

NEBRASKA

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Pete Ricketts, Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gov. Ricketts, Nebraska Department of Transportation Join Local Community Celebration of Hwy 281 Bridge Opening South of Spencer



Photos from today's event are available by [clicking here](#).

October 22, 2020 (Lincoln, Neb.) — Today, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), Governor Pete Ricketts, transportation partners and Spencer-area community members gathered to celebrate the opening of the permanent bridge on Highway 281 over the Niobrara River south of Spencer. The event also marked full mobility being restored on the State Highway System after catastrophic flooding in March 2019.

“Since last March’s tragedy, we’ve come far with recovery in Nebraska. We’ve reached many milestones worth celebrating as we worked to rebuild bigger and better than before. While there has been much progress over the last year on the State Highway System, two major projects remained to be completed,” said Governor Ricketts. “On September 1st, we celebrated the opening of the Mormon Canal Bridge at Niobrara. Today, we do the same here at Spencer with a final celebration of the completion of the work on the State Highway System following the 2019 floods. The speed of rebuilding is a true testament to the commitment and dedication of the community, NDOT, and everyone who contributed to get us here.”

On March 14, 2019, the dam at Spencer was compromised and resulted in significant damage to Highway 281 at Spencer. On July 26, 2019, a temporary



bridge was completed, allowing direct access in the region once again. Prior to the temporary bridge installation, locals were required to utilize a 127-mile detour to cross the river. With the operational temporary bridge, the NDOT was able to reestablish mobility on Highway 281 over the Niobrara.

“We at NDOT are part of the community,” said Mark Kovar, NDOT District 8 Engineer. “We live here and raise our families here. The flood of 2019 was felt by all of us. Getting to today took a lot of work, coordination and effort from NDOT and our industry partners. It also took partnership and patience from the community, which was devastated by the flooding. We know getting the roadway open was of utmost importance to help with recovery.”

As a result of the March 2019 flood, 3,300 miles of the State Highway System was closed. Once the damage was assessed, over 27 bridges required major work or total rebuilds in addition to over 200 miles of pavement requiring total rebuilds of significant repair. The NDOT finalized repairs on the final project on Thursday, October 15, approximately 580 days since the flood occurred on March 13, 2019.

“Recovery hasn’t been easy, but the people in this community worked together to come back better and support each other when times were hard,” said Derek Bentz, Chairman of the Spencer Board. “We still have some work to do, but the completion of this bridge, especially as harvest moves into full swing, goes a long way to helping us get back to ‘normal.’ Thank you to NDOT, Hawkins and their subcontractors for the work they have done.”

“The flood of 2019 presented challenges for all of us,” said Chris Hawkins, COO of Hawkins Construction. “Challenges some of us had never encountered before that required innovative solutions. Together with NDOT we brought a new temporary bridge system to Nebraska for the first time to restore mobility in north central Nebraska while the permanent bridge was built. Our partnership with NDOT and industry partners helped us get here today. The partnership with NDOT helped us get here today. We look forward to seeing this new bridge serve the community and the region as they continue to grow.”

The NDOT worked closely with Olsson & Associates to expedite the design of the reconstruction. Hawkins Construction is the lead contractor on this project. The \$25,470,887 contract covers the single lane temporary roadway and bridge as well as a permanent 1,050-foot bridge over the Niobrara River Channel.

“Recovery from the flood was something that took a lot of coordinated efforts from NDOT’s team and our partners across the state and at the federal level, said Kyle Schneweis, NDOT Director. “We got here today because a lot of folks worked really hard and changed our approach on how we look at projects and how we can get them accomplished. The people who got us here today come from all over our agency, our friends at Benesch and many more. The work they did was simply outstanding. But we couldn’t have done it alone. We spent many hours with our FHWA partners here in Nebraska to help us get across the finish line. Full mobility restored to this region in less than two years is something you don’t see all the time.”

#NDOT#

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