

A long wait

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 17 September 2021 03:42



New Manuelito Canyon Bridge opens at last

Staff Reports

MANUELITO, N.M. — Since the fall of 2010 when heavy rainfall washed out the Manuelito Canyon Bridge and the Federal Emergency Management Agency declared the bridge structurally unsafe, residents who traveled it had to find other routes to their destinations. That all changed on Sept. 3 when the ribbon was cut to open the new Manuelito Canyon Bridge.

The long wait involved considerable coordination from Senator Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., as well as McKinley County staff, state legislators, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, the Navajo Division of Transportation and the Manuelito Chapter, to secure the right-of-way approval and funding for the project which was completed in August.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Luján spoke about the challenges associated with gaining approval for the easements and other requirements to move the project forward and thanked all of the leaders for their support.

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“Since the Manuelito Canyon Bridge was washed out, my office worked with state, tribal, and federal leaders ... to reconstruct this bridge — a project a decade in the making,” Luján said. “Today, the bridge is now open!”

Construction of the project began in December 2019 with an overall cost of \$3.2 million from various funding sources including funds secured by McKinley County and state leaders and from the Navajo Nation’s roads funds.

Navajo Division of Transportation Executive Director Garret Silversmith was present to offer his support and to congratulate the Manuelito community and residents.

Also in attendance were Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, Miss Navajo Nation Shaandiin Parrish, Manuelito Chapter President Milton Davis, McKinley County Commission Chairman Billy Moore, New Mexico State Reps. Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup and D. Wonda Johnson, D-Rehoboth, Navajo Area Bureau of Indian Affairs Regional Director Gregory Mehojah, and local residents.

“We are very happy for the community of Manuelito, for their local leaders and most of all, the families who reside here. ...The roadway is now accessible for families, students, first responders, and many others who rely on the bridge to commute on a daily basis. Congratulations to the Manuelito community!” Nez said.

This week, the Navajo Nation also celebrated the completion of a newly-constructed two-lane concrete bridge along N9402 in the community of Tsé Si áni, Ariz. located approximately 22-miles south of Window Rock, Ariz.