

WAYFINDER

2021, Issue 3



WAYFINDER

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Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

ABOUT THE COVER:

A tow plow clears the snow for travelers. While NDOT's snowfighters are giving their best efforts to help make the roads safe for winter travel, motorists are asked to do their part by giving plows plenty of room and by making good choices in planning for winter contingencies. See pages 14-15 for tools to aid in decision-making, including the updated Nebraska 511 service.

CONTENTS

2021, Issue 3

3	Director's Message
4-5	Inflatable Bull Amplifies NDOT's Highway Safety Message
6-7	New Interactive Bike Map Offers More Options for Cyclists
8-9	Traffic at Nebraska's First RCUT Intersection 'Flows Nicely'
10-11	2021 Innovation Showcase Sets New Records for Involvement
12-15	NDOT's Winter Operations Advocates for Good Driver Choices
16-17	Exploring Nebraska's Scenic Byways
18-19	Bogen Brings Curiosity and Enthusiasm to Process Improvement
20	Continuous Improvement Team Shares Best Practice and Knowledge with DOT Peers
21	Thomsen Named Project Manager of the Year
22	Pawnee Scouts Memorial Highway 22 Signs Unveiled
23	Ankeny Offers New Insights as Communications Director
24	Laughlin Named District 2 Operations & Maintenance Manager
25	Davis New NDOT District 3 Construction Engineer
26-27	City of Norfolk Rebrands and Expands Public Transit
28	Employee Spotlight: Brian Ziska

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Reflecting on Our Journey, Looking Forward to New Opportunities

It has been an interesting year for NDOT, as we've gradually gained ground toward attaining pre-pandemic normalcy. We are back in our offices working and collaborating with each other and with our transportation partners. We also have an increased appreciation for the flexibility that online resources and meetings provide us to ensure we can still get our business done efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of our customers.

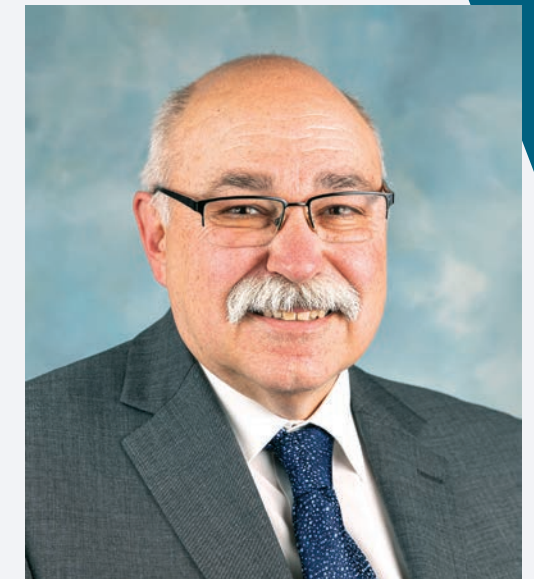
For me, it has been an enlightening journey of nine months as NDOT's director. Since my first day on March 15th, I have had the opportunity to visit several of the districts and am making some rounds to meet division teammates. It has been my pleasure to meet many of you and become more aware of your talent, hard-working dedication, and commitment to your teammates. Only through your efforts is this agency successful. My numerous conversations with state senators, partner agencies, private industries, and local communities confirm this sentiment.

From my visits, I've gained a growing sense of appreciation for the vital work undertaken to build, maintain, and operate our system, along with the tremendous amount of planning and preparations needed to make this possible. This is particularly the case for winter operations, and I can't thank those involved in this effort enough. Many of you are out plowing roads during unpredictable Nebraska winter snowstorms and others are providing the necessary support to ensure travelers can safely travel on the system.

While our snowfighters are giving extraordinary efforts to keep our roads safe, it is essential to remember that our good choices as drivers are crucial to the success of these efforts. This includes allowing our plow drivers plenty of space to do their jobs. Also, taking just a few extra minutes to prepare in advance for weather contingencies, such as planning alternate routes or deciding to stay home, can make all the difference and potentially save a life.

I thank each of you, for all your hard work this past year and to our transportation partners, for your support of our mission. I look forward to the new opportunities in the year ahead to continue working together to serve Nebraska's citizens.

Best wishes for a safe, healthy and Happy New Year. Please drive safely, and remember "Buckle Up, Phone Down."



John R. Selmer



Inflatable Bull Amplifies NDOT's Highway Safety Message

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

That message was conveyed this past summer during NDOT's *"Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over"* highway safety campaign, which featured an inflatable bull, along with other displays and activities, that traveled to school rodeos and events throughout the state.

The bull proved to be very popular among the crowds that attended rodeo events during the summer, offering a great tool to start conversations among families on this very important subject. Created by Alliance Highway Safety on request from the NDOT Highway Safety office (HSO), this was the first year the bull has been used and it may continue to be used at future events, according to Bill Kovarik, NDOT Highway Safety Administrator.

"The bull has been well received and has created an interest to get people to stop by and discuss the highway safety message, 'Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over' as well as other safe driving topics," said Kovarik. "The campaign emphasized the importance of having a sober driver and never driving impaired."

Like a bull in a china shop, drinking and driving can be a dangerous combination. The difference being that the latter involves life or death consequences.



The bull visited numerous Nebraska events:

- Nebraskaland Days, North Platte
- NHSRA National Finals Rodeo, Lincoln
- Big Nebraska Rodeo, Burwell
- Southwest Nebraska H.S. Rodeo, Madison
- Thedford High School Rodeo
- Logan/McPherson High School Rodeo
- Atkinson High School Rodeo
- Valentine FFA Alumni High School Rodeo
- Harrison High School Rodeo
- Crawford High School Rodeo
- Wahoo Saddle Club PRCA Rodeo
- Cheyenne County Fair PRCA Rodeo, Sidney
- PRC Oregon Trail Rodeo, Hastings

According to Kovarik, at least one-third of all fatality crashes in Nebraska last year involved alcohol. Seventy-six people lost their lives in alcohol-related crashes in Nebraska in 2020. He stressed that even one fatality is too many as NDOT continues their efforts toward achieving the goal of zero fatalities on Nebraska roadways.

In addition to getting their pictures taken with the bull, many spectators stopped by a tent display to talk with HSO staff about drinking and driving and to fill out highway safety surveys. Other activities included "walking the line" with the Fatal Vision Goggles, an inflatable cornhole game, and photo booth. Members of the State Patrol were on hand at some of the events to demonstrate "The Persuader" rollover simulator.

Good Driver Behavior

Many of the attendees expressed their appreciation for promoting such an important message about good driver behavior. An older Nebraskan shared his gratitude for the campaign and the efforts to keep the local roadways safe. One woman was incredibly happy to see the booth at the event, as her son was involved in a drinking and driving crash. She is thankful that no one got hurt but feels that the safety message is important for rodeo fans of all ages.

The bull visited about 20 events over the summer, including the first University of Nebraska home football game on September 4 at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln. During the game, many parents with teenagers stopped by to make sure their children noticed the message. This created a starting point for conversations between parents and their teenagers and served as a great reminder to have a safe and sober ride home.

