



THE
ROADRUNNER

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Winter 2020



From the Director

Protecting Serving our Customers



Kyle Schneweis

As we wrap up 2019 and move into 2020, it's a great time to reflect on our accomplishments, along with opportunities for growth, and look forward to see how we can serve and protect Nebraskans even better in the future.

In 2019, Nebraska experienced 249 traffic fatalities on our roadways. At NDOT, our priority is always to create and maintain the safest possible transportation system here in Nebraska, but safe roads only go so far. With these latest statistics, it's increasingly clear that improving driver behavior is key to safety on our roads. With this in mind, it is vital to remind both drivers and passengers about their responsibilities behind the wheel, including the life-saving benefits of seat belt usage, the risks of distracted driving, and avoiding impaired driving.

In 2020, we look to increase our messaging about the importance of safe driving while better leveraging existing programs, including the "DriveSmart" program. I am proud of the efforts of our NDOT engineers who deliver the message to high school-aged drivers about the role good driving plays from their unique perspective as transportation professionals. The DriveSmart program is a unique way that we can make an impact by serving our customers, utilizing new and existing partnerships, challenging our business practices and developing our workforce. Look for more safety messaging throughout 2020.

Additionally, we had the opportunity to honor some of our flood heroes, who showed their selfless dedication and bravery by taking action to save lives during the 2019 flooding. Rudy Novacek, District 1, and Chuck Stanczyk, District 4, were among Nebraskans recognized by Governor Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore during ceremonies at the State Capitol Rotunda.

I am excited about a long-awaited project, the Lincoln South Beltway, set to begin in 2020 that will benefit many Nebraskans. This past December, the Nebraska based Hawkins Construction Company was awarded the contract. The \$352 million project, the largest and one of the most complex projects NDOT has undertaken, will reduce congestion on N-2 through Lincoln, improve lines of commerce for freight as it moves across the country, improve the quality of life for many Nebraskans, and continue to Grow Nebraska.

In our efforts toward becoming a more efficient, effective, customer-focused and safety-driven agency, we have undergone a number of process improvement projects resulting in significant savings. One of these efforts, led by the NDOT Process Improvement Team, involved development of a Pilot Purchasing Card Program by District 7. With documented time savings, greater efficiency, and much better customer service, the process was approved by DAS for use throughout NDOT.

2020 is looking to be an amazing year full of opportunity for at NDOT as we remain focused on our mission: to provide the best possible statewide transportation system for the movement of people and goods. Serving customers is and always will be at the heart of our mission. Thanks for all you do to support this mission!

the Roadrunner

Published quarterly by the

Nebraska Dept. of Transportation

Communication & Public Policy Division
1500 Highway 2, PO Box 94759
Lincoln NE 68509-4759
402-479-4512
dot.nebraska.gov

Governor Pete Ricketts

Highway Commission

Mary K. Gerdes (vacant)	Doug Leafgreen James Hawks
David Copple	Greg Wolford
James Kindig	Jerome Fagerland

Aeronautics Commission

Michael Cook	Diana Smith	Dick Trail
Tom Trumble	Terri Wachter	

Administration

NDOT Director	Kyle Schneweis
Deputy Director	Moe Jamshidi
Deputy Director	Khalil Jaber

Divisions

Aeronautics	Ann Richart
Bridge	Mark Traynowicz
Business Technology Support	Devin Townsend
Communication & Public Policy	Vicki Kramer
Construction	James Knott
Controller	Lyn Heaton
Human Resources	Sue Larson
Legal Counsel	Jeff Schroeder
Local Assistance	Jodi Gibson
Materials & Research	Mick Syslo
Operations	Tom Sands
Program Management	Amy Starr
Project Development	Brandie Neemann
Right-of-Way	Brendon Schmidt
Roadway Design	Mike Owen
Strategic Planning	Ryan Huff
Traffic Engineering	Dan Waddle

Districts

District 1	Thomas Goodbarn
District 2	Timothy W. Weander
District 3	Kevin Domogalla
District 4	Wesley Wahlgren
District 5	Doug Hoever
District 6	Gary Thayer
District 7	Kurt Vosburg
District 8	Mark Kovar

Copy Editor	Linda M. Wilson
Layout Editors	Jim Pester & Diane German

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NDOT Engineer Alan Swanson works with a student wearing goggles that simulate blood alcohol levels, while demonstrating walking heel-to-toe on a taped line as if a law enforcement officer has pulled them over.



NDOT Engineers Deliver ‘DriveSmart’ Message to Students

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 leading cause of death for teenagers.

According to NDOT engineer Brian Johnson, most students he talks to are surprised by this fact. It is his mission and that of his fellow NDOT presenters who volunteer with the DriveSmart program, an educational outreach initiative, to make certain students are aware of this alarming statistic and the actions they can take to bring the numbers down.

