

Quarterly News of the Nevada Department of Transportation



Moving Motorists and More

Protecting Lake Tahoe is a Top Priority for NDOT

The Director's Corner

Tom Stephens, P.E., Director



At the Nevada Department of Transportation our job is to efficiently plan, design, construct and maintain a safe, effective highway system considering economic, environmental, social and intermodal needs. Our work in the Lake Tahoe Basin has brought together all the elements of our mission in a way we would not have thought possible 10 years ago and no small part of the encouragement to do this has been from the national level.

National initiatives included the Presidential Summit at Lake Tahoe two years ago and the additional funding and legislation in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century enacted last summer. Senator Harry Reid recently organized a Second Anniversary Workshop to track the progress of the Presidential Summit's preservation program which was moderated by U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California and Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn. Speakers included Rep. Jim Gibbons, representing Nevada, U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Jim Lyons and U.S. EPA Regional Administrator Felicia Marcus.

Improvements in NDOT's highway maintenance practices have gained us national recognition. The installation of 15 Remote Weather Information System sites has allowed NDOT to halve the winter use of salt and sand in the basin. The weather information provided by RWIS, including road surface temperatures, lets us know exactly when to use salt and sand. Several years ago our district engineer for District II, Rick Nelson, was awarded the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials President's Modal Award for exemplary performance in highways, largely due to his work on RWIS. He is a sought after speaker at national and international conferences on snow removal.

Our first project, of what will be many projects, to improve erosion control and to collect and treat roadway runoff gained NDOT the Federal Highway Administration's Environmental Excellence Award. This prestigious award was accepted by Amir Soltani, NDOT's chief hydraulics engineer, on our behalf at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., in July. Soltani's multi-agency efforts will reduce the impacts the highways have on the water quality of Lake Tahoe. This first project starts at Memorial Point on State

Route 28 and goes north to Incline Village. Eventually all of S.R. 28 and most of U.S. 50 on the Nevada side of the lake will have similar environmental protection improvements at the cost of several million dollars a mile.

This summer NDOT spent \$13 million on paving projects in the basin. Additionally, million-dollar federal enhancement projects were completed to add roadside improvements at Memorial Point, Incline Village and Crystal Bay.

The establishment of the multi-state Lake Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization under the auspices of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was a real milestone with regard to federal highway funding. NDOT is working closely with TRPA to implement nearly \$100 million in future projects. The next major project is roadway and environmental improvements for two miles of U.S. 50 and 3.8 miles of S.R. 28 on either side of the Spooner Junction. This project is being largely funded with a federal highway grant of \$10 million from the public lands program and a grant of \$2.5 million from the forest lands program.

NDOT has come a long way at Lake Tahoe but we have much farther to go. However, unlike four years ago, we have a plan on how to get there and are working closely with many other organizations on a much larger program, the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program. Working independently and as a member of a team, NDOT will do its part to preserve Lake Tahoe for future generations.