Overall, rodeo fans from across the state engaged with the message and left with the reminder to always ***"Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over."*** ▲



NDOT's New Interactive Bike Map Offers More Options for Cyclists

Bicycling for transportation and recreation is continuing to grow in popularity throughout Nebraska. Savvy cyclists are looking for updated information that is easily accessible on their smart phones, computers, and other devices, rather than a static paper map. The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) saw the need to provide these options and acted upon it.

"We are pleased with the results that will provide the bicycling public with more options for a safer and more enjoyable experience."

Craig Wacker, NDOT Bike & Pedestrian Coordinator

- INTERACTIVE BIKE MAP INFORMATION**
- Traffic Volumes (Average Daily Traffic, ADT)
 - Truck Volumes (Average Daily Truck Traffic)
 - Rumble Strip Locations
 - Surfaced Shoulder Widths
 - Speed Limits
 - Trail locations
 - 511 Website

According to Craig Wacker, NDOT Bike and Pedestrian Coordinator, it was decided to create an interactive bike map that could regularly be updated and have the most needed information immediately available to the public. To achieve this goal, they chose to use the ArcGIS application to create the map and a web-based platform to display the information.

The new [NDOT Bike Story Map](#) better informs the bicycling public about characteristics of the state highway system such as volume of vehicle traffic, shoulder widths, presence of rumble strips, and other information to help cyclists make an informed decision when planning their route on our state's highways and trail

systems. Wacker noted that another benefit is the user can select only the information they are interested in, rather than tedious sorting through other information to find it.

"The new map was created in ArcGIS Story Map which allowed us to display the various types of information we thought the bike community would want to have available," Wacker said.

Also included, when available, is information on the various trail systems and urban designations of on-street routes throughout the state for cyclists that prefer to avoid roads when possible. This information is limited and will be updated as NDOT acquires more data from local communities. Wacker offered a caveat that, while the map is updated

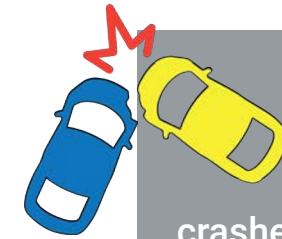
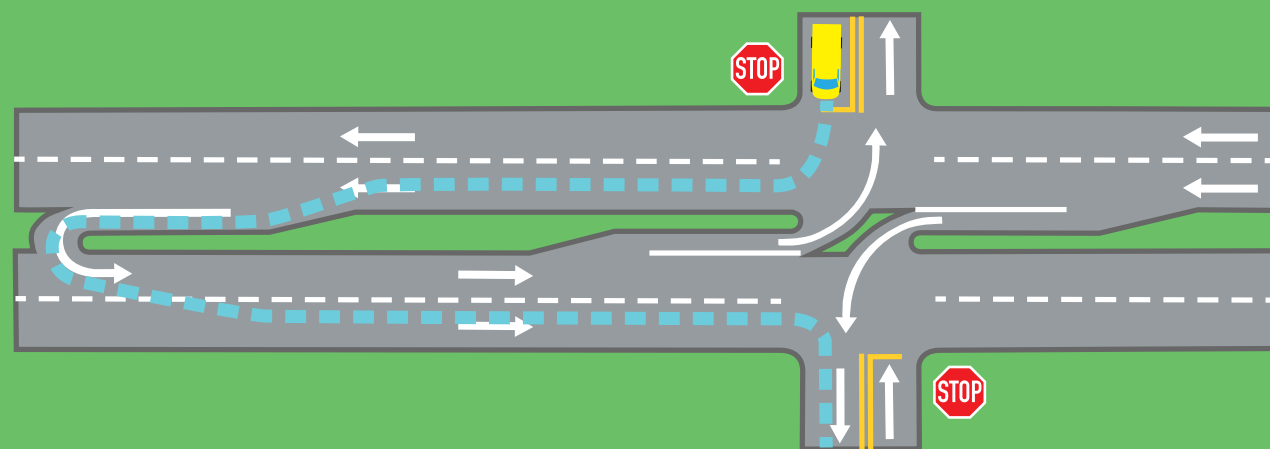
regularly, there may be instances of inaccurate information due to newly completed projects or projects outside the control of NDOT. He noted that they are working to keep this occurrence to a minimum.

"All of the information, apart from the trail locations, came from NDOT databases," Wacker said. "We worked with several localities, the Natural Resource Districts, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to get the trail information. We are pleased with the results that will provide the bicycling public with more options for a safer and more enjoyable experience." ▲

Traffic at Nebraska's First RCUT Intersection 'Flows Nicely'



A Restricted Crossing U-turn (RCUT) intersection is a type of Reduced Conflict Intersection used primarily on four-lane divided highways. Motorists approaching the divided highway from the side road are required to turn right and then make a U-turn at a designated median opening.



RCUT intersections significantly reduce the potential for crashes by allowing drivers to navigate through one lane of highway traffic at a time. The RCUT reduces the number of places a car crash can occur in the intersection from 42 possible conflict points to 24,

The RCUT at the US-81/N-91 intersection near Humphrey was the first of its kind in Nebraska. Completed in November 2020, by Paulsen, Inc, of Cozad, the RCUT was designed to decrease right-angle crashes on the four-lane divided highway, and so far, it is functioning as it should, according to Kevin Domogalla, the Nebraska Department of Transportation's (NDOT) District 3 Engineer.

Prior to construction of the RCUT, the intersection had experienced a number of high speed, right-angle crashes according to NDOT highway safety statistics. Since construction was completed, the results have been favorable, with no reported crashes in the area, other than a couple of initial minor low-impact crashes that occurred during construction of the RCUT.

NDOT Survey

Although the RCUT was monitored and continues to be, input from maintenance crews, law enforcement and public input was important given the community's pre-construction sentiment towards the RCUT. The NDOT conducted a survey this past summer to learn what drivers thought of the RCUT after having had time to get used to it. The survey was mailed to area stakeholders and was also made available on the NDOT website. Overall, there were 53 responses to the public survey – 39 responses were mailed back to NDOT and 14 responses submitted online.

Sarah Soula, NDOT External Affairs Manager, noted that considerable positive feedback was received, and based on that information, "there is an increase in satisfaction from the community on the functionality of the intersection since the RCUT has been implemented."

According to Soula, based on received responses, drivers' opinions evolved from somewhat hesitant/hesitant (80%) before construction to being somewhat supportive/supportive (50%) today.

"Many respondents were appreciative of the right-hand turn lanes added to and from Highway 91, as well as the lower speed limits," Soula said. "These two changes seem to be the highlight for most respondents regarding the intersection. Respondents also have seen increased safety with the RCUT now in operation, as compared to the previous stop-controlled intersection – 78.85% increased/somewhat increased."

"The success of the RCUT and the information we learned from the survey will not only help guide future design but allow us to communicate the community of Humphrey's reaction before and after the RCUT was completed."

