

# THE ROADRUNNER

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Winter 2018



Mike Daly, District 2, part of NDOT's snow fighting team, on a tow plow in Omaha.  
*Story on pages 8-9.*

# We are NDOT ... Making a Difference in Our Communities



Kyle Schneweis

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) had a historic 2017, and 2018 has already provided more opportunities to make a difference in the lives of Nebraskans all across the state.

Among our many achievements last year, several are particularly noteworthy, including the awarding of the state's first ever Economic Opportunity Program (EOP) grant to Merrick County. With this grant, Merrick County and NDOT will divide the cost of paving 1.25 miles of gravel on Merrick County Road 9 between US-30 and Preferred

Popcorn, LLC's operations near Chapman, Nebraska. This grant was a key consideration in Preferred Popcorn's decision to invest nearly \$6 million to expand their facility, leading to the creation of approximately 10 new full-time jobs for this Nebraska-based company.

Another milestone occurred on October 3rd as NDOT held a public hearing for the Lincoln South Beltway project, one of the biggest in our state's history. This project will provide major safety and economic benefits to the Lincoln, Lancaster County and Southeast Nebraska region. The hearing provided the opportunity for the public to review the draft environmental assessment document, hear about project details, and to provide their comments.

Moving in to this year, we are off to a great start in 2018, with the selection of 22 proposals for the second round of the County Bridge Match Program, created as a result of the 2016 Transportation Innovation Act. This program helps fund critical bridge repair needs in many counties across our state.

As I look back at these and other accomplishments, each one contributes to providing an efficient, effective transportation system for the public and to growing our state's economy. All of this is done with safety continuing to be our top priority and a dedication to providing exceptional service.

Our employees take pride in helping their neighbors and giving back to their communities. Every day, we receive letters and emails thanking our hard-working employees for their efforts and for going above and beyond what is required in their daily jobs. An example of these efforts is the recent major snowstorm that hit many areas of the state. Despite the challenges of dealing with blizzard conditions, our snowplow crews were out there getting the job done. I can't say enough about the snow fighting heroes on our NDOT team!

While we have undergone many changes and there will certainly be more challenges ahead of us in 2018, one thing remains the same: the dedication, hard work and commitment of our NDOT employees.

**Thank you for all you do!**

## the Roadrunner

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Governor Pete Ricketts

### Highway Commission

Mary K. Gerdes ..... Doug Leafgreen  
E.J. Miliotti, Jr. .... James Hawks  
David Copple ..... Greg Wolford  
James Kindig ..... Jerome Fagerland

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# NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



# Appointments Announced to State Highway Commission

Jim Hawks, of North Platte, Nebraska, was recently appointed by Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts to serve as District 6 Commissioner on the Nebraska State Highway Commission. District 6 includes Arthur, Blaine, Custer, Dawson, Grant, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson and Thomas counties. Hawks will complete the term of Ron Books, who resigned in July 2017 after serving on the Commission since 1995. The term runs through the fall of 2019.

Governor Ricketts also reappointed Mary Gerdes (District 1), David Copple (District 3), James Kindig (District 4), and Greg Wolford (District 7) to the Highway Commission. The six-year terms will run through September 2023.

Hawks is a Nebraska native and was born and raised in Lexington. He holds an MBA from the University of Nebraska and has been very involved in the community serving on many local boards and commissions.

Hawks has served as the North Platte City Administrator, Utility Director and Development Director for nearly 15 years and prior to that served as the Lincoln County Highway Superintendent. He also currently sits on the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Innovation Task Force and is a past president of the Nebraska Association of County Engineers, Highway Superintendents and Surveyors, and the Professional Surveyors Association of Nebraska.

The State Highway Commission was created by the Nebraska Legislature in 1953 to ensure citizen input in the planning, design and operation of the state highway system. It acts as a liaison between the public and Nebraska Department of Transportation regarding highway matters and holds commission meetings throughout the year to provide a forum to receive public input.

