

8:30 a.m., Friday, January 16th, 2026
State Highway Commission Meeting Minutes

On Friday, January 16th, 2026, the Nebraska State Highway Commission convened at NDOT Headquarters at 1500 Nebraska Parkway in Lincoln, Nebraska. The agenda, a recording of the meeting, attendance sheets, and handouts relevant to the business of this meeting are a part of the permanent minutes of record and are on file at NDOT Central Headquarters. The Nebraska Open Meetings Act (Statutes 84-1407 to 84-1414) was posted in the meeting room.

MEETING NOTICE

- Notice of the regularly scheduled meeting, including the time, location, and agenda, was advertised on the Department of Transportation and the State of Nebraska's websites no less than ten days prior to the meeting.
- The agenda was emailed or mailed to commission members, NDOT staff, and interested persons no less than ten days prior to the meeting.
- A media release was emailed on Friday, January 9th, 2026.
- The meeting agenda was kept current and available to the public in the Communication Division of the Nebraska Department of Transportation, 1500 Nebraska Parkway, Lincoln, Nebraska. No changes were made to the agenda within 48 hours prior to commencement.
- Copies of the meeting agenda were posted and available to the public at the entrance to the meeting room.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

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| • Commissioner Richard Meginnis | District 1 |
| • Commissioner Heath Mello | District 2 |
| • Commissioner David Copple | District 3 |
| • Commissioner Doug Leafgreen | District 5 |
| • Commissioner Jim Hawks | District 6 |
| • Commissioner Greg Wolford | District 7 |
| • Director, Vicki Kramer | Ex Officio |

Marissa Kuehn, NDOT Highway Programs Administrator, was recording. A transcript of the meeting is available upon request. Nebraska State Highway Commission meetings are conducted in compliance with the statutes of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act.

CALL TO ORDER

- Commissioner **Wolford** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.
- The chair requested an attendance roll call. A quorum was present.
- The December 12th Meeting Minutes were called for approval. It was noted that the header date would be corrected.
 - Motion made by Commissioner **Leafgreen, Copple** seconded.
 - Motion carried by unanimous rollcall vote.

INTRODUCTIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

- None

MEETING BUSINESS

Remarks from Director Kramer

- Leadership Changes
 - Marissa Kuehn was formally recognized as the new Highway Commission Secretary.
 - Nichole Bogen was introduced as the new Chief Counsel, succeeding Jeff Schroeder as he transitions toward retirement.
 - NDOT plans to advertise a Deputy Director of Operations position to complete the executive team.
- Financial Update
 - S&P Global reaffirmed NDOT's AAA rating, reflecting strong fiscal management and the success of Nebraska's bonding program.
 - Thank you to Lyn Heaton and Jeff Schroeder for their work supporting the program.
 - An announcement regarding the I-275 bond issuance timeline is expected next week with the Governor.
- Federal Funding Status
 - NDOT is awaiting federal guidance related to the continuing resolution ending January 30.
 - While not a full shutdown, funding uncertainty may slow construction planning.
 - Grant programs such as the Regional Accelerator remain on hold pending federal action.
- NEPA Assignment (Section 327)
 - NDOT expects to finalize its Section 327 NEPA assignment in February, allowing the department to handle Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements internally.
 - This builds on prior success with Section 326 and reflects strong environmental program capacity.
- Grant Assistance & Infrastructure Hub
 - NDOT continues supporting local governments through the Infrastructure Hub, including competitive bridge bundle applications.
 - Results of federal grant applications are anticipated later this spring.

Old Business

Highway Naming – Matt Neemann, Traffic Engineer

- Hollis D. Stabler Application
 - The Nebraska Department of Transportation routinely consults with the federally recognized tribes through the Government-to-Government relationship to preserve historic and cultural Tribal resources. To recognize the Omaha tribal sovereignty in cultural preservation, to promote respect for their tribal cultures and to recognize that Mr. Hollis Stabler has been honored and received the Medal of Honor by the Omaha Tribe,

NDOT recommends approval of naming State Highway 94, Pender to Walthill, “Hollis D. Stabler U.S. Army Ranger Highway.”

- Motion from Commissioner **Mello** for approval of Naming Nebraska Highway 94, from Pender to Walthill, “Hollis D. Stabler U.S. Army Ranger Highway. **Meginnis** seconded.
- The motion was carried by unanimous rollcall vote.

- Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway

- The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) promotes consistency and advocates clear and uniform guidance. Its core purpose is standardization. In the interests of uniformity and consistency and to align with the NDOT Highway Naming Policy and the National Medal of Honor Highway Act of December 17, 2024 (Public Law 118-154), NDOT recommends the approval of the US Highway 20 name change from “Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway” to “National Medal of Honor Highway”. This recommendation includes the update to all 12 currently installed signs statewide.
 - Motion from Commissioner **Copple** to approve the change from previously approved “Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway” to “National Medal of Honor Highway” for statewide route and all 12 signs. **Leafgreen** seconded.
 - The motion was carried by unanimous rollcall vote.