Future RCUTs

Given the success of the RCUT at the US-81/N-91 intersection, NDOT has kept this design option at play for future projects. According to Soula, "The NDOT has been working closely with the city and school board of North Bend who has requested NDOT evaluate an intersection improvement at the US-30/N-79 intersection, similar to the US-81/N-91 intersection. The RCUT is an option being considered." The NDOT has met with local community leaders and are now planning to hold a Public Meeting in North Bend to gather the additional public feedback before proceeding. ▲

2021 Innovation Showcase Sets New Records for Involvement



This year's 5th Annual Innovation Showcase held on July 16th at the Nebraska Department of Transportation's central headquarters in Lincoln was a great success! The event wrapped up a record-setting year where both voting and showcase attendance set new records for involvement. The 6-foot Hot Mix Asphalt Rut Box submitted by District 4 took home this year's Innovation of the Year.

Continue reading for information on all award-winning innovations, including prizes awarded and links with details on each innovation. Also, remember you can submit your nominations for the 2022 Innovation Challenge any time!

Innovation of the Year - \$750 each
(from WASHTO Quality Awards Program)

6-Foot Hot Mix Asphalt Rut Box – District 4

Travis Martenson, Chuck Polka,
Mark Klingelhofer, Stewart Kurtzhals,
Jesse Hilton

2nd Place - \$300

Wing Cart – District 1

Curtis Steiner

3rd Place - \$200 each

DIRK System 2.0 – Traffic, BTSD, Controller, Districts 1, 4, 7, Legal, Project Development

Matt Neemann, Don Butler, Donna Hosick,
Dave Tyser, Shirley Danahy, Ian Dikeman,
Chris Wiebke, Cole Davison, Marc Zaiger,
Teri King, Natalie Johnson, Susan Wurster
Katy Ambriz, Deb Nelsen, Kelly Doyle,
Barb Smetter, Shane Sisel

4th Place - \$100 each

Wetland Predictive Model – Business Technology, Project Development

Shelley Schulte, Jeff Hartman,
Claire Inbody

5th – 8th Place

T&E Matrix Monitoring GIS Application –

BTSD, Project Development

Jon Soper, Mercy Manzanaras,
Derek Juracek, Claire Inbody

Drift Stopper 5000 – District 3

Curtis Thompson, Terry Merten, Kevin Miller

Hydraulic Hose Table – District 3

Curtis Thompson, Terry Merten

Snow Pusher – District 5

Garrett Wild, Shelby Riffle

Director's Office Picks - \$100 each

Interactive Dashboard for the EOP –

Strategic Planning, BTSD

Jarrod Walker, David Jones, Claire Inbody,
Shelley Schulte

Maintenance Planning GIS Application – BTSD

Claire Inbody, Shelley Schulte, Kelly Doyle,
Roger Klasna, Tom Renninger

Aeronautics Grand Payment Process

Improvement – Aeronautics

Rachel Kilcoin, Ann Richart, Andre Aman,
Barb Atkins, Anna Lannin, Gabe Robertson,
Marsha Sand, John Buhmann, Diane Hofer

Highway Safety Grant Improvement –

Traffic Engineering

Bill Kovarik, Cindy Olson, Tina Rockenbach,
Marisue Wagner, Scott Milliken



Innovation of the Year



2nd Place



3rd Place



4th Place

NDOT's Winter Operations Advocates for Good Driver Choices

As anyone familiar with the weather knows, winter storms can be unpredictable, especially in Nebraska. Those who have lived in the state for a winter can remember a time where they went from clear to snowy in a matter of a few miles.

For that reason, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) advocates for winter preparedness, with a year-round effort in place. NDOT's snowfighters' efforts in plowing snow, along with the latest innovations, equipment and materials make it possible to maintain a safe and reliable transportation system. In addition to these efforts, NDOT advocates for motorists to do their part by making good choices and planning for weather contingencies.

"When crashes happen, it makes life difficult for the motorists impacted and escalates the risk to those who provide public safety functions on our highways."

- Roger Klasna, District 6 DOMM

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

According to Doug Hoevet, District 5 Engineer, "Keeping in mind how quickly our Nebraska winter weather conditions can change, advance planning is crucial for a safe travel experience for motorists, as well as to ensure the safety of our snowfighters and first responders. NDOT's commitment to winter preparedness has expanded with phone apps, including Nebraska's 511 smartphone app, allowing people real time access to weather and road conditions across Nebraska."

Contingency Plans

Armed with this information, motorists are urged to make contingency plans, including having an alternate route in mind should their primary route be impacted by a major winter storm. This will prevent traffic back-ups and delays as well as potential crashes and vehicle pileups that could result in injuries or fatalities.

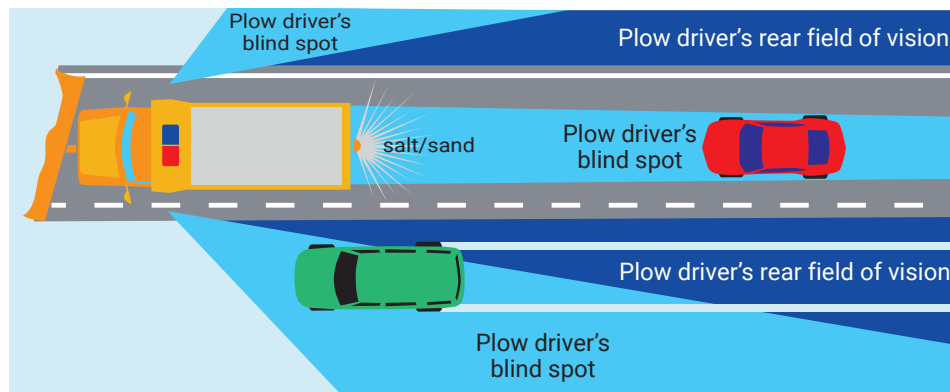
Roger Klasna, District 6 Operations and Maintenance Manager, underscored the importance of travelers planning ahead to avoid crashes. "Winter conditions bring a lot of special challenges and potential danger," Klasna said. "When crashes happen, it makes life difficult for the motorists impacted and escalates the risk to those who provide public safety functions on our highways. Taking the time to make contingency plans can reduce risks and increase safety for everyone on our roads."

Klasna also identified [six of the most common bad winter driving habits](#) he has noticed drivers repeating over the years, which often lead to accidents. "Replacing these habits with safe habits can go a long way toward making our roads safer for travel in winter conditions."

Caution Advised

In addition to advance planning prior to winter travel, maintaining control is key to winter driving. Motorists traveling the roads during a winter storm are advised to slow down and allow plenty of time to reach their destination. Motorists also need to pay particular attention when crews are out, and be mindful of their equipment, to allow them to improve roadway safety.

Caution is advised when following or passing a snowplow. Jim Laughlin, District 2 Operations and Maintenance Manager, provided several key



**BE ALERT.
WE'RE AT WORK.**

NEBRASKA
DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION



"It is important for drivers to give our plows plenty of space to work."