The Commission consists of eight private citizens with one member appointed from each of the eight highway districts. Each commissioner is appointed by the Governor and approved by the Legislature to serve a six-year term. ■



**Jim Hawks**



**Mary Gerdes**



**David Copple**



**James Kindig**



**Greg Wolford**

## Transportation and Telecommunication Committee Members Convene

The 105th Nebraska Legislature convened January 3rd for its 60-day second session. Eight members of the Transportation and Telecommunication Committee returned to their roles in facilitating public policy.

The Committee is responsible for processing legislation involving motor vehicles, highways, railroads, common carriers and aeronautics. During session, the Committee meets on Mondays and Tuesdays in Room 1113 on the 1st Floor of the Capitol.

The eight Transportation and Telecommunications Committee members are:

- *Chair - Senator Curt Friesen*  
Henderson, District 34
- *Vice Chair - Senator Jim Smith*  
Papillion, District 14
- *Senator Bruce Bostelman*  
Brainard, District 23
- *Senator Tom Briese*  
Albion, District 41
- *Senator Suzanne Geist*  
Lincoln, District 25
- *Senator Mike Hilgers*  
Lincoln, District 21
- *Senator Dan Hughes*  
Venango, District 44
- *Senator John Murante*  
Gretna, District 49

Additional information, including proposed bills, hearings scheduled and other updates can be found on the official Unicameral Legislature web page at [www.nebraska-legislature.gov](http://www.nebraska-legislature.gov)

# Zwonechek Honored for Lifetime Achievement in Highway Safety



Fred Zwonechek received a Lifetime Achievement Award during the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators Conference held August 21-23 in San Francisco, California.

Fred Zwonechek, Motor Vehicle Highway Safety Administrator in NDOT's Traffic Engineering Division, received the 2017 Martha Irwin Award for Lifetime Achievement in Highway Safety – Motor Vehicle Administration. The award was presented during the Annual American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) International Conference held August 21-23 in San Francisco, California. AAMVA's Safety Awards are presented to distinguished individuals in recognition of commitment to and accomplishments in highway safety over the course of a career.

Zwonechek's career with the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety spans 43 years. He started in 1974 and in 1981 he was named Highway Safety Administrator, the position he currently holds. The Nebraska Office of Highway Safety is the hub for coordinating highway safety efforts in Nebraska. Zwonechek has been

instrumental in constructing the state highway safety plans which focus on four primary areas: education, enforcement, engineering and the emergency medical system.

Over his more than four decades of service, Zwonechek has instituted and championed many programs. Some of his more notable ones are: occupant and child restraint use legislation and education, Drug Recognition Expert Program, longitudinal research on teen driving behaviors, standardized field sobriety training, implementation of motorcycle safety training, installation of rumble bars on interstates and state highways, distracted driving education and legislation, use of seatbelt simulators, 24/7 monitoring for multiple DUI offenders, drug courts, "move over" legislation, ignition interlock legislation, multi-state enforcement efforts, alcohol license compliance checks, dynamic messaging signs, and safety grants for saturated enforcement efforts.

Individually, each of these safety initiatives has produced positive outcomes. However, the combined efforts have generated significant results. Zwonechek has not only spent his professional career devoted to making the highways in Nebraska and around the country safer for everyone, it is his personal passion.

The Martha Irwin Award for Lifetime Achievement in Highway Safety honors individuals who have committed their time and resources to safety initiatives, outstanding customer service, and public affairs and consumer education programs throughout North America. Each year, the AAMVA receives numerous outstanding submissions in each category and through a rigorous judging process selects those that are exemplary.

The Nebraska Department of Transportation congratulates Fred on his exceptional contributions to highway safety. ■

# NDOT Explores Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Bridge Inspection



Photos by Jake Daniels

Wayne Patras, center, and Babrak Niazi, right, look at the live feed from a drone during a bridge inspection in June. NDOT bridge inspectors partnered with a team from The Digital Sky to use a drone to perform visual inspections of portions of the Interstate 480 bridges in downtown Omaha.

While driving in certain parts of central or eastern Nebraska last fall, perhaps you caught a glimpse of a strange flying object in the distance, hovering beneath a bridge. Wondering whether you had witnessed a new species of bird in search of a location to make its nest, another quick look revealed that there was more to this “bird” than met the eye.