New Business

- Winter Operations Update – Ben Merchant, Assistant Operations Division Manager

- Winter Preparedness
 - NDOT prepares for winter operations from October through May.
 - Equipment preparation includes truck conversions, calibration, and technology checks.
 - Extensive training is conducted, especially for new CDL operators.
- Coordination & Communication
 - NDOT coordinates with neighboring states, emergency management agencies, law enforcement, and the National Weather Service.
 - The public is encouraged to use 511 Nebraska, including optional user alerts.
- Operations & Closures
 - Interstate corridors are staffed 24/7 during storms; lower-volume highways may have limited overnight coverage.
 - NDOT uses both reactive and preemptive closures to improve safety and reduce crash-related delays.
- Equipment & Materials
 - Approximately 736 plow trucks statewide.
 - Expanded use of tow plows to improve efficiency.
- Public Safety Messaging
 - Emphasized the importance of giving snowplows adequate space to operate safely and efficiently.
- Question from Commissioner **Hawks**: How is staffing going? Ben: It has improved in the last year, with some openings still. Maintenance staff is also available.
- Question from Commissioner **Mello**: How is the division utilizing AI tools to assist with decision- making or gaining efficiencies? Ben: We are on the cusp of that and looking into ways to utilize it. Mick Syslo also shared how they are using Samsara.

- Legislative Update – Ryan Balluck, NDOT Government Affairs Manager

- Session status: Day 8 of the 2026 legislative session; ~400 bills introduced so far, with more expected.
- Highway safety priorities (carryover bills):
 - LB 594 – Hands-Free Distracted Driving: Makes handheld phone use illegal with primary enforcement; supported by the Governor; modeled after other states with proven fatality reductions.

- LB 600 – Automated Work Zone Speed Enforcement: Allows speed safety cameras in work zones; NDOT continues working through legal and enforcement structure.
 - Bills NDOT is monitoring
 - Legislative oversight and reporting requirements affecting state agencies.
 - Bills with fiscal impacts to NDOT revenue sources, including sales tax–related legislation tied to the Build Nebraska Act.
 - NDOT Omnibus Modernization Bill (forthcoming)
 - Expands innovative finance and alternative delivery, including creation of a state infrastructure bank using tools like Rural TIFIA to support local transportation projects.
 - Modernizes public-private partnership authority and design-build statutes.
 - Question from Commissioner **Wolford**: Asked for clarification on what the bill (LB 594) would actually prohibit. Ryan: The current law only bans texting while driving as secondary enforcement, meaning officers cannot stop a driver solely for that offense. Under LB 594, any handheld use of a phone while driving would be illegal and primary enforcement would apply. Hands-free use (mounted devices, voice activation, or single-touch actions) would remain legal.
 - Question from Commissioner **Wolford**: Asked whether the proposed state infrastructure bank and innovative finance tools would create new responsibilities for the Highway Commission. Ryan: Confirmed the Commission would likely have an approval role similar to its role in the bonding program, since the financing would involve debt service. The Commission would review and approve programs or loan structures rather than individual local projects, with administrative support from NDOT.
 - Commissioner **Mello** publicly commended NDOT leadership and staff for proposing bold, modern financing and delivery tools.
- 2026 Calendar Review and Approval
 - The item in question was the approval of the 2026 calendar meeting dates as follows:
 - Friday, March 27th, 2026
 - Friday, May 22nd, 2026
 - Friday, August 14th, 2026
 - Friday, October 23rd, 2026
 - Friday, December 11th, 2026
 - Motion from Commissioner **Meginnis** to approve the dates listed above. **Copple** seconded.
 - The motion was carried by unanimous rollcall vote.
- Election of 2026 Commission Chair & Vice Chair
 - The item in question was the election of Commissioner Meginnis as chair and Commissioner Mello as vice chair.
 - Motion from Commissioner **Copple** to approve the proposed chair and vice chair. **Hawks** seconded.
 - The motion was carried by unanimous rollcall vote.

PUBLIC INPUT

- None.

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR

- Commissioner **Wolford**: No additional remarks.

PUBLIC MEETINGS CALENDAR

- The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) has 4 public meetings scheduled between now and the next Highway Commission meeting.
 - NDOT will hold a public hearing concerning a proposed amended regulation regarding 411 NACA 1, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. The meeting will be held here at the Nebraska Department of Transportation Central Headquarters at 1500 Nebraska

Parkway in Lincoln, NE in the Communications Conference Room, room 105.1, this Tuesday, January 20th, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

- NDOT will hold a public information open house meeting regarding the I-80, Sarpy County Interchange project, southeast of Gretna. The meeting will be held at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church at 11204 S 204th St. Gretna, NE 68028 on Thursday, February 12th, 2026, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
- NDOT will hold a public information open house meeting regarding the Fort Street - Blair High Road project in Omaha. The meeting will be held at Davis Middle School at 8050 N 129th Avenue, Omaha, NE 68142 on Thursday March 19th, 2026.
- Lastly, NDOT will hold a public information open house meeting regarding the 50th Street – I-480 project in Omaha. The meeting will be held at Buena Vista High School at 5616 L St. Omaha, NE 68117 on Tuesday March 24th, 2026, from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

- The next scheduled meeting is March 27th, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. in Columbus, Nebraska.

ADJOURNMENT

The chair adjourned the meeting at 9:31am.