- Ben Merchant, District 4 DOMM

reminders for snowplow safety: "When you see one of our snowplows, please give them plenty of room as they have a lot of blind spots (especially on the right side of the plow), and stay 100 feet behind them," Laughlin said. "If you're going to pass a snowplow, do it opposite of the side they are plowing the snow to (if they are plowing snow to the right pass on the left). Never drive through the snow that is coming off a snowplow. After storms are over, be on the lookout for plows out doing cleanup of gore areas, shoulders and ramps, turn lanes, maintenance crossovers etc."

Ben Merchant, District 4 Operations and Maintenance Manager, shared his observations. "Recently, we have seen quite a few trucks hit, which causes them to be out of service for repairs," Merchant said. "This increases the time required to get the highways plowed and treated. It is important for drivers to give our plows plenty of space to work."

NDOT works closely with their transportation partners, including the Nebraska State Patrol, first responders and contractors, in advocating for winter preparedness. They ask motorists to do their part by making good choices

in planning for weather contingencies, as well as driving with caution during winter weather conditions. NDOT cares about good driver behavior and wants motorists to arrive safely at their destination. ▲

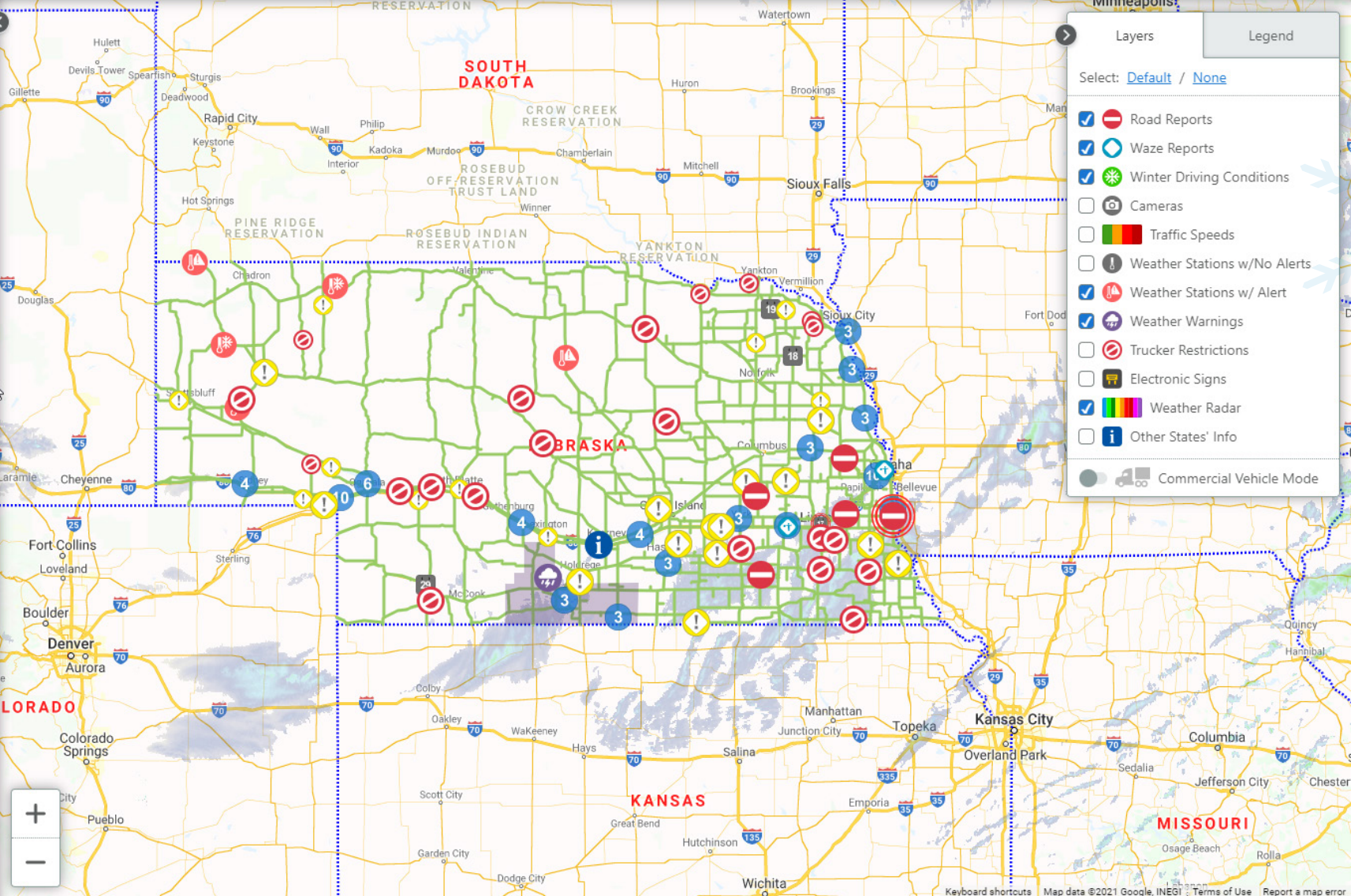
BAD WINTER DRIVING HABITS

Each winter many drivers find themselves involved in accidents that could have been prevented if safe habits been in place. When crashes happen, it makes life difficult for other motorists, and escalates the risk to those who provide public safety functions on our highways. Listed are the most common bad winter driving habits.

- * Failing to react soon enough to trouble ahead.
- * Excessive speed for the conditions.
- * Driving in a fatigued condition.
- * Failing to anticipate or notice changing road/weather conditions.
- * Not maintaining sufficient following distance.
- * Continuing to drive when conditions are unsafe to do so.

SNOW/CRASH RESEARCH

Some of the biggest crashes often occur with the least amounts of snowfall, according to NDOT Meteorologist Jesse Schulz. This was a key finding of [research](#) conducted on winter weather in Nebraska from the 2008-2009 winter season through the 2017-2018 winter season, which showed that most winter-weather-related vehicular crashes during those years were associated with relatively minimal winter weather conditions. This highlights the need for winter weather maintenance operations activities to continue well after a storm has exited the region and also the need for continued messaging of hazardous weather conditions.



**WE NEED YOUR HELP...
NAME A SNOWPLOW!**

In early 2022, NDOT will be sending out a form soliciting snowplow name ideas. The form will be available to all NDOT employees and the public. We have hundreds of plows across the state ready for their new name. Once names are chosen, selected plows will be branded with their new name and updated on our plow tracker website. We are excited to see the name ideas you come up with!




NDOT Updates Nebraska 511 with New Tools for Winter Weather

The Nebraska 511 service has proven popular, with 1.5 million users from November of 2020 to October 2021. Nebraskans and travelers alike have come to depend on the service for information on construction, road conditions, closures, lane restrictions, highway cameras and other important information. With the updated Nebraska 511, they can look forward to these staples and much more in planning for winter travel.

New features of the updated 511 include integrated weather, dedicated information to commercial carriers, overhead digital signs and their messages, updated icons, and an improved user interface. Of these, the three main enhancements to the service include adding weather system data so people can see the progression of storms, creating a dedicated page for commercial drivers to get information, and integrated crowd-sourced data about weather and road conditions from the Waze app.