Johnson has worked at NDOT for 28 years and is the Lincoln Coordinator of DriveSmart. He and NDOT engineers Doug Pillard and Alan Swanson, along with Jake Weis, a traffic engineer at HDR and the Omaha Coordinator of DriveSmart, share their unique insights as transportation professionals with high school students ages 14-16 who are learning to drive. Their enthusiasm for safe transportation shows as they share the role good driving plays through an interactive presentation that includes real world discussions on the benefits of seat belt usage, the risks of distracted driving, as well as avoiding impaired driving.

Educating Drivers

After deciding that educating high-school-aged drivers about good driving behavior was one way to bring a positive change to their community and help reach the Institute of Traffic Engineers’ (ITE) goal of zero roadway

fatalities, the DriveSmart program was started in 2008 by the Lincoln-Omaha-Council Bluffs Association of Transportation Engineers (LOCATE), a local chapter of the Missouri Valley section of the Institute of Traffic Engineers (MOVITE). Each year, information provided to students is updated with new data and facts, as well as new topics in order to stay current with social and technical advancements.

Johnson said he first heard about the program seven years ago, when he saw a parent give a presentation during a work seminar on distracted driving, describing how a distracted driver ran through a red light and crashed into his daughter’s vehicle, killing her. At the time, Johnson had a son and daughter who would soon be driving.

“I realized that no matter how good a driver I trained my kids to be, all it would take is another distracted driver to create a very sad result. The DriveSmart presentation is exactly what students need to hear in recognizing the myriad of distractions that are too often considered acceptable with tragic consequences the result.”

Pillard, who has worked at NDOT for four years, saw this as a great opportunity to get new drivers off on the right foot. Swanson, an 18-year NDOT employee, has been presenting since 2015 and was impressed by the impact of the program when, after his second presentation, a student thanked him and shared that she planned on changing her driving habits based on the presentation.

Interactive Learning

Overall, the goal of the speaking program is to remain informative and relevant to local high school students, with opportunities for hands-on learning. Johnson cited an example for impaired driving, where students wear a set of goggles to simulate the different blood-alcohol levels (0.09 and 0.15 BAC).

“Students walk heel-to-toe on a taped line as if a law enforcement officer has pulled them over. Overall, the students enjoy doing this segment, and it also proves the point that if walking a straight line is difficult, imagine trying to drive a vehicle moving 30 mph.”

Since its inception in 2008, the LOCATE DriveSmart program has reached more than 25,700 students. Johnson has presented to 2,900 students, Pillard to 964 students and Swanson to 922 students. They hope eventually to provide DriveSmart at every Lincoln high school, but more speakers are needed. The ongoing goal is to reach 3,000 students per academic year.

The program has been well received by both students and teachers. In addition to coordinating class times to allow the presentations to occur, Health teachers encourage the students to participate and share their own driving experiences when applicable.

Swanson shared that one of his students told the class she had never worn her seat belt in her life, and her parents and grandparents never had either. “After a video and discussion about seat belts she changed her mind. She told me that she was going to show her relatives one of the videos we presented to try to convince them, also.”

Firsthand Experiences

According to Johnson, many of the presentations have evoked emotional responses from students who have had firsthand experiences with the aftermath of crashes involving someone close. “The hardest class I’ve ever led occurred within a day of a local student fatality. A student whose friend was killed the prior day said she wanted to participate, but at a few parts of the presentation she would openly weep, and thankfully, the teacher jumped in to ask some questions to the class as my voice was cracking.”

“Another time, a teacher shared that her daughter had been in a rollover crash the night before, but was luckily wearing her seat belt. Throughout the presentation I would catch her cringing and shedding some tears. Afterward, she said it was the best presentation she had ever seen and she wanted to get her daughter to see it somehow.”



Photos by Clint Mangen

NDOT Engineer Doug Pillard engages students at Lincoln Southeast High School during a presentation about what happens during a crash and the importance of wearing seat belts.

The program’s success was recognized in August 2018, when ITE selected the DriveSmart program to receive the Transportation Safety Council Organization Award presented at the Joint ITE International and Midwestern/Great Lakes Districts Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Other states have also expressed interest in the program. In November 2019, transportation engineers in Wisconsin contacted Johnson and Weis about the DriveSmart program and they are in the process of starting the presentations.

“Plant the Seed”

A side benefit of the DriveSmart program is the commitment of presenters to the advancement of transportation engineering. At the beginning of each presentation, the engineers take time to promote the field and “plant the seed” for high school students who have limited exposure to it. This also provides an excellent opportunity for NDOT to reach out to students and make them aware of what the department does to improve the roadway. Johnson, Pillard and Swanson have all had students approach them after the class about their plans to enter the engineering field, and they provide some basic information and guidance.

Another benefit of the DriveSmart program is the opportunity to collaborate with others in supporting safe driving outreach events. The program has shown support for transportation safety by coordinating and sharing with other groups, transportation professionals and educational presentations around the state, including safe driving summits that are periodically held to educate teen drivers.

