

PUEBLO OF ACOMA
TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE REVENUE SUBCOMMITTEE
PROPOSED MESA HILL BRIDGE AND SP 36 ROAD EXTENSION PROJECT
STATEMENT BY LT. GOVERNOR JOE ARAGON JR.

August 28, 2013

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Joe Aragon, Lt. Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma. Unfortunately, Governor Shutiva could not be here to address the committee. I know he is listed on your agenda, but he is on travel. On behalf of the administration and the Acoma Tribal Council, I want to thank the Committee for allowing the Pueblo to present its issues regarding Transportation and Safety concerns on tribal lands.

- I want to begin by sharing with the committee the results of an Alternative Access Road Feasibility Study that was done to take a serious and in depth look at public safety and emergency responder concerns, especially as it relates to the railroad, which cuts across miles of Acoma tribal lands.
- The railroad cuts through several of our villages, east and west. And that presents a huge problem for the emergency responders at the Pueblo.
- Here's why. All our emergency services personnel, vehicles and equipment including Fire, Ambulance, EMT, and Public Safety officers are located near our tribal governmental complex which is on the south side of our tribal lands. However, a good section of our villages are on the north side including our hospital, the tribal casino, state and county roads, and access to Interstate 40.
- If there is ever an emergency and a freight train is passing through tribal lands...sit tight and pray. Our emergency vehicles cannot get to the north side to administer emergency services because of several at-grade railroad crossings. There is no other way across or around to provide emergency services to not only to tribal members and their property, but also to respond to any accidents that may occur along miles of the Interstate, or on state and county roads that border our reservation or cut through it.
- Precious time is lost waiting for the train to pass, the flashing lights to stop and the crossing guards to lift.
- This has happened on many occasions.
- The study I referred to was completed in August 2005. It evaluated 13 transportation routes where a bridge could be constructed. It was a response to the public safety and emergency issues Acoma has been dealing with for years.
- The answer according to the assessment has been to construct a bridge over the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway. The bridge would be located one mile south of Interstate 40, at Exit 100. The assessment recommended a new half-mile road, linking SP road 36 to SP road 30 with a bridge over the BNSF Railway. The bridge would span several major utilities like the El Paso Natural Gas transmission lines, the Rio San Jose, two traditional irrigation systems and farming lands.
- In 2007, the Pueblo of Acoma Tribal Council approved the recommended alternative access route and bridge. As a result of tribal council action, the Pueblo sought and received state funding...2 million dollars in GRIP II funds from the State Legislature. They were used to complete the following:
 - Survey of the proposed site
 - Right Of Way Maps
 - Environment Assessment

Geotechnical Assessment

Drainage Analysis

Utility Certifications

Plans, Specifications and Engineers Estimate

The Pueblo in turn committed to seeking and providing matching funds.

- In 2007, the Pueblo of Acoma Tribal Council also approved a Resolution to authorize expenditure of 1.5 million dollars in Indian Reservation Road (IRR) funds from the BIA to acquire right-of-way. The funds were also used for planning, engineering and design services including environmental and archaeological assessments, along with other preconstruction activities. Lastly, we put together a construction and tribal project management team for the proposed alternative access route.
- In 2009, the Pueblo of Acoma Tribal Council approved another Resolution that would grant a perpetual right-of-way and easement for the road and bridge construction project.
- By 2012, the proposed project was deemed “CONSTRUCTION READY.” If I may, I’d like to share what this bridge and road extension would look like. Please refer to the brochures we have prepared. Millions of dollars have been spent on pre-construction activities.
- Now, roll forward to this year, 2013. Sad to say, we have been unable to secure all the necessary funding for the bridge.
- The proposed Mesa Hill Bridge and SP 36 Road Extension Project is now slated to cost approximately \$28 million dollars.
- We haven’t been sitting on our hands. We have tried securing funds in whatever form they may take. For example, BNSF authorized financial assistance in the amount of \$100,000 of in-kind work...labor and materials, for the construction of the Road Extension and Bridge project. Secondly, we will be seeking a support letter for a federal TIGER V Grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Additionally, we will continue to work on finalizing engineering plans and negotiate all remaining definitive agreements and real estate transactions necessary for this project to proceed.
- The Acoma Tribal Council recognizes that the Mesa Hill Bridge and SP 36 Road Extension Project is the number one top safety and health priority for the community and all citizens traveling across and through Acoma Pueblo lands. As I have mentioned, in emergency situations, it is necessary for First Responders to have direct road access to emergency sites and to have the ability to transport citizens who need medical attention to medical facilities for immediate treatment.
- Most recently, the Acoma Tribal Council approved the “Sharing of Transportation Visions Summit”. It is our way of attempting to communicate with Members of Congress, the Governor of the State of New Mexico, New Mexico State Legislature, New Mexico Cabinet Secretaries, Utility Corporations with right-of-way easements through the Pueblo of Acoma lands and other key members of various agencies.
- This is a huge public safety concern and we are looking to find ways to fund this multi-million dollar project. We invite members of this Committee to attend the October 18th Summit at Acoma Pueblo.
- Lastly, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, this bridge is not just about benefiting the Pueblo, but it’s also about improving the health, safety and emergency and medical concerns of all New Mexico citizens, visitors, and the traveling public. The proposed Mesa Hill Bridge and SP 36 Road Extension Project is one that needs your attention. It’s one that has already received state money. And it’s one that will put an enduring stamp on public safety here in the State of New Mexico. Thank you.