The system is available via Nebraska 511's smartphone app, online at www.511.nebraska.gov, or by dialing 511 on your mobile device within the state, or dialing 1-800-906-9069 from a landline or outside Nebraska.

"The work we do, with our partners, the Nebraska State Patrol and the National Weather Service, together with the information provided on our 511 service, helps keep motorists moving while providing the best information possible for decision making. NDOT's teammates in our State Operations Center work day and night to keep motorists updated through the 511 system as well as use our dynamic message boards to give advance notice whenever possible."

John Selmer, NDOT Director



Technology Plays Major Role in NDOT's Winter Operations

Technology's tools continue to give NDOT's eight highway districts a leading edge in their efforts, including plowing snow to make the state's roads safe for the traveling public and keeping commerce moving. NDOT is dedicated to leveraging technology to provide additional resources to serve our customers as they make their travel plans.

The Maintenance Decision Support System (MDSS), Plow Tracker, Statewide Radio System (SRS) and other tools continue to provide improved information to increase efficiency and help make winter travel on roads safer.

The MDSS, a computer application for managing and improving highway maintenance practices during winter weather events, is in place again this year after a contract was renewed with Parsons

Corporation. The system provides information to help with weather forecasting, road conditions, the application of materials during storm events, and more, with reports available to supervisors.

The Plow Tracker website, now in its third year, is another helpful tool for motorists to make informed decisions about travel during inclement weather. The website shows real-time locations of NDOT's snowplows on the Nebraska state highway system and has camera images from each plow of road conditions. The system is available at www.plows.nebraska.gov.

Motorists are reminded that sometimes conditions are worse than what the camera image portrays, and Nebraska's 511 System, is the best option for assessing whether conditions are safe for travel. The system is available at all times via Nebraska 511's smartphone app, online at www.511.nebraska.gov or by dialing 511 on your mobile device within the state,

or dialing 1-800-906-9069 from a landline or outside Nebraska.

The Statewide Radio System, also in its third year, is available to all NDOT districts. The system makes it easier to coordinate and communicate with NDOT responders and other state agencies, as all operators on the assigned channel are able to hear all communication, allowing for continuous situation awareness.

Pathfinder, a collaborative effort between the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), National Weather Service (NWS) and weather service contractors, is available again this year to provide weather support services to the public. NDOT is a member of the region's Pathfinder chat group, which includes forecasters from Wyoming, Nebraska and Iteris, NDOT's commercial forecasting service, who provide information to decision-makers ahead of and during weather events that impact motorists. ▲

Exploring Nebraska's State Scenic Byways

Throughout Nebraska's vast expanse of land, highways make commerce and personal travel possible. The practical needs for highways are many, but highways also offer residents and visitors access to stunning natural beauty and fascinating historic places.



Sandhills Crane Migration

By Bev Kellison
Communications & Public Policy Division

In 1995, the Nebraska Legislature set the parameters for certain sections of Nebraska state highways to be designated as state scenic byways. In accordance with these rules, nine byways were designated.

Designation imposed certain rules, intended to enhance the scenic view of the byways. State highways, but not interstate highways, could be designated as scenic byways. No new billboards could be placed adjacent to a byway. When existing billboards are removed, they cannot be replaced. NDOT also placed identifying signs along the byway routes and added the byways to the Nebraska state map.

Leaving I-80 at the Wood River exit, and traveling north on Nebraska Highway 11, a traveler soon reaches one of the most unusual geological sites on the Great Plains—the **Happy Jack Chalk Mine**, near Scotia. At the site of an ancient lake, the “chalk” is comprised of soft rock, formed by layers of sediment consisting of billions of tiny organisms called diatoms. In the heart of the Loup River Scenic Byway that meanders through the Sandhills and beside the Calamus River, the mine offers tours during the summer months.

Chimney Rock



Fort Robinson Area



Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway Visitor Center



Happy Jack Chalk Mine, near Scotia



Photos courtesy of Nebraska Tourism

Other State Scenic Byways include:

Outlaw Trail – Highway N-12 between Valentine and South Sioux City—includes the Niobrara National Scenic River, Smith Falls State Park, Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area and the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. Events along the byway range from rodeos and pow-wows to winery tours, museums and arts and craft shows.

Bridges to Buttes – Takes the traveler west on US-20, between Valentine and the Wyoming border, through the Sandhills and the prairies of the northern panhandle. Two natural wonders greet the visitor: Toadstool Geologic Park and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. Historic Fort Robinson State Park at Crawford offers both compelling history and remarkable scenery.

US-385-Gold Rush – At its peak, more than \$200,000 worth of gold traveled this route daily from Chadron to Sidney! Gold mining ended long ago, but natural treasures remain, including the Jailhouse Rock and Courthouse Rock formations, and miles of pine-covered buttes, rolling hills and lush river valleys. Chadron State Park offers swimming, horseback riding, golf, hiking, fishing, and other activities.

Heritage Highway – Beginning at the Missouri River near historic Brownville, on to the Homestead National Monument in Beatrice, to Red Cloud, the home of Willa Cather, and finally to the Harlan County Dam near Edison—the Heritage Highway combines historic sights with recreational fun—238 miles on US-136 between Brownville and Edison.

Lewis and Clark – Follows the trail that the famous explorers traveled in Nebraska, through the Loess Hills and along the Missouri River - 131 miles on US-75 North between South Sioux City and Fort Calhoun.

Western Trails – 144 miles on US-6 and N-92, from Ogallala to the Wyoming border. Travelers can have water fun at Lake McConaughy, then enjoy the scenic prairie on west to historic Chimney Rock and continue tracing the steps of the pioneers into the foothills of the Rockies. ▲

In 2021, two of Nebraska's state scenic byways were designated as National Scenic Byways by the Federal Highway Administration. The Lincoln Highway National Scenic and Historic Byway encompasses all of US-30 from Nebraska's eastern border to the Wyoming line, near Bushnell. The Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway takes the traveler through the Nebraska Sandhills on N-2, from Grand Island to Alliance. These two byways were featured in the Wayfinder, Volume 2021, issue 2.

Bogen Brings Curiosity and Enthusiasm to Process Improvement

Since joining the NDOT Process Improvement team in June 2021, Mark Bogen has found his passion in helping NDOT teammates simplify processes and implement solutions in the workplace. He credits his success in his new position to his natural curiosity and desire to understand how things work.

“This quality helps me to interact with teammates who are involved with processes and systems in which I am unfamiliar. I really enjoy assisting people with finding ways to improve their workflow, which ultimately frees up more time to work on the things that move us forward as an agency.”

Prior to his role as Process Improvement Coordinator, Bogen worked in the financial services industry, then held various IT positions, including business analyst, solutions developer, and project manager. Most recently, he worked at Doane University, managing a scholarship program funded by the National Science Foundation to develop future STEM teachers.

Bogen said he likes to bring energy and enthusiasm to each project, which helps to remove any perceived drudgery of reviewing how they get tasks done. A quote by Dan Millman, author of “Way of the Peaceful Warrior” has motivated him when facing internal resistance: “The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

Bogen appreciates Lean Six Sigma (LSS) methodology that, after the team maps out the current process, identifies value-added steps, labels the wasteful elements, explores root causes of those issues and brainstorms potential solutions, then they start with a clean sheet of paper to map out a new process.