Partners at NDOT

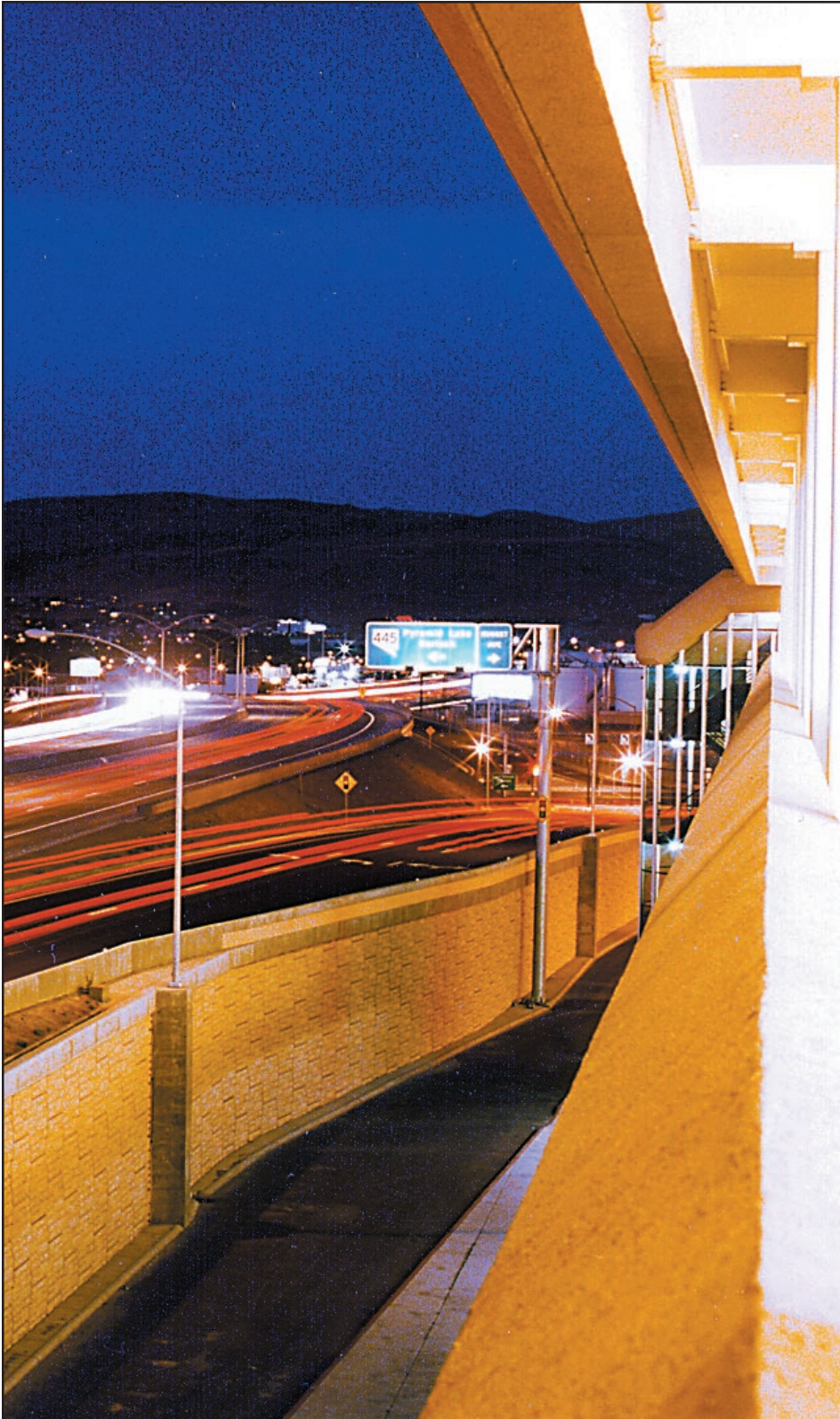
Among those who also contributed to the RWIS efforts are District II's Thor Dyson and the maintenance crews, Julie Masterpool, Dave Titzel, Hector Quiroga, Bill Hendrix and Greg Dodson.

Lake Tahoe planning efforts included representatives from nearly every NDOT office. Special thanks to Theresa Jones, Michael Premo, Reid Kaiser, Rob Welsh, Matt Lorne, Jeff Palmer, Wayne Allred, Jeff Dodge, Tom Lumpkin, Steve Williams, Parviz Noori, Eric Glick, Bill Hoffman, Jim Mallery, Patrice Burke, Mary Luster and Denise Grissom. Also Barbara Dinsmore, Ted Bendure, Jon Bunch, John Erb, Daryl James, Alan Jenne, Lynette Johnson, Ron Marwin, Hal Turner, Roger VanAlyne, Thor Dyson, John Dube, Dave Vill, Susan Martinovich and all those who work on this project.



Road Weather Information System technology collects vital information that results in reduced application of sand and salt at Lake Tahoe.

The Pyramid Way



“My speech is going to be very short because I waited 28 years for this. This has to be one of the greatest projects I have ever been involved with and I have been around here for 40 years. This opens the gate.”

Pioneer John Ascuaga’s words summed up the Sparks sentiment when officials gathered June 25 to unveil the brand new \$28.8 million urban interchange along Interstate 80 in Sparks, billed as the gateway to Sparks for the 21st century.