The most important message that Johnson wants students to take away from the DriveSmart presentations? “How precious their life is and how easy it can be taken away with simple distractions.” ■



Photo by Jake Daniels

Lincoln South Beltway Plans Move Forward

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) announced in December that Hawkins Construction of Omaha was awarded the contract to construct the Lincoln South Beltway. Once complete, the South Beltway will improve safety and regional mobility by connecting U.S. Highway 77 (US-77) and existing Nebraska Highway 2 (N-2).

“Awarding the contract for Lincoln South Beltway is decades in the making,” said NDOT Director Kyle Schneeweis. “This brings us one step closer to breaking ground on a project that will improve the quality of life for many Nebraskans.”

The Lincoln South Beltway is the largest and one of the most complex projects NDOT has undertaken. The \$352,191,375 contract will cover construction of an 11-mile east-west four-lane freeway that will reduce congestion on N-2 through Lincoln and improve regional mobility. Construction is anticipated to begin in spring of 2020 with the freeway anticipated to be open to traffic in spring of 2023.

NDOT has acquired most of the required right of way and work on removal of vegetation in the area of the roadway is scheduled for completion in March.

Additional public meetings will be announced which will provide local residents with information on timing of work that may impact their normal travel routines.

The project kick-off is scheduled for March 18. Details will be provided on the specific time and location.

NDOT has been working towards delivery of the South Beltway for decades and, following passage of the Build Nebraska Act, was able to partner with the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County and the US Department of Transportation to secure funding and prioritize the project.

In February 2019, NDOT announced it would use an innovative financing approach to accelerate construction of the project to allow it to be built over three years but paid for over the same eight-year time frame originally laid out in the phased approach. ■



dot.nebraska.gov/lincoln-south-beltway/
dot.nebraska.gov/media/112882/2019-bna-tia.pdf

NDOT's Flood Heroes Recognized by Governor and First Lady

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

On December 16, at a ceremony in the State Capitol Rotunda, Governor Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore recognized several dozen heroes who helped save lives during the 2019 flooding. NDOT employees Rudy Novacek and Chuck Stanczyk were among those honored. The Governor and First Lady were joined by Major General Daryl L. Bohac – Adjutant General of the Nebraska National Guard and Director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) – and NEMA Assistant Director Bryan Tuma to present the awards.

“As Susanne and I traveled the state in the aftermath of the most widespread natural disaster in our history, we heard heartwarming stories of ordinary Nebraskans doing extraordinary work,” said Governor Ricketts. “Nebraskans showed their strength, grit and compassion in countless ways. We are grateful for the opportunity to give them official recognition for their service to the state.”

In June, the Governor and First Lady asked Nebraskans to submit nominations for the Flood Heroes honor. Hundreds of nominations were received, detailing Nebraskans’ extraordinary compassion and bravery in service of their communities. Among the state’s many Flood Heroes, those who took direct action to save the lives of others received their official honor at the Capitol. The State Capitol ceremony was the first of several ways the Governor and First Lady planned to

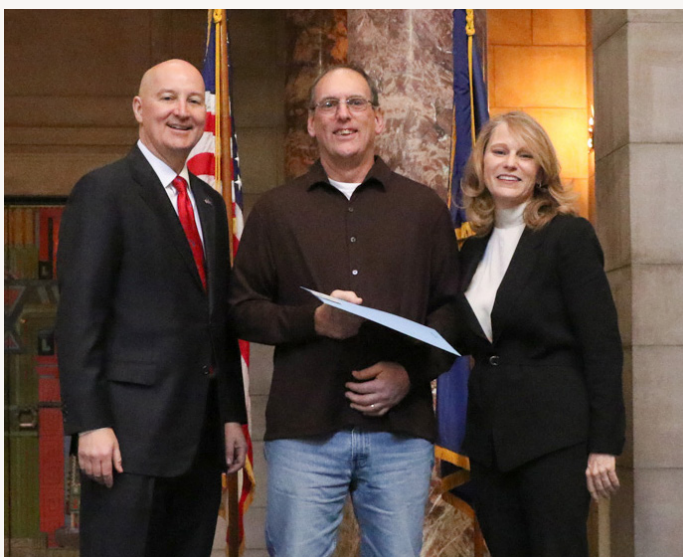
honor heroes from the 2019 floods over the course of the next year.

Rudy Novacek, Hwy. Maintenance Worker Sr. in David City, is a member of the NDOT District 1 team. While guiding others to safety, Rudy saw a state trooper who had been stranded in his pickup. Rudy immediately headed back into danger to help the trooper and led the entire group to safety.

