

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of the Committee;

My name is Paulson Chaco and I am the Division Director for the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation. Today I would like to speak to you about four major concerns that the Navajo Nation has regarding transportation. First, I will discuss the issue of Direct Funding, followed by Job Creation and Road Maintenance, and briefly ending with the Navajo Nation's concerns with question 10 of 25 CFR part 170 regarding the definition of Indian Reservation Roads.

The Navajo Nation has gone to great measures over the years to create a sophisticated level of government and ensure quality public services for the Navajo people and everyone who may be guests on Navajo Land. As a people and a Nation we continue to grow and progress, continually looking forward in this emerging global economy to pave a path for the Navajo people. However, in 2011, our Nation still finds itself being held to a different set of standards and in many regards as second-class citizens. While the United States has made great strides to foster a more positive relationship with Tribal Nations there are still improvements to be made.

DIRECT FUNDING

Perhaps the greatest issue that faces Navajo Transportation is access to direct funding.

Many programs such as TIGER GRANTS, TRANSIT, EMERGENCY RELIEF FOR FEDERALLY OWNED ROADS and SAFETY GRANTS are not *truly* available to Tribes unless they have partnered with a State. Why is this? The Navajo Nation Division of Transportation is a sophisticated and quality public service. There is no reason that we should not have the ability to apply for all the same funding as any state in the union. Allowing the Navajo Nation access to direct funding will allow for greater oversight in planning and management of funding. Additionally, the decision of where the funding is to be utilized will rest in the hands of the Navajo Nation, allowing for more services to be provided in areas not of interest to any particular state government.

My Division is tasked with the construction and maintenance of Navajo roads. Many of these roads are the only access our people may have for public services and basic human necessities. Yet today, we still find ourselves at the mercy of other departments of transportation. This is an issue that clearly needs to be addressed through legislation so that the Navajo Nation and other Tribal Nations can begin to acquire direct access to Transportation funding.

JOB CREATION

Job creation is an integral part of the Navajo Nation's current agenda, just as it is across the entire Nation. Unlike the majority of the Country, Navajo and other rural or large land based tribes have a unique problem: Tribal member access to job opportunities because of inadequate roadways.

For 2011, the Navajo Nation used A.R.R.A funding for eight separate road projects in the Western Agency, Eastern Agency, Fort Defiance and Shiprock. All funding was used within the allotted timeframe and to date all projects are completed. This funding was instrumental in not only creating Navajo construction jobs but in secondary industries as well. Specifically, merchants and food vendors saw an increase in revenues from our presence and the creation of roads allowed people more efficient access to job opportunities throughout the Navajo Nation. Additionally, many of the social ills that plague Native American communities are a direct result of unemployment and lack of opportunity. As roads are created, and employment and access to opportunities increase, we have a greater ability to curtail these countless social problems that have hurt so many in our community.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

While road creation does assist The Navajo Nation people in accessing employment opportunities, receiving all forms of public services and obtaining basic human necessities, it is only half the battle. Once the roads are built the question for the Navajo Nation, and all Tribes, is "how do we maintain them?"

Currently, transportation funding received by the Navajo Nation is never earmarked for road maintenance, meaning that the roads can be built but not maintained. This is a major obstacle for the Navajo Nation. Unlike State Governments that have an array of methods for generating revenue to assist in road maintenance, the Navajo Nation is not so fortunate. This is not a problem that is unique to the Navajo, but is a reality across Indian Country and stems from systematic inequalities in taxation methods and economic development. Until those underlying issues are addressed, discretionary transportation funding needs to also include road maintenance.

DEFINING INDIAN RESERVATION ROADS UNDER QUESTION 10 OF 25 CFR PART 170

It is common knowledge throughout Indian Country that there is a growing concern over the definition of an "Indian Reservation Road" for Transportation funding purposes, specifically proposed and access roads as described in 25 CFR Part 170. While I will not go into great length on this issue—I will state that the Navajo Nation does firmly believe that roads, which are continuously and systematically maintained by State and County governments, should be excluded from the definition of a *true* "Indian Reservation Road."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the Navajo Nation hopes to see greater access to direct funding, which in turn allows for greater employment opportunities and job creation. Additionally, it is essential to allow separate funding based on the total number of BIA and Tribal road miles and bridges for Road Maintenance ***and*** there must be legislation addressing the definition of Indian Reservation Roads under 25 CFR Part 170.

I would like to thank Chairman Akaka and the other esteemed members of the Committee for inviting me here to speak today. The Navajo Nation understands that in this difficult economy many hard decisions are to be made that will affect all citizens of our great Country. However, when it comes to Transportation issues it is important to remember that in order to grow and progress there must be a path for people to follow. Without this path, there is no greater destination for them than the circumstances in which they currently live. Thank you.