This “bird,” in fact, was likely one of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), also known as drones, being used by the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) to conduct safety inspection of bridges. The NDOT pilot project included 11 bridges of different types and sizes divided into

six groups to be fully evaluated using a drone for National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS) bridge inspections on efficiency, quality, safety, cost and application of current FAA regulations.

## Potential Benefits

Since all bridges in the United States are required to be inspected every 24 months, this can require a great deal of time, energy and expense on the part of many DOTs. For this reason, according to Babrak Niazi, NBIS Program Manager in NDOT’s Bridge Division, NDOT wanted to explore the use of drones to see if better quality inspections could be achieved with increased safety to the public and inspectors, yet in a

shorter period of time and with less cost. Considering the potential benefits, the NDOT piloted this project to further evaluate the use of drones for bridge inspections in Nebraska.

Other than inspection of fracture critical bridges, which requires visual inspection of steel tension elements of the bridge within arm’s reach, most other bridge inspections are completed with visual inspection, following NBIS standards. According to Niazi, the critical issue in bridge inspection is always access to the details and elements of the bridge. Bridge inspectors use ladders, rope access and aerial work platforms to get access to bridge elements that are not accessible from the bridge deck or ground. The pilot project was intended to show that drones can be more efficient, as other access methods are not only time-consuming and relatively unsafe, they are also significantly more expensive.

## Groups of Selected Bridges for Inspection

The 11 bridges chosen were placed in the following six groups, with comparisons of current inspection methods and drone bridge inspection:

- **Three bridges on I-480 in downtown Omaha** were selected to evaluate the effects of traffic control, urban areas and long bridges using drones. In order to view the bearings and the top of the piers on these bridges, a snooper truck is deployed, which takes about a day and is not as safe as using a drone to view the bridge details. During the pilot project, a drone took over 100 high-quality photos in less than 90 minutes.



- **Two bridges over the Platte River** were selected to evaluate drone inspection on a river bridge where the drone operated under the bridge and inspectors were on top of the bridge without having a direct line of sight to the drone. With a snooper truck, it takes about a day to get the required details, but with the drone, bridge inspectors gathered all the information in less than an hour per bridge. The inspection resulted in high-quality pictures and even if the line of site was lost to the drone, it still could be controlled to complete the work.
- **A culvert** was selected to study the stability of the drone in a restricted area that carries water. Despite the constrained flying area, the drone was reasonably stable and was able to take some good photos inside the culvert.
- **One Missouri River bridge** was selected to evaluate a high and long bridge over the river and whether a drone can be substituted for inspections from a boat underneath the bridge. The drone resulted in a much clearer visual of bridge details, saving time and money. Inspection consultants and representatives from the University of Nebraska who viewed the demonstration said they would consider using a drone for future bridge inspections.
- **Arch bridges in Columbus and Ravenna** were selected to evaluate drone inspection over the arches for connection details. Using a drone, the camera was able to get much closer than the rented platform that is normally used, resulting in a better visual of the details. It took less than 10 minutes for the drone to complete the inspection task on each arch, while a platform would have taken

about a day to complete the bridge inspection that required closing a traffic lane.

- **Two fracture critical bridges** were selected – one truss bridge and one girder bridge – to evaluate whether the details of bridge steel elements in tension can be observed at the site or in the office. The drone took some high-quality, high-resolution photos and videos with details so clear the NBIS may consider replacing “within arm’s reach” inspections of these bridges.



A drone hovers underneath a bridge in Omaha during inspections by NDOT bridge inspectors in June.

### Advantages and Disadvantages

During the pilot project to evaluate use of drones for bridge inspections, several advantages became apparent:

- The inspection days using drones were stress-free as there was no need of coordination with other parties such as snooper operators, platform operators, traffic control staff, advance road closing notices, etc.
- The inspectors and the operators of the drone always felt safe and focused on the task as they chose the location of operation where they felt most comfortable.