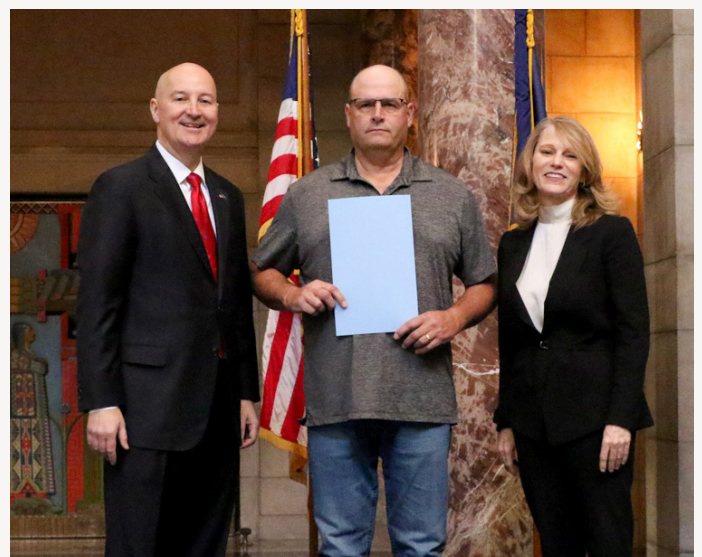
Chuck Stanczyk works as the Fullerton Highway Maintenance Supervisor for the NDOT District 4 team. He ventured into the Cedar River’s floodwaters with his pickup to remove a fallen power pole that had washed onto a highway and to rescue a motorist whose jeep had run into the obstruction.

In March 2019, blizzard and floods caused the most widespread natural disaster in Nebraska’s history. The disaster claimed lives and caused billions of dollars in damages across the state. Thousands of homes and businesses were lost. Disaster declarations were issued in 84 counties, 104 cities and villages, and 5 tribes.

The flooding resulted in the closure of 3,300 state highway miles and 27 state highway bridges. With the February 7 opening of the N-13 bridge east of Hadar, four miles north of Norfolk, the final bridge to be reopened as a result of damage sustained from the flooding, all highway miles and bridges affected by the flood are now open. While most bridge repairs are temporary, a full recovery is expected by the fall of 2020. ■



Rudy Novacek, District 1, is recognized as a flood hero by Governor Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore.



Chuck Stanczyk, District 4, is recognized as a flood hero by Governor Pete Ricketts and First Lady Susanne Shore.

Successful Pilot Purchasing Card Program Leads to Agencywide Use

The process for purchasing items under a state contract with specific vendors is now much more efficient, thanks to a pilot purchasing card program completed last fall at NDOT. The pilot brought partners together, resulting in improved customer service.

After successful completion of the pilot program, an expansion of the purchasing card program was approved by the Director of the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Jason Jackson for use throughout NDOT for purchases under \$500.

Prior to the pilot program, items needing to be purchased had to be paid for using a purchase order, and the purchase card (Visa) could not be used. The purchase order process requires more paperwork, more team member time and vendors are not paid at the point of purchase, which creates inefficiency and delays.

In response to this need for an improved process, a Visa pilot program was developed in District 7, and eight project team members from various district areas came together for two days in Lincoln during a Kaizen to identify the issues and brainstorm a solution. Jan Collins, Administrative Assistant, and Maggie Repass, Staff Assistant at NDOT's District 7 headquarters in McCook, played significant roles in the effort.

Repass explained the steps completed during the pilot program. "We had a small number of cardholders (3) using only 10 specific contract vendors, with a limit of \$200 per invoice. We timed and kept track of each transaction, sending our findings to Controller each week. After two months, we took this one step further using all District 7 cardholders (33) for the next two months.

Great Process

According to Repass, concerns by the DAS about their ability to capture the cost to show the Legislature were resolved due to support from NDOT leadership. "District 7 Engineer, Kurt Vosburg, and NDOT Operations Manager, Tom Sands, worked with other division heads to show the merit of the Kaizen we participated in," Repass noted. "Doug Carlson, Deputy Director of DAS, sat in on part of our Kaizen and decided



Photo by Jake Daniels
Governor Pete Ricketts attended a presentation on NDOT's Purchasing Card Program during the Operations & Maintenance Conference last fall in Kearney. Pictured with him, l to r: NDOT Director Kyle Schneewis; DAS Director Jason Jackson, holding PCard Pilot Program letter of understanding; Doug Carlson, DAS Deputy Director; Tom Sands, Highway Operations Division Manager; and Maggie Repass, District 7 Staff Assistant.

that this would be a great process if we could prove it worked. We succeeded in proving that the needed reporting for DAS and the Legislature can be done."

Team members found that by using the Visa card for contract purchases under \$200, they reduced 80 percent of the time it takes to process invoices and the vendor is paid instantly. This was a total time savings of 22 hours and 43 minutes in the first four months of the pilot program. Both NDOT employees and their customers have seen significant impacts.

"Vendors are happy to be getting paid faster and there is a cleaner paper trail," Repass said. "NDOT employees love that it is faster, easier, less paperwork, and involves direct communication with only one person instead of three or four. There is also no more setting up accounts."

