

U.S. 491 MAKEOVER

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Potholes, bad spots a thing of the past

Milling and inlaying are being done to a short stretch of U.S. Highway 491 as it goes out of Gallup and near the east and west exit points to Shiprock and Window Rock — and at a cost of \$3.2 million, officials said.

The work is not connected to the bigger and more than \$150 million four-laning project of U.S. 491 that goes from Shiprock to Gallup.

“This is maintenance with that the department planned,” Delane Baros, public information officer with the state Department of Transportation, said of the milling and inlaying work. “We are

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making a lot of progress with the project.”

Baros said the milling and inlaying work started on April 10, 2017, and will be completed by the end of June. Motorists can see that a part of the highway as it runs from T&R Market, 667 N. Highway 491, to the new Family Dollar, located at 706 U.S. 491 and just after the 264 west exit sign to Window Rock is now black-topped and free of potholes and bad rough spots.

Prior to the repaving that there were several people that used U.S. Highway 491 on a daily basis, which also is also the gateway eastward from Gallup to Shiprock, that said the stretch of road was chock full of potholes and a lot of motorists deemed it unsafe for cars.

“I’m just glad they’re doing something about it,” Conrad Yazzie, 49, who works at Rio West Mall in Gallup said. “It was getting bad coming from Window Rock into Gallup and a lot of people got their cars damaged, especially when you got to the Chee Dodge Elementary School near T&R Market.”

Baros said the name of the firm doing the repaving work is Braiser Asphalt of Albuquerque. Of the milling and inlaying work in the process of being done, Baros said it’s being done with 3.5 inches of hot mix asphalt.

“This is strictly for maintenance,” Baros said. As far as the (DOT) receiving complaints about the bad conditions of the particular part of U.S. 491, Baros, who works out of DOT’s regional office in Grants, said she wasn’t aware of such complaints.

Striping is part of the work to be done, also, Baros said. That part of the project is coming along, she said.

Previously called U.S. Highway 666 and referred to as the “Devil’s Highway,” due to the inordinate amount of fatalities on the road, U.S. 491 is set to be reconstructed and four-laned from Shiprock to Gallup in a matter of months, officials have said. The four-laning of 491 is already complete as far south as Naschitti. Baros noted that the U.S. 491 four-laning project is still underway.

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Sen. John Pinto, D-Tohatchi, along with area New Mexico legislators, Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup, and George Muñoz have been instrumental in moving the four-laning project along over the years.

Pinto, 92, called the milling and inlaying part of 491 a plus for people utilizing the businesses that line that part of the highway. Pinto is the longest serving legislator in the history of New Mexico and has been out front on the four-laning issue for years.

“Yes, we are making progress,” Pinto, 91, said. “A lot of progress.”

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