“That ‘clean sheet’ represents a magnificent opportunity for significant and meaningful changes to occur based on everything the team has discovered about the existing process up to that point,” Bogen said. “We don’t have to keep doing



LSS author and motivational speaker, Patrick Adams, interviews Mark Bogen at the COE's Operational Excellence Summit.

things ‘the way we always have done it,’ if it makes sense to do it a better way. The LSS framework empowers project teams to explore these options freely.”

As he continues to learn and grow in his expertise in LSS, Bogen sees his role as being a catalyst for positive changes, with the credit for successes ultimately going to the project team members.

Managing Fixed Assets

Bogen’s first LSS project assignment was to review the process for managing fixed assets with NDOT’s Operations Division. Tom Sands, the division head, supported utilizing a Kaizen event to make a rapid change in this process. Team members were recruited from Operations, the Controller’s Office, Aeronautics Division, and from the districts, to get valuable input from a variety of perspectives.

The Fixed Asset Management process originally had 47 steps, and the team was able to design a new process comprised of only 21 steps. Even more significant were the number of errors and reworks that were occurring in the original process, delaying the process completion approximately 33 percent of the time.

A new standard operating procedure and checklist were created by the project team to address the root causes of these issues, and training of key personnel will be ongoing. Further data collection is taking place currently, to confirm whether the new process meets the expectations.

Seeding Approval Program

Bogen’s second LSS project was a review of the seeding approval program for the Environmental Section in Project Development. Ron Poe, Highway Environmental Program Manager, submitted the

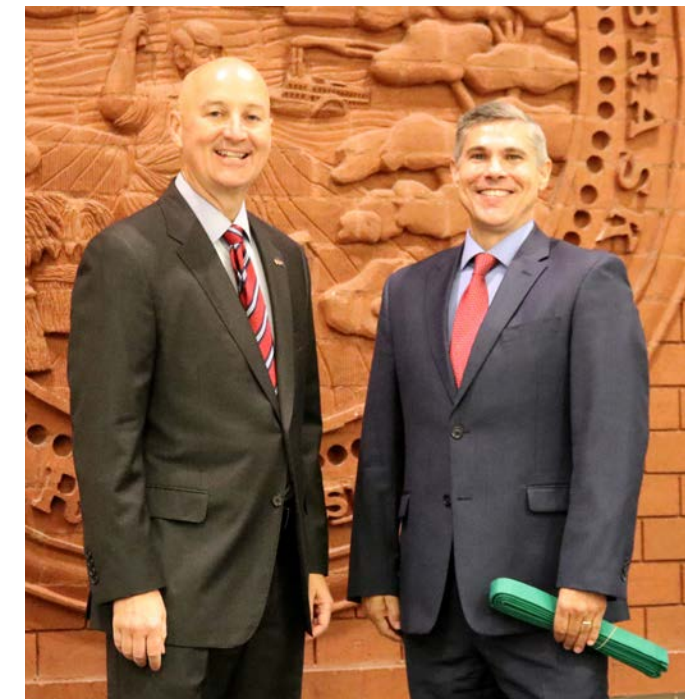
The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new. ”

- Mark Bogen
NDOT Process Improvement

project for LSS review. Interviews with stakeholders and customers revealed that the process for installing new grass seed post-construction was expected to take 7 days or less. However, delays and reworks were causing the process to regularly take 14 days or more.

A new process was designed by a cross-functional project team, and a key change is that regional grass seed assignments will be stipulated before the construction cycle begins each year. This should eliminate delays currently experienced by the seeding contractors, as seed vendors will have the required seed available to them as needed, rather than handling each project on a custom basis. This improvement initiative should satisfy the critical customer requirements and make a positive impact along Nebraska roadways

After completion of both improvement projects and earning his green belt certification, Bogen noted, “I am looking forward to using my skills and experiences to contribute to NDOT’s success for the citizens of Nebraska.” ▲



Bogen receiving Green Belt from Gov. Ricketts.





Panelists shared their perspectives on Leadership and Continuous Improvement during the first Nebraska Operational Excellence Summit held on October 20th in Lincoln.

Continuous Improvement Team Shares Best Practice and Knowledge with DOT Peers

By David Jones
Process Improvement Coordinator

On October 20th, NDOT leaders, process improvement professionals and others involved in Continuous Improvement and Operational Excellence attended the first Nebraska Operational Excellence Summit held at the Cornhusker Marriott in downtown Lincoln.

This summit showcased Operational Excellence leaders from across the United States and two represented DOTs: Kismet Weiss is the Continuous Improvement Leader at the Arizona Department of Transportation and Patrick Cowley is the Director of Transportation Performance Management at the Utah Department of Transportation.

Kismet and Patrick attended the summit as guest speakers. They spoke in a panel discussion on Operational Excellence and individually during breakout sessions to share their perspectives on Leadership and Continuous Improvement.

After the summit, the NDOT Continuous Improvement team was fortunate to spend time with these leaders in a peer-to-peer exchange to

share Continuous Improvement best practices and experiences to the benefit of all, as well as work to build relationships between these innovative and successful DOTs and the NDOT. Patrick was also able to spend time with Mick Syslo, NDOT's Materials and Research Engineer, sharing information on asset and risk management from a material and resources perspective.

As a part of this relationship building, Kismet and Patrick, along with Linsey Sousek, NDOT's Process Improvement Supervisor, all currently sit as committee members on the Transportation Lean Forum, which is administered by the Colorado DOT. The Forum provides a quarterly exchange of information to benefit State DOTs and international Transportation Bureaus and Agencies.

Because of these and other relationships that are built and maintained by the NDOT Continuous Improvement Team, there will always be a free flow of ideas and the capability to benchmark proven processes as we strive to reduce variation and eliminate waste in the way we do business every day. ▲



Pictured l to r: Tyler Chicoine, AGC Nebraska Chapter National Director; Toby Thomsen, District 6, Project Manager of the Year; and Katie Wilson, AGC Nebraska Chapter Executive Director.



Thomsen Named Project Manager of the Year

Toby Thomsen, of North Platte, was honored by the Nebraska Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) with the Lyle Leader Award as Nebraska Department of Transportation's (NDOT) Project Manager of the Year. Thomsen received a plaque on September 2 during the AGC-NDOT Construction Industry Days in Lincoln. The award is normally presented at the annual Project Managers' Conference, but due to the global pandemic, the conference was not held this year.

Before working at NDOT, Thomsen worked as a licensed electrician. He joined NDOT in 1983 as an Engineer Aide. He spent his first years with NDOT working on bituminous sand projects in the Sandhills. In 1986, Thomsen worked on the I-80 reconstruction project, Hershey East. In the early 90s, he went to work for Merle Bargmann, and in 1996, he was promoted to Project Manager.

