

## **Broadband Initiative on Navajo Nation Notes**

Thursday, June 2, 2022

10 AM – 4 PM DST

In-Person and Zoom Meeting

Navajo Technical University - Hospitality Center

Lowerpoint Road, State HWY 371, Crownpoint, NM

Presiding: Coconino County District 5 Supervisor Lena Fowler

24th NNC Resources and Development Committee Member Kee Allen Begay, Jr.

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### **Welcome and Introduction – Lena Fowler, Coconino County Supervisor & Kee Allen Begay Jr., Navajo Nation Council Delegate:**

- Ms. Fowler welcomes everyone to the meeting. She gives an update on the meeting's agenda changes for today. She overviews the benefits of collaboration and is thankful for all that has been achieved. Ms. Fowler briefly overviews the connections she made and is currently working with concerning broadband.

### **Summary of Broadband Initiative on Navajo Nation - Patrick Sandoval, Apache County Dist. 1 Manager:**

- Mr. Sandoval welcomes everyone to the broadband meeting and gives an update of the meetings so far. Indicates that they will eventually hand over the leadership of the meetings to Navajo Nation but at this time they would like for the current leadership to maintain the meetings. Mr. Sandoval overviews the progress made so far and recognizes the efforts of the meetings and who is attending. Equality is still needed. Mr. Sandoval references international call centers established in India as an example of how broadband can unite Navajo Nation with the world.

### **Navajo Technical University/Navajo Nation Presentation – Dr. Elmer Guy, NTU President & Jason Arviso, VP for Operations NTU:**

- Dr. Guy welcomes everyone to NTU. Notes the impacts of the lack of broadband had on their school. NTU has different resources that they can help with and bring to the community. Dr. Guy also notes the hopes of the school to have more graduates and eventually offer doctoral degrees. Thanks everyone for their collaborative efforts.
- Mr. Arviso gives introduction and welcomes everyone to NTU. Notes the university's credited programs. He gave a PowerPoint presentation on Broadband on Navajo. The Navajo Nation has submitted a proposal to the NTIA that originally had NTU's proposals of use and adoption, but NTU was eventually excluded. They have since used ETCs to establish broadband on the NTU campus and be their own internet service provider that allows them 100 gigabytes. NTU can bring in specialized resources that the Navajo Nation can tie in on. They have partnered with Eduroam to provide internet service to the campus but are looking to expand it to K-12 students. NTU would also like to increase their e-learning resources and to add more online degrees. They have established a new collaboration with the NNTRC and the broadband office with an intergovernmental agreement that will have NTU act as a resource. They are partnering

with UNM at the Gallup location to share their internet service and other e-rate programs to further their collaborative efforts. NTU would like to expand beyond Navajo Nation and AZ and establish broadband projects in other locations and states. With these new collaborations they are looking to bring internet services to all users with multiple benefits.

**Comments – Kee Allen Begay Jr., NN Council Delegate:**

- Welcomes everyone to the broadband meeting today and thanks them for their participation. Mr. Begay notes that he would like a resolution as soon as possible that addresses the support needed for broadband. Mr. Begay appreciates the progress the meetings have made so far and comments that we need to continue to move things forward for the benefit of the people.

**State Update – Jeff Sobotka, Arizona State Broadband Director:**

- Mr. Sobotka gives thanks for the progress made so far but notes we need to start moving forward by this point, especially with our highways. Reinforces the teamwork that is needed to achieve our broadband goals. Overviews what is new with the state broadband office. There was a state task force that was created from the federal legislation that is led by Sarah Webber. The task force directs federal funding and addresses the issues of the AZ infrastructure. Updates on the highway infrastructure. I-40 east is still in progress and a priority, but he is in discussion with Kee Allen Begay Jr. and others to further this project. They are looking to have it established as an open conduit. The accomplishment of these goals will depend on a variety of factors including partnerships and funding. Notes the Navajo Nation chapters houses that will eventually get connected with Christopher Becenti's initiative that will provide further connections from the fiber backbone to connect Navajo Nation. They will award a \$100 million dollar grant later this month that will benefit areas across AZ including the Navajo Nation. Mr. Sobotka overviews the updates in broadband funding. Indicates that once the infrastructure falls into place, we need to look at our communities. Some of these projects require a plan for a plan. He displays a breakdown of the AZ IJIA Funding Allocation. The projects associated with this funding allocation will take time to complete. Mr. Sobotka requires collaboration and is seeking contacts to help with these projects. On a final note, Mr. Sobotka mentions workforce development. Many jobs will be created by broadband and many people will be needed as these jobs come about, especially jobs for implementing the broadband infrastructure.

**State Update - Rebecca Dilg, Utah Broadband Center Director**

- Ms. Dilg gives her appreciation with the efforts done. She gives a PowerPoint presentation on Utah updates. Provides a quick overview of the IJIA Broadband funding. The state is willing to work on getting these funding opportunities especially with tribal communities. Notes the list of things that need to be done for each program under the IJIA Broadband funding. Not only will the state need to complete this list but Navajo Nation as well. A joint effort is needed to avoid duplicating efforts and competing when more can be accomplished jointly. They have a State Digital Connectivity Plan that includes the Broadband Infrastructure Plan and State Digital Equity Plan. The Affordable Connectivity Program, while successful in Arizona, Utah needs to make more efforts to increase their numbers. Utah is still doing speed tests to identify areas of low or no service but can't do tests in areas where there is no connection. Knowing these locations will

help them direct funding where it's needed. Ms. Dilg overviews the progress they made so far and what success means in establishing a broadband infrastructure.