- There was significant time savings as it took less than 5 minutes to fly the drone and start observing bridge details.
- Using drones for bridge inspection goes beyond photos and videos. With a 6"x4" screen, the observation of all the details of the bridge is live and continuous to the inspector.
- The cost of inspection would be lower using drones in several cases: (1) when inspection of the bridge requires a snooper truck or platform and can be replaced with a drone; (2) when inspections require traffic control, which is not needed with drone inspection and requires additional time and effort; and (3) saving of time, which significantly decreases inspection costs, including the time to observe and record details of the bridge, which took only an hour, compared with about a day using snooper or platform equipment.

### Disadvantages were far fewer:

- Drone operator training and experience are required in order to fly safely for bridge inspections involving going under the deck away from line of sight and up between the girders to view the details of the bearings and top of pier/abutment caps.
- FAA regulations interfere in some bridge inspections where people are driving under the drone. However, the FAA may be relaxing some of its regulations.

According to Niazi, the pilot project was successful in exploring the use of drones for bridge inspections, showing that this could be achieved with increased safety to the public and inspectors, yet in a shorter period of time and with less cost than current inspection methods. With these results, it is likely that one or more options for employing drones will be implemented in the future. ■

# Nebraska City Southeast Interchange Opened

By Jake Daniels  
Communication Division

The mid-December opening of the Nebraska City Southeast project was welcome news to many, after a rough start and a wet year in 2016. Thanks to a change in the phasing sequence, work kept on track and did not run past the original deadline.

The project, aimed at reducing the number of accidents and increasing efficiency of the U.S. Highway 75 and Nebraska Highway 2 junction in Nebraska City, was originally slated to begin in August 2015. Utility relocation delays pushed that date back to March 2016, but Constructors, Inc., the primary contractor, proposed new phasing. The department gave the go-ahead and main construction ended in December 2017.



Photo by Chris Hasenbank, Tecumseh Construction Office  
The eastbound Highway 2 off ramp in the background connects eastbound Highway 2 with Highway 73/75 north and south, part of the Nebraska City Southeast project.

Around 29 percent of traffic on Highway 2 is heavy trucks, heading to or from Iowa. The new intersection will keep traffic moving along the highway without stopping south of Nebraska City. The intersection was also constructed in the hopes of reducing accidents at the intersection.

A 177-foot bridge structure now raises Highway 2 about 30 feet over Highway 75. Crews from the more than 15 subcontractors completed lighting, grading and surfacing work, and also installed a new traffic signal. New overhead signs were also installed, prompting the nighttime shutdown of US-75.

“We had one overhead that spanned 145 feet and two cantilever signs that spanned approximately 70 feet,” said Project Manager Mike Habegger. Girders for the bridge sections were also erected at night to alleviate traffic issues.

The project also suffered from some setbacks due to the wet weather of 2016. Habegger says that above-average rainfall and groundwater issues put a damper on grading operations throughout the

year. The issues came along with the territory – literally.

“Groundwater issues...are almost always prevalent when you work that close to a river,” Habegger said.

Some portions of the intersection’s ramps needed to be “over-excavated” due to wet soil. Crushed rock and biaxial geogrid – a soil-reinforcement product that prevents the shift of material – were used with drain tile to protect against erosion under the roadway. The drain tile will direct water into existing storm sewer pipes that were another part of the project.

Aside from the nighttime closures to erect signage and bridge girders, the construction was done under traffic. The four-lane Highway 2 was narrowed to head-to-head travel through the construction zone, resulting in some congestion.

This project was part of the second tier selection in the Build Nebraska Act Project. The act was passed into law in 2011 and assigns ¼ of 1 percent of the general state sales tax receipts to state and local roadway projects. The planning for second tier projects runs through fiscal year 2019. ■

Along with prime contractor Constructors, Inc., of Lincoln, Nebraska, others involved with the project included subcontractors, materials suppliers, Project Development, Right-of-Way and Construction divisions. Individuals who made significant contributions include:

#### District 1:

Curt Mueeting, Dist. Construction Engr.,  
Mike Habegger, Project Manager

#### Project Inspectors:

Jeff Fossenbarger, Chris Hasenbank, Tim McCoy, Jason Kosmos, Alison Krohn, Ashley Rippe, Jacob Volker, Jim Wenzl