In November, the pilot was expanded department-wide, and results from the study continued to be very positive with significant time savings, resulting in greater efficiency. Based on the data submitted in early January, DAS agreed that the case has been proven and the new process has been approved.

While the benefits of the new purchasing card process are significant, Vosburg sees even more possibilities. "We're hopeful that this process will be made the new standard with one universal card limit for users regardless of whether they are purchasing a contract-covered item or not." ■

UNL College of Engineering Outlines Major Expansion Plans



Photo rendering of the renovated College of Engineering on UNL campus.

By Linda Wilson

Communications & Public Policy Division

On November 21, 2019, Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) employees, including engineers and UNL alumni, gathered in the auditorium at central headquarters in Lincoln to hear Dr. Lance Pérez, Dean of the UNL College of Engineering, outline his vision for a college that will better meet the growing engineering workforce needs of Nebraska's existing industry, create new businesses, and attract new companies to the state. Dr. Pérez was accompanied by Shannon Bartelt-Hunt, the new Chair of the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, and Justin Carlson from the NU Foundation, who shared brief remarks.

NDOT Partnership

In his opening remarks and introduction of Dr. Pérez, NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis emphasized the importance of NDOT's partnership with UNL, particularly with regard to workforce development. He touched on three key areas: 1) NDOT's investment of \$4.6 million in 52 active research projects that they are sponsoring in partnership with UNL; 2) a work-study program with 20 student interns currently participating from UNL and up to 40% of all interns taking permanent positions at NDOT; and 3) NDOT's long-term partnership with UNL's Transportation Center, including the crash site at the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility,

with research that specializes in highway, roadside and race track safety research, as well as the development of roadside safety features. Schneweis underscored the importance of this partnership now and in the future and thanked everyone in the room for their leadership and support of UNL.

"We are building a College of Engineering that will be a major source of economic development in the state and region while addressing problems of global importance."

- Dr. Lance Pérez,
Dean of the UNL College of Engineering

Dr. Pérez, College of Engineering Dean since May 2018, following two years as Interim Dean, was previously Associate Vice Chancellor for Educational Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies. He has been a faculty member in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering since

1995. With the support of the university, its leadership and the state, he is leading the college through a transformative period of change and growth.

Economic Development

"We are building a College of Engineering that will be a major source of economic development in the state and region while addressing problems of global importance," Dr. Pérez noted.

To that end, he identified four key areas where the college must continue to advance, adapt and grow: 1) better train a broad spectrum of students; 2) expand industry and university partnerships; 3) continue to recruit

and retain world-class faculty; and 4) increase the number of students and faculty to build a larger and higher-quality workforce pipeline, creating future leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs of Nebraska while strengthening the state's economy.

Dr. Pérez noted that many Nebraskans are not aware that the UNL College of Engineering is the only engineering college in the state. For this reason, they have a strong mission to serve the entire state. In addition, UNL's engineering college has a unique program, "Developing the Complete Engineer," that sets it apart from other programs, with a commitment to develop every person along three axis: technically, professionally and personally.

"We know our undergraduates are going into the workforce better prepared, they interview better, they are better prepared to have a career in engineering with both technical and nontechnical skills, including leadership, teamwork, civic responsibility and engineering ethics." We are proud of this, as we develop our students to be 'Complete Engineers.'"

Dr. Pérez emphasized that an investment in facilities is critical to the future of the college. He shared results of a survey conducted several years ago of the condition of all university facilities across the state, with the UNL College

of Engineering rating second to last, just ahead of a barn on one of the university's working farms.

Three Phases

Soon after, the Legislature approved a deferred maintenance bill and the college is leveraging \$75 million from those funds and private donations for Phase I of the project, to demolish and build a new research area and renovate the Scott Engineering Center. Phase II involves adding a new building, to be called Kiewit Hall, at a cost of \$85 million and funded through private donations. This will support classrooms and collaborative workspaces and "will totally transform the undergraduate experience with the creation of a new academic quadrangle." The building is anticipated to be completed in 2023, depending on fundraising success. A third phase involves plans to expand and repurpose space on Omaha's Scott Campus.

Dr. Pérez concluded his remarks by thanking UNL alumni and engineers for supporting this major investment in the future of the College of Engineering and capsulizing what it means going forward.

"The priority is to continue to enhance and expand engineering education and research, while also adding to its critical role in the economic development of the state of Nebraska and throughout the Midwest." ■



Photo by Jake Daniels

In November 2019, NDOT employees, including engineers and UNL alumni, gathered in the auditorium at central headquarters to hear Dr. Lance Pérez, Dean of the UNL College of Engineering, outline his vision for major expansion for the college.



“Including this year’s selected bridges, the program has funded the replacement, repair, or removal of 254 deficient bridges since the first round of proposals were selected in January 2017.”