**Navajo Nation Broadband Update – Sonia Nez, NN Broadband Office Manager:**

- Ms. Nez gives introduction and thanks for all the support she's received so far. Provided updates from the NN Broadband Office. Ms. Nez is thankful for the partnerships she has obtained while being a broadband manager for the NN Broadband Office. She attended the Naa'bik'iyati' Committee May meeting where they did a presentation of the broadband plan. Together with Tico Charlee, the NN Presidential team, NTUA and chapter leadership, they went to Low Mountain Chapter on May 18 and May 23 to overview the tower site locations. The broadband office also hired Clara Pratte as their grant writer to help them with the funding opportunities available. With Clara Pratte, they will meet with other state officials about their next steps going forward. Ms. Nez notes the meeting she attended recently with Coconino County concerning broadband. She next overviews the project management that includes a list of broadband projects from ARPA, service providers, E-Rate, and others. This list will include their statuses and project priorities. There are highway projects that are in progress and other highways identified as future broadband projects. The highway broadband projects will also help expand broadband into the surrounding communities, institutions, and especially the Navajo Nation offices in those locations. Her office is glad to hear from communities and other leadership about the broadband goals for their areas. They are currently looking to hire an administration specialist, a project and program specialist, and a planner. Lastly, they are creating a NN Broadband Office website with office updates posted and to try to streamline the right-of-way process. Ms. Yocom, UDOT, provided a quick update that they have installed fiber alongside the road from Mexican Hat to Monument Valley. They are waiting on historical clearance from Navajo Nation to install further and are continuing with the Navajo Mountain project.

**Navajo Nation Broadband Update – Tico Charlee, NN Telecommunications Regulatory Commission:**

- Mr. Charlee gives a quick update of their tower leasing status. The NN Broadband office is looking at the 600 tower locations to fix and regulate these towers. They are also trying to standardize the cost of broadband by working with different regulatory groups. Further updates can be given later.

**County Updates – Patrick Sandoval, Apache County Dist. 1 Manager:**

- Mr. Sandoval updates that they are looking forward to getting fiber along highway 191. Announces that the north part of Navajo County in their Teec Nos Pos office they were approved for a USDA grant that will give them fiber connectivity. The grant will also provide two years of free service and are looking forward to the better internet service.

**County Updates – Fern Benally, Navajo County Supervisor:**

- Ms. Benally updates that 132 miles of fiber will be installed along highway 77 and 260. Navajo County submitted a grant to ACA and are awaiting a decision. The Navajo County broadband is estimated to be at \$20 million dollars for the Middle Mile that is to enhance services throughout the county. The county is currently negotiating design contracts with two partners WANRack and APS.

**County Updates – Lena Fowler, Coconino County Supervisor:**

- Ms. Fowler updates on the Middle Mile project and the benefits of the project once it has been completed. To complete the project, Coconino County must purchase dark fiber from Arcadian, but Ms. Fowler doesn't believe in doing this since they should just be providing the service to the public. They recently met with Navajo Nation, BIA, and the National Forest Service, and they referred Coconino to Arcadian since they have sole proprietorship on Navajo Nation and to obtain their right-of-ways from them and NPS. They have partnered and applied to NTUA for a project in Tuba City for a grant with the State of Arizona. She notes that they partner with San Juan Southern Paiute, the Hopi Tribe, and Navajo Nation when they do projects in the Tuba City region and references the partnership with Starlink. Ms. Fowler mentions the submission of right-of-way applications to Sonia Nez for their review and the importance of submitting grant applications before the deadlines. Partnerships and collaborations are the way we will get our broadband goals accomplished and improve our way of life.

**Comments – Willie Greyeyes & Mack McDonald, San Juan County Commissioner:**

- Mr. Greyeyes comments that the communities of Navajo Mountain and Black Mesa are the most isolated communities on the Navajo Nation and lack broadband infrastructure. He would like to have Navajo Nation leadership view and understand the issues these communities face and address them. Mr. Greyeyes would like for these communities to be included in broadband projects rather than be set aside and to have their own broadband meetings. It is also noted that towers do have a limit of how much equipment and service providers can have access to it.
- Mr. McDonald comments of the continued coordination they seek with everyone to continue the completion of their broadband projects.

**Open Discussion:**

- Joy Thompson, Alliance for Navajo Broadband, thanks for the collaborative results of the broadband meetings so far. She notes the organization of information in a centralized location for access is needed. Ms. Thompson comments on the work of Sonia Nez and the collaboration work done so far.
- Wayne Claw, CEO of Navajoland Nursing Home, comments on the benefits of broadband for the elderly, including telehealth. They did receive funding for improvement, but they still need more help. Notes communication is a major concern for operating a nursing home but is thankful that there are meetings to address the broadband issues.
- Lydelle Davies, Interim Chair for Dineh Chamber of Commerce, thanks everyone for attending and comments that she follows the broadband meetings. Notes that workforce development is important. They need skilled people especially for Navajo businesses in information technology and for other areas.

**Closing Comments – Kee Allen Begay Jr., Council Delegate:**

- Mr. Begay will continue to his efforts on the state and national level. He recommends bringing in more Navajo Nation staff including the NN President, NN Vice-President, and the NN Speaker. Lastly notes the need to access broadband and its benefits.

**MEETING ENDS**