#### Roadway Consultant:

Olsson & Associates –  
Tom Leikam and Dan Carey

#### Roadway Design Designers:

Tony Kessler, Jim Knott, Mike Owen,  
Syed Ataulah, Jacqueline Baird,  
John Baker (retired)

#### Right-of-Way Designers:

Dan Foreman, Kelly Behlen

#### Right-of-Way Appraisers:

Ryan Omel & Tim Mullin

#### Right-of-Way Negotiators:

Joey Kramer,  
Leslie Muehlich, Terrence Kubicek

Bridge: Terry Holman (retired)

# NDOT's Winter Operations Moves High-Tech to Next Level



Kenneth Konwinski, Hwy. Maintenance Worker Sr., District 1, Lincoln, passes another NDOT plow as he heads south on Highway 77 in his tow plow on January 22.

**By Linda Wilson**  
Communication Division

The Nebraska Department of Transportation's winter operations is fully engaged in the year-round effort of planning and preparing for potential winter storms. Each of NDOT's eight highway districts plays a major role in this effort, including one of the most important jobs at the department: plowing snow to make the state's roads safe for the traveling public and keep commerce moving.

Technology has greatly aided this challenging work, with innovations, equipment and materials to help lighten the load for these hard-working snow fighters.

According to NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis, "Plowing snow is probably the most visible thing our

maintenance crews do and has the most direct impact on safety, in terms of what decisions we make on a daily basis. In a recent survey, 82 percent of the public thinks we do a good job of clearing snow. We are well respected in the state on the job we do."

## Maintenance Decision Support System

To that end, priorities have been focused on new technologies that will result in improved safety, increased efficiency and taxpayer savings. Last year, NDOT began implementation of a new Maintenance Decision Support System (MDSS), a five-year, \$6 million contract with

Parsons Corporation, to modernize the state's road-clearing operations.

According to Austin Yates, Transportation Systems Management

& Operations (TSMO) Engineer in NDOT's Operations Division, the system uses weather forecasts and other information, including pavement type and thickness, to recommend the type and quantity of materials crews should use to treat roads. This will ensure that materials are spread evenly and effectively across the state's 10,000 miles of highways.

"The goal is to gain real-time information about specific quantities of materials used and better understand the true costs incurred for snow removal operations."

Yates says the technology, including the Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) units, touch screens and cameras, has been installed statewide on all snowplows in all districts, over 600 trucks total.

"By and large, the installation has gone well. Districts are getting acclimated to the system, working out the bugs, and providing feedback that will be helpful as we work with our vendor to fine-tune the system."

## Monitoring Progress

According to Chris Ford, District 5 Operations and Maintenance Manager (DOMM), "This is our first winter with this new system and we are monitoring our equipment progress with on board cameras and MDSS. The cameras and the MDSS mapping allow us to follow the progress of the work and see the actual conditions that the driver sees."

Roger Klasna, District 6 DOMM, noted, "This support system provides enhanced weather forecasting for a specific route well in advance of

*"Plowing snow is probably the most visible thing our maintenance crews do and has the most direct impact on safety, in terms of what decisions we make on a daily basis."*

- NDOT Director Schneweis



the weather system. It also provides treatment recommendations and record keeping as a method of monitoring performance and efficient use of labor, equipment, materials and when to dispatch NDOT resources.”

And there are additional benefits. “All of the MDSS information is integrated with our ITS cameras and Road Weather Information System (RWIS) stations across the state as well as with other partners who access Nebraska’s RWIS data, so this is a great tool for comparing both real and historical data,” Yates said.

### Ramp Gates

Work continues on another tool for snowplow operators – a three-year project to install remote-control ramp gates for closing on-ramps along I-80 across the state if storms are severe enough to require closing the highway. Yates noted that NDOT is entering the third and final year of the project, which will install gates at 65 interchanges along I-80 between the Wyoming border and Omaha. All ramp gate construction projects have been awarded and are expected to be operational at the end of the 2018 construction season.

“A big advantage is the remote-control gates will allow plow operators to continue clearing roads instead of having to manually close



*Photos by Jake Daniels*  
A tow plow driven by Kenneth Konwinski clears Highway 77 south of Interstate 80 in the Lincoln area. Below - A snowplow is loaded up with material at the District 1 maintenance yard before heading back out to clear roads in the Lincoln area.

gates. These can also be controlled statewide from district offices, the State Operations Center or the District 2 Operations Center.”