*- Mark Traynowicz,
NDOT Bridge Engineer*

Photo by Jake Daniels

NDOT Announces Selection of County Bridge Match Program Proposals

In January, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) announced 20 proposals have been selected for funding in the fourth round of the County Bridge Match Program (CBMP). The program was created as a result of the 2016 Transportation Innovation Act (TIA), signed into law by Governor Pete Ricketts in April of 2016.

“Since the passage of the Transportation Innovation Act, the Department of Transportation has worked with our partners to develop and implement a program that encourages innovation and improves the overall transportation system,” said NDOT Director Kyle Schneeweis. “We’ve seen the impact of the program reach beyond the dollar amount of investment. Through the CBMP, we as a state are getting smarter and learning to do innovative things to improve the condition of Nebraska’s rural bridges. Our partnerships with the counties, and groups like NACO and NACE, have helped us build a program that will have a lasting impact on rural infrastructure.”

The CBMP provides funding to counties for the innovative replacement and repair of deficient county bridges. The fourth Request for Proposals (RFP) was announced in October, with \$4 million to be distributed to counties across Nebraska. Proposals were submitted by 45 counties and included 133 bridges.

“The large number of counties submitting proposals, and the large number of bridges included in the proposals shows that the CBMP remains strong even with many counties being severely affected by the 2019 flooding,” said Mark Traynowicz, Bridge Engineer for NDOT. “Including this year’s selected bridges, the program has funded the replacement, repair, or removal of 254 deficient bridges since the first round of proposals were selected in January 2017. Three counties are receiving funding for the first time in this competitive program.”

Since the program’s inception, the County Bridge Match Program has:

- Approved funding for 58 of the 69 counties that have submitted proposals.
- Eighty-five proposals have been selected for funding to repair or replace around 254 bridges.
- Has spurred and supported innovative best practices that have been used on some of the additional 200 bridges that have been replaced with county funds during the same time period.

The CBMP will fund 55 percent of eligible bridge construction cost (up to \$200,000) with counties providing a 45 percent match. The selected proposals include 29 counties and 54 bridges at a total construction cost of \$8.7 million of which \$4.04 million is from the CBMP. ■

Selected Bridge Match Program Proposals are listed at: <http://dot.nebraska.gov/projects/tia/bridge-match/>



Pictured, l to r: Kenneth Hanel, past Area A Vice Commander and Treasurer of Nebraska Medal of Honor Foundation; NDOT Director Kyle Schneeweis; Gary Wooten, Commander of the Nebraska American Legion; and Daryl Harrison, Area A Vice Commander and President of the Foundation, gathered for signing of the recommendation to name Hwy. 20 as "Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway."

Photo by Clint Mangen

Highway 20 Named "Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway"

On January 31, Governor Pete Ricketts signed paperwork to formally name Nebraska's section of U.S. Highway 20 (US-20) as the "Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway." The signing took place on Veterans Legislative Day, an annual event at the State Capitol for veterans and veteran service organizations to learn about veteran- and military-related legislation.

"Naming US-20 as the 'Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway' pays homage to our nation's most heroic soldiers," said Gov. Ricketts. "It's a fitting way for Nebraska to show respect and appreciation to our veterans for their sacrifices to keep us safe."

The Nebraska Medal of Honor Foundation applied for the naming of US-20, which the Nebraska Highway Commission then recommended in December. Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) Director Kyle Schneeweis signed the recommendation before submitting the name change to the Governor for approval.

By designating US-20 as the Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway, Nebraska joins a national effort to name US-20, which runs 3,365 miles from Boston, Massachusetts to Newport, Oregon. Nebraska is home to 432 miles of US-20 and is the fifth state to formally adopt the Medal of Honor name. Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have already named their sections, and efforts are underway in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts to name their portions as well.

Nebraska's currently named highways and bridges can be found at: <https://dot.nebraska.gov/media/2865/named-hwy-list.pdf>

"I'm proud of Nebraska for taking this step to link arms with our neighbors and fellow Americans and be part of a national tribute to our heroes," said Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs (NDVA) Director John Hilgert. "This highway runs from coast to coast, crossing widely different terrains and connecting very different people, yet we remain united in our desire to pay tribute to our heroes. That is a powerful message."

Since the Medal of Honor was first presented during the Civil War, 3,508 awards have been issued with every state represented. As of Dec. 21, 2019, only 71 Medal of Honor recipients were living in the United States of America. To earn the Medal of Honor, a member of the U.S. Armed Forces must act with "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty during combat at the risk of one's life against an enemy of the United States."

"This is a means of paying tribute to all Nebraska Medal of Honor recipients and is a gift to them and treasure to Nebraska by all Nebraska veterans and patriots," said Nebraska Medal of Honor Foundation President Daryl Harrison. "Now the Nebraska Medal of Honor Foundation has the work before it to ensure signage along the Nebraska Medal of Honor Highway properly pays tribute to Nebraska's greatest warriors."