As a Project Manager, Thomsen has managed approximately 90 projects with a value of \$155 million. His projects have varied from asphalt and concrete paving, electrical and ITS projects, rest areas and truck scales, to new NDOT buildings. ▲

The Lyle Leader Memorial Award is presented annually by the AGC to an NDOT Project Manager who has displayed the highest level of ethics and integrity in the conduct of their business within the highway construction industry. The award is a tribute to Mr. Leader, who was a project manager at NDOT for 34 years. He was active in the District 3 Hartington office at the time of his death in August 1991 and was highly respected by his peers within the department, by the contractor members of AGC, and all with whom he worked.

Pawnee Scouts Memorial Highway 22 Signs Unveiled

Decades ago, Pawnee Indian scouts patrolled the Plains, guarding against warring parties seeking to invade the Pawnee villages along the Platte and Loup Rivers.

On June 12, a portion of Nebraska Highway 22, between Genoa and Fullerton, was designated to commemorate the work of the Native American warriors.

Two signs were dedicated marking the roadway as the "Pawnee Scouts Memorial Highway." The signs commemorate the scouts who protected Pawnee villages that were located in that area and later worked as scouts for Union Pacific Railroad crews and the U.S. Army.

The designation was promoted by the Genoa U.S. Indian School Foundation and supported by the Pawnee Nation, the City of Genoa and the Nance County Board. Jerry Carlson, Vice President of the School Foundation Board, applied for and presented the naming of the highway to the Nebraska Highway Commission, and members approved the designation unanimously in December 2020.

Parts of this article were reprinted with permission of the Omaha World-Herald.



Photos Courtesy of the Genoa U.S. Indian School Foundation

"This event was a wonderful celebration of the history of the Pawnee Scouts and their contributions to Nebraska. Their actions are more than deserving of this honor," Carlson said during the dedication in Genoa.

District 4 Nebraska State Highway Commissioner James Kindig also attended the event. "This is truly a part of our history that should not be forgotten but remembered," Kindig said. "This goes back to a time in our history that built the area and Nebraska as we know it today. What better location but this beautiful valley where the site of the Pawnee Reservation Village was from 1857 to 1875."

Several Pawnee were located in the Genoa area going back to the 1600s. Nance County had served as the Pawnee Reservation in Nebraska. The Genoa U.S. Indian School Foundation operates a museum at the site of the boarding school in Genoa that operated from 1884 to 1934.

At least six known Pawnee Scouts are buried in Genoa.▲



NDOT District 4 Highway Maintenance Workers Adam Bialas and Paul Glup install the Pawnee Scout Memorial Highway signs, along Hwy. 22, one near Genoa and the other near Fullerton.

On June 12, the first of two signs were unveiled that designate Nebraska Highway 22 as the "Pawnee Scouts Memorial Highway." Pictured from left: Andrea Tweety Bowen, James Kindig, Vicky LeadingFox (hidden), Adrian Spottedhorsechief, Pat LeadingFox, Todd Vetter, Matt Reed, Robert Adson, Tim Jim, Micah Jim, Herb Adson, Morgan LittleSun, Kim Adson and the child is Cody LittleSun.



Ankeny Offers New Insights as NDOT's Communications and Public Policy Division Director

Shannon Ankeny is enjoying her role as the Communications and Public Policy Division Director for the Nebraska Department of Transportation, having started her position in June 2021.

"I'm genuinely happy to be a part of NDOT. It provides such a vital and essential public service that literally everyone in the state uses," she noted.

Born and raised in Sidney, Neb., Ankeny graduated from Sidney High School, and later earned a bachelor's degree in English Writing from the University of Colorado-Denver and a master's degree in Integrated Media Communications from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Ankeny served in the Nebraska Army National Guard for eight years, from 2001 to 2008. She was deployed to Kuwait from 2004 to 2005 and served as rear detachment for a second deployment that sent her unit to Iraq from 2006 to 2007.

Ankeny began her career in the communications field in 2012 at Cabela's, first as a copywriter, and later as a technical writer. From 2018 to 2019, she served as Director of Communications and Public Relations at Northeastern College in Sterling, Colo. From February 2019 to May 2021, she held the position of Corporate Communications Manager at Nelnet in Lincoln.

Wider Audience

According to Ankeny, her experience gained from working in communications has provided opportunities to reach out in ways she had never realized, including helping lead a camping retreat for female writers from New York City while she worked at Nelnet.

Ankeny is proud of several achievements, on both a team and a

"I am looking forward to leading as NDOT continues to communicate the value of multimodal transportation in people's lives."

- Shannon Ankeny
Communications & Public Policy Division

personal level. While at Nelnet, her team earned two marketing awards through the Lincoln Chapter of the American Marketing Association for the United Way fundraising campaign they created in 2020. On a personal note, she is proud of her master's degree, which she completed in less than two years while being a working, full-time mother during a global pandemic.

Amazing People

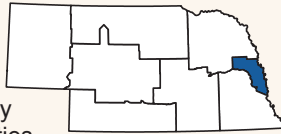
As far as goals in her position at NDOT, Ankeny said, "I am looking forward to leading as NDOT continues to communicate the value of multimodal transportation in people's lives and how our agency greatly contributes to Nebraska's high quality of life. I also look forward to shining the spotlight on the amazing people here at NDOT."

Regarding her management approach, Ankeny emphasized that she is pro-communication and always available to listen. "I love learning what people's aspirations (and challenges!) are, so I can more clearly and intentionally do what I can to put opportunities in their paths. I love seeing people grow and learn!"

Shannon comes from a large, close-knit family and enjoys staying in touch with her four siblings. She has been married to her husband Rob for over 18 years and they have two children, Finnegan (11) and Piper (7). In her spare time, she enjoys many activities with her family, including bike riding, hiking, camping, kayaking and rock climbing. She also loves to sew, craft and draw, as well as listen to podcasts and books on Audible.▲



District 2 includes Douglas, Dodge, Sarpy and Washington counties.



Laughlin Named District 2 Operations & Maintenance Mgr.

“I want to continue serving the public and the great employees at NDOT.”

- Jim Laughlin, District 2 DOMM

Jim Laughlin is the new District 2 Operations and Maintenance Manager (DOMM) for the Nebraska Department of Transportation, in Omaha. Laughlin replaces Tom Renninger, who was named the Assistant Operations Division Manager in May 2021, having previously served in that role from 2010 to 2017, then leaving to serve as a Deputy Director with the Alaska DOT & Public Facilities, and returning to NDOT in 2020 to serve as the District 2 DOMM.

A graduate of Omaha Northwest High School and Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs, Iowa, Laughlin began his career in 2000 with what was then the Nebraska Department of Roads as a Highway Maintenance Worker at the District 1 Greenwood yard. He was promoted to Crew Chief in February of 2001, then to Supervisor in September of 2003. In July of 2007 he transferred to the District 2 Elkhorn Yard and was promoted to Highway Maintenance Superintendent in Omaha in September of 2007.

Laughlin said he is thankful to everyone

who has taken the time over the years to teach him the different aspects of how roads and bridges are built, and he has appreciated the opportunity to give back to the people of the State of Nebraska.