### Tow Plow Power

The use of tow plows continues to be in the winter operations toolbox for districts 1 and 2, located in the Lincoln and Omaha areas. These state plow trucks pull a second plow blade behind the vehicle that allows plows to clear two lanes at once—one with its standard front-end plow and the other with the tow plow. They are especially useful on I-80 and other highways with multiple lanes in each direction. Eighteen tow plows are located in District 2 in the Omaha area and 13 are located in District 1 in the Lincoln area, with two of these new this year, according to Roger Kalkwarf, District 1 DOMM.

“We continue to expand our use of tow plows, as they speed up the process of snow removal, particularly on our six-lane Interstate, which benefits the traveling public.”

Jim Laughlin, District 2 Maintenance Superintendent, agreed, noting that his district has been using tow plows for the past 5 years and feedback from Omaha-area motorists has been very favorable. “They really appreciate how much faster the roads are cleared.”

According to Dale Butler, District 2 DOMM, “The next round of tow plows we receive will be bi-directional and able to plow left or right. This will help on roads where wind is an issue because we will be able to plow with the wind.”

As NDOT continues to implement new snow removal technology, including MDSS, remote control gates, and tow plows, not only will this lighten the load for the state’s hard-working snow fighters, it will augment efforts to modernize and increase efficiencies to taxpayer-owned highway clearing resources. According to Yates, “We are excited to bring more tools to our winter maintenance operations and these tools will enable us to be more efficient, more effective, and provide better service to the traveling public.”



# Aviation Art Contest Draws Kaleidoscope of Entries



**By Jake Daniels**  
Communication Division

They arrived in an assortment of colors and mediums – watercolors, acrylics, oil paints, pens, inks and crayon. Now, NDOT’s Aeronautics Division has begun paring down artwork entries submitted by students from across the state who met the January 19th deadline for the 31st annual International Aviation Art Contest.

Students between the ages of 6 and 17 sent their entries on the theme of “Flight into the Future” for this year’s contest. Entries from three age categories (6-9, 10-13, 14-17) will be judged by state employees, and the top three winners from each category will compete at the national level.

National curation is managed by the National Association of State Aviation Official’s Center for Aviation Research and Education. Winning entries at the



*Artwork from participants in the 2017 International Aviation Art Contest.*



national level move on to an International Jury overseen by the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) in Switzerland.

David Morris, Aviation Flight Manager at the Aeronautics Division, has been running the program for 13 years and says the contest usually draws around 250-300 participants each year.

Young artists looking to enter the contest were asked to submit an entry form, as well as a certificate of authenticity that was entered with their art. The certificate verifies that the piece is “the original and unassisted work” of a student.

“The aviation art contest is an awesome event,” said Director Ronnie Mitchell of NDOT’s Aeronautics Division. “It’s especially rewarding during the April awards ceremony.”

The top three winners from each age category are invited to the spring

ceremony. During the ceremony, the artists and their work are recognized with a certificate and trophy. In addition, cash prizes are awarded to the top three artists of each group, made possible by a donation from the Nebraska Aviation Council.

Entries from last year’s contest came from many communities, including Gretna, Fullerton, Raymond, Verdigre and Lincoln. The art must be done by hand (or by foot or mouth in the case of a physically challenged youth), and must be in “indelible” media – no pencil, charcoal or other non-permanent medium.

Past themes have included “Air Sports in Harmony with Nature,” “Beyond the Clouds” and “World Air Games.” The FAI establishes regulations and rules for worldwide air sporting events, and seeks to promote skill, proficiency and safety in aeronautics. ■



# New Soil Amendment Process Aids NDOT Project Completion



Photo by Jake Daniels

A contractor uses a sprayer for soil amendment work at the tail end of a project on Highway 7.

**By Jake Daniels**  
Communication Division

NDOT's District 8, in North Central Nebraska, is one of the latest places to utilize a new form of soil amendment—one that may take the place of manure and help improve seeding on difficult soils.