The US-20 segment running from Fort Robinson State Park to Hay Springs will retain its name as Crazy Horse Memorial Highway. ■

NDOT Promotes Safety through Winter Operations Awareness



Drivers head west on N-33 during winter conditions.

Photo by Jake Daniels

By Linda Wilson
Communications & Public Policy Division

Planning and preparing for potential winter storms is a year-round activity and a top priority for the Nebraska Department of Transportation'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's snow fighters play a pivotal role in accomplishing this important work and are featured for a second year in an awareness campaign, reminding motorists "Your Safe Travel is Our Business." Their efforts, along with the latest innovations, equipment and materials make it possible to maintain the safe and reliable transportation system that motorists expect.

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. NDOT is dedicated to leveraging technology to provide additional resources to serve our customers as they make their travel plans.

MDSS, a five-year, \$6 million contract with Parsons Corporation, is a computer application for managing and improving highway maintenance practices during winter weather events. The system, in its fourth year of implementation at NDOT, provides information to help

with weather forecasting, road conditions, the application of materials during storm events, and more, with reports available to supervisors. This year, several new features were added and districts received training updates to help assure the system is being utilized to the fullest.

Plow Tracker

The Plow Tracker website, which became available to the public for the first time last year, is another helpful tool for motorists. 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.

"Implementing Plow Tracker gives travelers an additional tool to aid them before they head out the door," said NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis. "This is just another example of the innovation we use to help our customers make engaged and informed decisions about their travel during inclement weather."

Motorists are reminded that sometimes conditions are worse than what the camera image portrays, and 511, Nebraska's Advanced Traveler Information 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.

RESPECT YOUR SNOWFIGHTERS



YOUR SAFE TRAVEL IS OUR BUSINESS.

The Statewide Radio System (SRS), also new last 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.

District Innovations

Several districts have incorporated new technology or expanded on items already in their winter toolbox. According to Roger Klasna, District 6 Operations & Maintenance Manager (DOMM), his district has six automated bridge anti-icing systems at three locations on Interstate 80. These systems provide real-time application of anti-icing chemicals when the system senses ice forming or the deck of the bridge becomes slick.

NDOT trucks are equipped with onboard wetting systems that apply a liquid brine to dry rock salt as it exits the truck. Previously, any pre-wetting application had to be applied to the entire load of salt prior to leaving the maintenance facility, which resulted in uneven liquid to dry material application. In contrast, the onboard wetting systems are calibrated to deliver a specified quantity of liquid per ton of salt.

District 7 is using the Spreader Validation Box that was developed by several district employees and received runner-up honors during NDOT's 2019 Innovation Challenge. This procedure allows crews to "dial-in" plow trucks to assure the spreaders are calibrated so they know what they are actually applying to the roadway during winter storm events. "This saves us money by assuring we are applying the correct amount of material to the roadway based on the recommendations of MDSS," said Kelly Doyle, District 7 DOMM. "It also assures that we are not over-applying material which has an impact on the environment." ■

Roadside Billboards

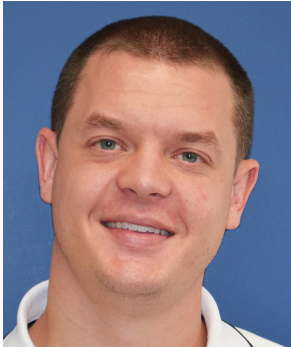
NDOT had a successful inaugural season of roadside billboards in 2018. Last winter, NDOT's billboards were in place for 12-16 weeks in four locations across the state, and earned a combined total of 13,081,724 impressions

Five new billboards were unveiled this year, showcasing the agency's winter-fighting axiom: Your Safe Travel Is Our Business. The billboards spotlight NDOT's mission to keep Nebraska's roadways safe for the traveling public and remind the public of its responsibility to take proper winter-driving precautions. The five displays, placed strategically across the state, are a way for NDOT to put the message on the road.

Each of the five new billboards highlight local snowplow drivers, letting motorists know their neighbors are the everyday heroes blazing the way through difficult conditions. Serving their communities and doing their part to shrink the number of winter crashes are what keep them focused.

"Our dedicated team of snow fighters are out there in every snow event," said District 1 Engineer Tom Goodbarn. "Motorists can help snow fighters do their jobs by slowing down, turning off cruise control and by giving the snow removal equipment room to work."

Klein New D-4 Construction Engineer



Eric Klein

Eric Klein is the new District 4 Construction Engineer for the Nebraska Department of Transportation. District 4 includes Adams, Buffalo, Clay, Fillmore, Greeley, Hall, Hamilton, Howard, Merrick, Nance, Nuckolls, Polk, Sherman, Thayer, Valley, Webster and York counties. Klein, a licensed professional engineer, succeeds Keith

Meyer, who passed away in August 2019 and had more than 29 years of state service, 21 years as the District 4 Construction Engineer.