The local icon and owner of the Nugget Hotel and Casino spoke with hometown spirit along with federal, state and local officials delighted to see the two-year project’s completion.

Design of the urban interchange was tricky since the Nugget’s parking structure and other property immediately abutted the highway, along with historic railroad facilities and newly redeveloped Victorian Square community space. To meet the challenge, NDOT’s designers selected a single point urban interchange that

“I hope in the years to come people remember that projects like this change people’s lives.”

U.S. Senator Harry Reid



Above: Interstate 80 westbound alongside Victorian Square. Right: Assistant Resident Engineer Mark Del Soldato responds to the media on hand opening day.

requires fewer signals and less right of way to move more traffic.

Ascuaga and the neighboring Silver Club joined in the community’s vision by donating right of way that helped make the project a reality and opened the door to economic prosperity for the city of more than 60,000 adjacent to Reno.

“We have a lot of things we’re going to do here. We’re just getting started,” said Mayor Tony Armstrong.

Access is Everything

Getting started begins with better access, the chief benefit of the project. By adding a new east onramp and west offramp at Pyramid Way, the project made the Sparks interchange whole, with easy downtown travel in every direction.

Since the extremely narrow corridor had to be widened, the project relocated the entire interstate 120 feet to the south. Crews constructed a new bridge deck and widened a portion of the freeway to accommodate a future six-lane project along I-80. Realigning Nugget Avenue to the south, it constructed new railroad access too. East McCarran Boulevard ramps were reconstructed along with retaining walls. To accommodate the new traffic patterns, the project added auxiliary lanes between Pyramid Way and East McCarran Boulevard.

Three months ahead of schedule, the project was delivered by Granite Construction following design by

Urban Interchange Debuts in Sparks



Officials join Nugget Hotel and Casino owner John Ascuaga in celebration of the new Interstate 80/Pyramid Way single point urban interchange opening in Sparks. From left, Sen. Richard Bryan; Bruce Breslow, former city of Sparks mayor; Ascuaga; Jack Finn, representing Gov. Kenny Guinn; Sen. Harry Reid; and state Sen. Bernice Mathews.

DeLeuw, Cather and Company, and NDOT Design Division's Glenn Petrenko managed the consultant's work.

Funded jointly by NDOT at \$10.4 million, the city of Sparks at \$1.7 million and the federal government at \$16.7 million, the project was a prime partnership. Representing Gov. Kenny Guinn, aide Jack Finn welcomed the partners and led off the praise.

"It took everybody working together to get a product," said Washoe County Regional Transportation Chairman John Mayer.

"The product," said U.S. Senator Richard Bryan, "is access to a vital corridor."

As a member of the Senate Subcommittee for Transportation and Infrastructure and the Transportation Appropriation Committee, U.S. Senator Harry Reid was instrumental in directing funding to Nevada for the project and was pleased to be there to thank all those who had a hand in the result.

There were plenty of thanks from all around to the NDOT crews who worked feverishly and diligently to see that the project met its goals, including uninterrupted access to the

"It took everybody working together to get a product."