In a half dozen sites over the course of the last year, the department has been reseeding areas using products like Biotic Earth in hopes of speeding up germination. In turn, this means the department will be able to wrap up construction projects quicker—maybe even six months quicker.

"The faster we get grass growing, the faster we can close out permits," said Ronald Poe, Highway Environmental Program Manager.

He says faster perennial growth will also mean fewer inspections and less paperwork.

The newer process involves contractors using sprayers to spread the mix, instead of hauling in new topsoil to a project area. The mixtures provide more minerals and nutrients to the soil as well, and Poe says the products are more consistent than the manure mixes used in the past. When a contractor sprays an area, they know what to expect.

Jason Lehn, District 8 Construction Engineer, notes that the product is good for use on sandy soils. Gross Seed Company, a contractor out of Johnstown, Nebraska, used it on a project along Highway 7, south of Ainsworth. It was the district's first use of the newer soil amendment.

While Poe and Lehn are very hopeful about the products' prospects, it takes time to really

assess the usefulness of soil amendment products. Poe says it'll take a while to evaluate and determine what works best on projects around the state, and new products for this type of work are continually hitting the markets.

Some projects from last spring used sprayer methods and initial impressions were good, according to Poe. The real judgment will be passed much further down the road.

For now, they just have to sit back and watch the grass grow. ■

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[Cynthia.E.Kinning@ehi.com](mailto:Cynthia.E.Kinning@ehi.com)

# National Transit Conference Held in Omaha

By Kari Ruse  
Intermodal Planning

In the fall of 2017, over 300 transit professionals from across the country gathered in Omaha for the third annual RTAP Technical Assistance Conference. The conference was hosted by the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), Nebraska Department of Transportation Transit Section and the University of Nebraska.

The conference was attended by state DOT personnel from over 40 states, rural transit providers, and staff from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Regional Office. A video highlighting the vital services provided by rural public transportation opened the conference, with welcoming remarks provided by NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis.

K. Jane Williams, FTA's Deputy Administrator, and Billy Mills, Olympic Champion of the Lakota Nation, were the keynote speakers addressing the impact of transportation on rural communities.

The 2½-day conference included workshops on mobility management, tribal transit technology, accommodating passengers with disabilities, and asset management. The conference closed with round table discussions on state programs, intercity bus development and transit management. ■



Last fall, over 300 transit professionals gathered at the Hilton Omaha for the Rural Transit Assistance Program Conference.

# Tri-City Roadrunner Offers New Transit Option in Western Nebraska



Photo by Corinne Donahue, Olsson Associates  
Shari Hinze, Scottsbluff County Public Transit Manager, presented members of NDOT's Transit Team with a plaque in appreciation of NDOT's support of the project. Pictured, l to r: Frank Faughn, George Gallardo, Kari Ruse and Shari Hinze.

By Kari Ruse  
Intermodal Planning

After months of planning, the Panhandle Region welcomed flex route transit service providing a new transportation option in Scottsbluff, Gering and Terrytown. Members of the NDOT Transit Team, FTA Region 7 Office, elected officials and other stakeholders celebrated the new service launch at a ribbon cutting in Scottsbluff on January 10.

Shari Hinze, Scottsbluff County Public Transit Manager said, "We are all excited about the new Tri-City Roadrunner up and running as of January 10. Great to see all of you at our ribbon cutting!"

A contest in June allowed the community to vote on the name of the new services as the Tri-City Roadrunner. Buses have been wrapped with the new logo and tag line "A NEW Way To Get Around Town."

Previously, Scottsbluff Public Transit provided only demand response service within the county. The new service utilizes six buses along two routes to provide scheduled service on a flexible fixed route. Passengers can board the buses at 132 designated bus stops and connect to major destinations including the community college, hospital, and senior center. Other vehicles will be available to continue demand response, door-to-door service.

Mokhtee Ahmad, FTA's Region 7 Administrator, said he and his team traveled from Kansas City to participate in the ribbon cutting because "we wanted to show you how strong our support is for this service." FTA's Facebook page featured a congratulatory post to Scottsbluff County and noted the new service will provide "better connections for residents between homes, businesses and everything in between." ■