road maintenance and enforcement of New Mexico
25 traffic, transportation and motor carrier laws have not always

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1 kept pace with the increased traffic, particularly from heavy
2 commercial trucks traveling to and from oil and gas activities
3 in the area; and

4 WHEREAS, the department of transportation is responsible
5 for road maintenance on United States highway 491, and the
6 commercial vehicle enforcement bureau of the New Mexico state
7 police division of the department of public safety is
8 responsible for commercial motor carrier vehicle and driver
9 enforcement pursuant to the Motor Transportation Act, the Motor
10 Carrier Act, the Motor Vehicle Code, the Criminal Code and
11 other state and federal laws; and

12 WHEREAS, the Navajo Nation or McKinley or San Juan county
13 is responsible for maintenance of the roads that intersect
14 United States highway 491, and they also have trouble
15 maintaining certain roads as a result of commercial truck
16 traffic and environmental conditions;

17 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
18 OF NEW MEXICO that the department of transportation and the
19 commercial vehicle enforcement bureau of the New Mexico state
20 police division of the department of public safety, in
21 consultation with the Navajo Nation and McKinley and San Juan
22 counties, as appropriate, be requested to study United States
23 highway 491's road, traffic and environmental conditions and
24 make recommendations on how to improve safety and comfort for
25 all travelers, passenger cars and commercial heavy trucks; how

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1 to improve safety through increased enforcement of the Motor
2 Transportation Act, the Motor Carrier Act, the Motor Vehicle
3 Code and the Criminal Code; and how to improve traveler safety
4 from environmental conditions and manmade problems; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of
6 transportation and the commercial vehicle enforcement bureau
7 provide data concerning United States highway 491, including:

8 A. an analysis of road conditions by mile marker,
9 as applicable, on United States highway 491 and the effect on
10 road conditions of commercial motor carrier vehicle traffic,
11 particularly water, sand and equipment haulers traveling to and
12 from the oil and gas fields;

13 B. daily traffic counts, including totals and
14 separate counts for passenger cars, school buses and commercial
15 motor carrier vehicles;

16 C. daily traffic counts at intersections with
17 United States highway 491, particularly in state transportation
18 commission district 5, and to cooperate with the Navajo Nation
19 or the appropriate county to collect commercial motor carrier
20 vehicle traffic counts from the intersection connections to
21 United States highway 491 and, if data are available, a report
22 of which feeder roads bear the most commercial traffic;

23 D. the number of accidents and fatalities with mile
24 marker locations, including pedestrian-related accidents;

25 E. the number and statistical details of law

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1 enforcement stops involving speeding, careless or reckless
2 driving, distracted driving or other reasons for a stop;

3 F. results of port-of-entry and field enforcement
4 of truck drivers and commercial motor carrier vehicles,
5 including data regarding:

6 (1) verification of driver- and commercial
7 motor vehicle-required credentials;

8 (2) proper trip paperwork, including weight-
9 distance and oversize-overweight permits;

10 (3) assessment and collection of taxes and
11 fees;

12 (4) driver and mechanical inspections; and

13 (5) an analysis of the effect that increased
14 law enforcement on commercial motor vehicles and drivers has on
15 traffic safety and law enforcement;

16 G. consideration of environmental barriers or other
17 means to ameliorate the driving hazards from blowing sand or
18 snow and water on the roadway and from drainage issues along
19 the highway;

20 H. consideration of improvements to pedestrian
21 safety, particularly the need for school bus stops to have
22 flashing safety lights warning drivers to slow down; and

23 I. other information that should be called to the
24 attention of the legislature concerning United States highway
25 491; and

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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study include data on the
2 number of commercial truck drivers needed nationally and in New
3 Mexico over the next ten years, the number and cost of public
4 and private programs in the state that train intra- and
5 interstate commercial drivers, the number of graduates each
6 year and strategies for increasing the number of qualified
7 commercial truck drivers in New Mexico; and

8 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department of
9 transportation and the commercial vehicle enforcement bureau
10 report their findings and recommendations to the appropriate
11 legislative interim committees prior to November 1, 2026; and

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
13 transmitted to the secretaries of transportation and public
14 safety, the governor, the president of the Navajo Nation, the
15 county managers of McKinley and San Juan counties and the
16 director of the legislative council service.