Washoe County Regional Transportation Chairman John Mayer

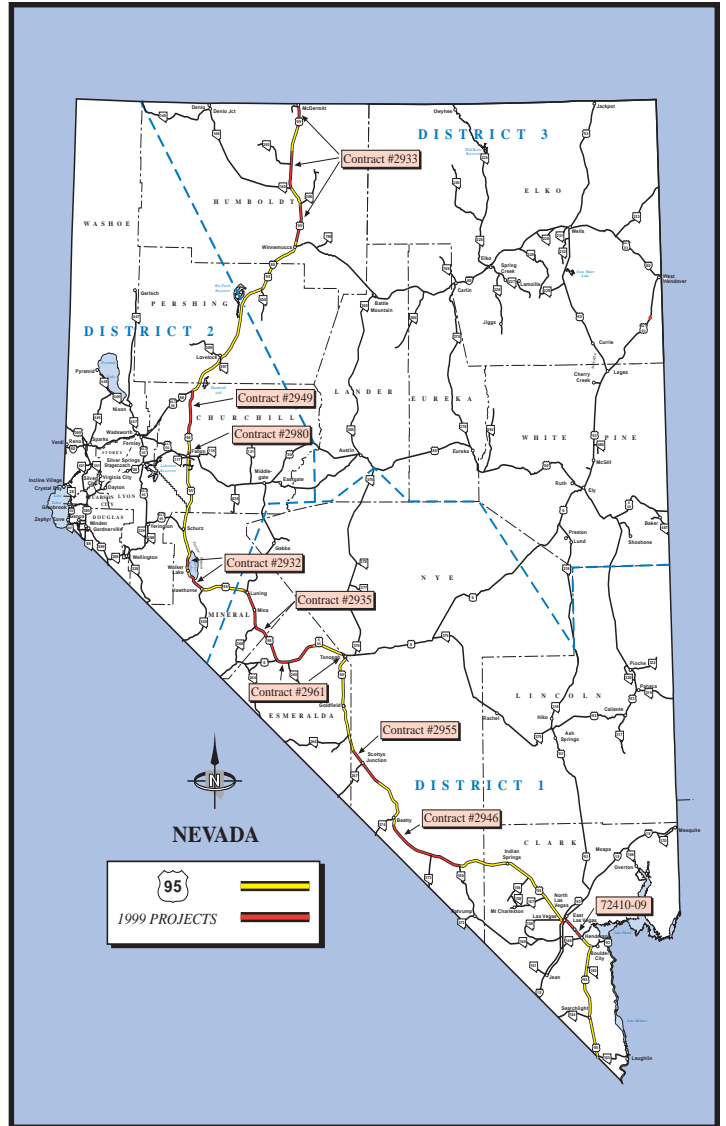
interstate for the 80,000 that use the freeway daily. Reid Kaiser's Crew 907 along with assistant Mark Del Soldato kept the project on track for NDOT.

"Thanks to the real heroes in the orange vests, for their backbreaking work behind the scenes, doing their best," said former Sparks Mayor Bruce Breslow.

The senators greeted NDOT crews to offer their personal appreciation for a job well done.

"I hope in the years to come," Reid said, "that people remember that projects like these change people's lives."

On U.S. 95 in 1999
Eight Hot and Cold Projects
Five Counties
\$47.5 million
220 paved miles



Cold Recycling Benefits

- Removes pavement distresses
- Produces high quality material
- Safe, environmentally friendly
- Turns waste product into paving material
- Minimizes lane closure time



In the desert heat, Crew 916's Mike Bridges, right, keeps tabs on U.S. 95 work.

It was a cool summer for the road that bridges Oregon with California and Arizona. U.S. 95, Nevada's major north-south route, begins in Humboldt County, north of Winnemucca, winding past cowboy country, mining territory and the lights of Las Vegas to meet Interstate 40 near Needles, California and the Arizona state line.

In 1999, NDOT invested \$47.5 million in eight major projects to rehabilitate and reconstruct U.S. 95 pavement ready for a new lease on life. Some of those demanding desert jobs were built using a unique operation known as a cold recycle.

Unlike most pavement projects which use a hot plant to mix and melt asphalt then truck it to where it is needed, the cold recycle train produces material onsite without heat. The material is used as a stabilized base under hot mix overlay. The result—a longer lasting pavement at lower overall costs.

Cold recycling makes use of the existing roadway by recycling the aggregate on site so less material must be hauled. Specially suited for remote places, the recycle train process mills out the road surface and mixes it with lime slurry.

Next, a crusher reduces the size of larger aggregates to less than one and a

The Cold Recycle Train

Milling Machine-
Cold milling is mixed with lime slurry

Crusher-
Milled material is crushed to a proper gradation

Pug Mill-
Mixes the milled material and lime with a binder

half inches. Then the material is mixed with a binder using equipment known as a pug mill that generates uniform material and it is put right back onto the highway. Within a couple of hours, the road is open again to traffic. Vehicles help to set the pavement for 14-21 days, then the surface is rolled again to remove surface irregularities caused by traffic. Pavement is then ready to be overlaid.