“I want to continue serving the public and the great employees at NDOT. I am especially proud of accomplishments over the years, including when the Greenwood yard was awarded ‘Yard of the Year’ in 2006. I was extremely proud of how far we had come.”

In discussing his approach toward management, Laughlin noted, “I support the people under me and try to give them the tools they need to become successful so that they can move up into leadership roles or into higher leadership roles. I am approachable and willing to help however I can.”

Laughlin has lived in or near Omaha all his life. He lost Sandy, his wife of 33 years, to cancer in 2013 and has been married to Susan since 2017. He has one daughter, Jessica, who got married in July of 2020 and is a teacher at Ralston Public Schools.

In his spare time, Jim follows most motorsports and likes to go to concerts and car shows. His current project is building a shop so he has a place to work on his cars, including a 1965 fastback Mustang and a 1967 short box F-100. ▲

Davis New NDOT District 3 Construction Engineer

“I believe that the most important part of management is providing guidance and support to the teammates I manage.”

- Rob Davis, District 3 Construction Engineer

Rob Davis is the new District 3 Construction Engineer for the Nebraska Department of Transportation. Davis, a licensed professional engineer, succeeds Pat Boyle, who retired with more than 38 years of state service, 24 years as the District 3 Construction Engineer.

Born and raised in southern Idaho, Davis graduated from Minidoka County High School in 1985, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Idaho in 1990. After graduating, he started working at the NDOT District 3 office in Norfolk and has worked there for the past 31 years, first as an Engineer I for two years, then an Engineer II for 3 years, an Engineer III for 11 years, and then as Assistant DCE for 15 years before being named the District 3 Construction Engineer.

Reflecting on his career so far, Davis noted, “I’ve enjoyed the people I work with at NDOT and with the contractors. My accomplishments include managing expressway projects on US-275 east of Norfolk and US-81 south of Norfolk, as well as major urban projects, including Omaha Avenue in Norfolk and US-275 through Neligh.”

Davis shared that he is very goal-oriented and likes to get things finished so he can move on to the next thing on his list. “My first goal I want to achieve in my new position is to maintain our high standards while dealing with recent

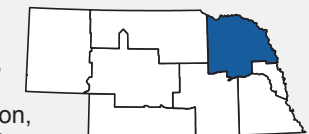


and upcoming challenges, such as the training of new, inexperienced employees,” he said.

In describing his approach or philosophy toward management, Davis said, “I believe that the most important part of management is providing guidance and support to the teammates I manage.”

Rob and his wife, Liz, live in Norfolk. They enjoy spending spare time with their nieces and nephews. Rob also enjoys reading, as well as outdoor activities, including hunting, fishing and hiking. ▲

District 3 includes Antelope, Boone, Burt, Cedar, Colfax, Cuming, Dakota, Dixon, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Platte, Stanton, Thurston and Wayne counties.





ALL SERVICES COMING IN 2022
Telelift is Available Now



Colorful new vehicle wraps are an important marketing tool to advertise the new services.
Photo courtesy of Olsson

City of Norfolk Rebrands and Expands Public Transit

By Kari Ruse
NDOT Transit Manager

Norfolk Public Transit has rebranded and renamed their service as North Fork Area Transit (NFAT).

On September 8th, NFAT's governing board invited the public and elected officials from the City and Madison County to an open house to unveil the agency's new marketing campaign and preview new services. Attendees were able to board colorful, wrapped transit vehicles and learn more about plans for expanded services.

Currently, NFAT provides traditional, demand response service with a 24-hour advance reservation. Passengers book their ride and a transit vehicle will pick them up at the curb Monday through Friday between 8:30 am and 5:30 pm. This service will now be referred to as "Telelift" and will eventually be expanded beyond the current 30-mile service area to include regional transportation service.

Norfolk Mayor, Josh Moenning is excited about the new service. "The City of Norfolk is an active and willing partner in all of this. In fact, we're willing to put our money where our mouth is because we recognize the value of public transit," he said.

Troy Uhler, Madison County Commissioner agrees. "Providing transportation options to our residents allows access to food, health care, educational opportunities, community engagement and jobs," he said.

Funding to plan and launch the new service is provided by state and federal funds available through the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). The City and County will provide local matching funds for operating and capital expenditures. The Norfolk transportation expansion project is a priority for NDOT's Statewide Mobility Management team and will serve as a model for other Nebraska towns and cities to launch similar services. ▲

Early in 2022, NFAT will launch "Forklift," a new service that will operate on three different routes. Service will be provided on pre-determined flex routes and schedules that will allow passengers to hop on the bus at any of over 100 new bus stops. The service will operate seven days a week and will include transfer points, so passengers have access to all three routes.

Later in 2022, NFAT plans to introduce "Expresslift," a new on-demand service similar to Uber and Lyft. Passengers will book same-day trips using a mobile device and app.



Norfolk Mayor Josh Moenning speaks to attendees at the September 8th open house in Norfolk.

To learn more about the new services in Norfolk and other mobility management projects across the state, visit northforkareatransit.com and nebraskatransit.com.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Auto/Diesel Mechanic Brian Ziska Zeroes in on Solutions



“It can be challenging to diagnose the problem and determine how to best fix it. The flip side is that it is very satisfying to get the job done and to ensure the equipment is back on the road, where it belongs, to support the traveling public throughout the state.”

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

As an automotive diesel mechanic in NDOT’s District 2 maintenance shop in Elkhorn for the past three years, Brian Ziska has helped solve a multitude of mechanical problems. These involve major and minor engine repair of multiple makes and models of heavy-duty trucks, road construction and maintenance equipment.

The work is demanding and can vary greatly from day to day, which is why he enjoys it so much.

Ziska’s background in diesel mechanics prepared him for these challenges. “My previous work in agriculture for several years exposed me to a variety of equipment, like here at the NDOT.”

He noted that the number one responsibility of his position is to keep snowplow trucks on the road.

“We try to fix everything we can in the summer. When the snow falls, the trucks get a workout, and things break. We get a lot of help from the maintenance workers that drive the trucks. They inform us mechanics of any problems they experience with the trucks. They also fix the simple problems such as wipers and light bulbs.”

Ziska said he gets satisfaction from fixing a

piece of equipment well enough that it doesn’t come back for a long while. He also takes pride in making a modification that improves the truck’s ability to work better or longer.

He points to several key areas of enjoyment and accomplishment in his career choice: “Working with good people and learning new equipment technologies stand out the most. I’m proud of all the things I have learned in the last three years being with NDOT. There is always something new to learn with this equipment.”

With a look toward the future in automotive diesel mechanics, Ziska observed that the equipment is becoming more complex as engines and other components use more electronic systems to control their operation, which will make it even more crucial to have the proper training and skill set. He is excited for the opportunities that lie ahead and encourages others to explore this challenging but rewarding career field.

Brian is originally from Atkinson, Nebraska, and has two sisters who live in the area. In 2019, he and his wife, Lisa, and their daughters Emily and Lillian moved to Yutan. In his spare time, he enjoys hunting, fishing, camping, and riding ATVs. ▲