Born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, Klein graduated from White Bear Lake High School in 2005, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from Iowa State University in 2010. He started working at

the NDOT in the fall of 2011, first as a construction technician, then moving on to project management before becoming the District 4 Project Delivery Engineer when that program was rolled out in the winter of 2017.

Klein would like to continue the advancement of technology and e-Construction methods used out in the field. He also noted, "I want to assist the district and department as they continue to navigate through the post flooding cleanup, reimbursement and short-term program adjustments. This includes collecting best practices and lessons learned to improve the department's response to the next emergency."

Klein's management philosophy involves providing guidance and an environment that leads to productive employees.

Klein and his wife, Lauren, reside in Grand Island with their two children, Noah, 4, and Alexa, 3. In his spare time, he enjoys golf, traveling, wine, watching and participating in most sports, and spending time with his family. ■

Renninger New District 2 Operations & Maintenance Manager



Tom Renninger

Tom Renninger is the new District 2 Operations and Maintenance Manager (DOMM) for the Nebraska Department of Transportation, in Omaha. District 2 includes Douglas, Dodge, Sarpy and Washington counties. Renninger replaces Dale Butler, who retired in December 2019 with 40 years of state service, 21 years as

the District's Operations and Maintenance Manager.

A graduate of Alliance High School and Western Nebraska Technical College in Sidney, Renninger began his career with NDOT in 1988 as a Highway Maintenance Worker in Hyannis. He moved to Ogallala in 1989, where he served as a Crew Chief, then Supervisor until 1995, when he moved to Mullen to become a Hwy. Maintenance Superintendent. In 2010, Renninger moved to Lincoln and held the position of Assistant Maintenance and Operations Division Manager until 2017. After 29 years with NDOT, he took a position with the Alaska DOT &

Public Facilities as the Southcoast Region Deputy Director. After three years in Alaska, Renninger returned to Nebraska to accept the position of DOMM in District 2.

Renninger said he has enjoyed the people he has worked with and has been impressed with their abilities to adapt through changes.

Renninger wants to continue what those before him started by providing a safe workplace for employees. "I believe in getting every person that works on the highways throughout Nebraska home at night to their families. The safety of our workforce and the traveling public is my top priority."

Renninger stated, "I believe in management from a team aspect when appropriate, allowing people to be themselves, accepting their strengths and mentoring through their weaknesses. I have a great passion for people and the development of future leaders. I take pride in participating in the growth of our workforce."

Renninger has three children and four grandchildren who reside in Lincoln and Ogallala. In his spare time, Tom enjoys family gatherings, spending time with his kids and grandchildren, golf, all forms of motorsports racing, and attending Nebraska sporting events. ■



Photo courtesy of About ORBT

Articulated buses are high capacity with an extra axle and most often used in high demand, urban fixed routes and bus rapid transit.

Articles By Kari Ruse, NDOT Transit Manager

Bus Rapid Transit Service Coming to Nebraska

Omaha Metro is leading the largest transit investment project the city of Omaha has seen in decades. Bus rapid transit (BRT) service is expected to launch in 2020 with an 8-mile route from the Westroads Mall to downtown Omaha along Dodge and Douglas Streets. The new service has been branded Omaha Rapid Bus Transit (ORBT).

BRT service is an innovative and cost-effective public transit solution that can often achieve the benefits of more expensive rail modes. ORBT will utilize technology like transit signal priority, a smartphone app to track vehicle arrival times, and onboard Wi-Fi. Dedicated roadways will reduce congestion and delays due to vehicle traffic.

Construction on 25 state-of-the-art raised-platform stations began in August 2019. The platforms will allow for safer, easier and more accessible boarding. Each station is equipped with a lighted canopy, electric snowmelt system, integrated ticket kiosks, Wi-Fi and real-time arrival displays.

The new, articulated ORBT buses have begun to arrive in Omaha. There will be 10 compressed natural gas-powered, 60-foot buses in the ORBT fleet. The vehicles are 50% longer than other metro buses and will include bike racks and on-board Wi-Fi. For more information about the service, go to www.rideorbit.com. ■

Northeast Region Transit Providers Meet

In December, Winnebago Transit Director David Mentzer hosted a meeting of Northeast Region transit providers, NDOT Transit, and members of the Olsson consultant team. During the meeting, transit providers brainstormed solutions to coordinate service and meet the unmet transit needs of the region. Mentzer discussed plans for a significant Winnebago Transit expansion. Northeast Regional Coordination is a priority task included in NDOT's Mobility Management project.

Winnebago Transit provides transportation for tribal members and is also open to the general public. They currently provide transportation to community colleges, medical destinations, large employment centers and the WinnaVegas Casino in Sioux City, Iowa. Future plans for the agency include an expansion of their transit facility and adding additional routes. ■

Photo by Kari Ruse
David Mentzer, Winnebago Transit Manager and Stephanie Slobotski, Ponca Tribal Transportation Planner, tour the Winnebago Transit facility.