FNF Construction, Inc., is the state's contractor for the \$6.5 million cold train job at Beatty, along with Valentine Construction of Vancouver, Washington, a

The Summer of U.S. 95

Pavement Projects Proliferate

company that specializes in the cold mill process.

Crew 916, led by Resident Engineer Tim Ruguleiski, endured the scorching desert heat that provides the necessary 91-degree surface temperature to do the job.

Outside of the pavement, there is nothing cold about Crew 916's job near the remote town of Beatty. They oversee placement of 2 1/2 inches of dense grade and an open grade of 3/4 inch on U.S. 95, a stone's throw from Death Valley,

"This particular business is built for heat. Once you get your feet wet and learn, you can survive it," said Mike Bridges, one of 11 NDOT workers based

in Beatty for several construction projects.

Because the cold process is done on site, construction inspectors must examine the work closely and address concerns quickly, Bridges said. A similar process was used on more than 90 miles of highway near Mina on U.S. 95 and S.R. 360 and more on S.R. 376 this season, said Tonopah Assistant District Engineer Chuck Nixon.

In 20 days, FNF, Valentine and NDOT can complete 18 miles of two-lane highway 32 feet wide. Crews kept traffic flowing during that time, cognizant of travel peaks and special occasions that must take precedence over paving for a healthy economy.



The cold recycling train's milling machine, crusher and pug mill in action.

Enhancing Ideas: Communities Appreciate the Possibilities

Selected Projects FY 98-2001

Reno Riverfront Trails #1 and 2
 Reno Riverfront Trails #3
 Sun Valley Pedestrian Path/Lighting
 Sparks I-80 Detention Basin Landscaping
 Sparks McCarran Sidewalks/Landscaping
 Sparks Sidewalk/Landscaping at Pyramid
 North Truckee Pollution Prevention
 Boulder City River Mountains Trail
 Boulder Strip Beautification
 Summerlin Non-Motorized Trail
 Henderson River Mountains Trail
 Las Vegas Lewis Street Streetscape
 North Las Vegas Boulevard Landscaping
 U.S. 50/Nevada Beach Road Sidewalks
 Washoe County Bike Lanes/Sidewalks
 S.R. 28 Sidewalk Extension
 Lovelock Downtown Beautification
 Mesquite Alternative Transportation
 Beatty Downtown Beautification/Safety
 Virginia City Gaslights, Boardwalks
 Fallon Pedestrian Project
 Ely Downtown Street Lights
 Gardnerville Pedestrian/Bike/Water
 National Parks River Mountains Trail
 Nevada Cultural Resources Info System
 Valley of Fire Visitors Center Parking
 Great Basin Visitors Services/Center
 Buckland Station Restoration Phase 2

Like the finishing touches applied to a great work of art, the Enhancement Program paints a more vivid picture of the state highway system, delivering a more colorful product.

To cities and counties, Leif Anderson brings a blank canvas and a budget, soliciting concepts that illustrate intermodal, historic, environmental and architectural designs.

While he may not be a patron of the arts, Anderson is the statewide enhancement coordinator in NDOT's Program Development Office overseeing 28 recently approved projects totaling \$11.8 million.

The current cycle includes projects funded through 2001 under the program first funded in 1991 by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and reauthorized under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century in 1998. The law requires that 10 percent of the Surface Transportation Program funds be made available for transportation enhancement activities.

In 1999, that amounted to \$4.5 million in projects that fit any of 11 qualifying

categories and met the requirements for selection. Successful proposals came from 10 cities, two towns and three counties along with the National Parks System, Nevada Division of State Parks and the State Historic Preservation Office.

They will build sidewalks and trails for pedestrians and bicycles, visitor centers, safety, pollution prevention and community beautification projects, Anderson said.

"They are all good projects that are important to the communities that proposed them," he said. "They meet what the communities have identified as a real need."

Works of Art Take Shape

When the town of Lovelock turned to NDOT for its downtown street and sidewalk improvements it did so with the specific goal of creating an environment that would help boost the local economy by attracting people to the downtown area. The \$691,350 project selected in 1995 and completed in 1997 was a perfect fit in the historic community.

Near Fort Churchill a historic Pony Express stop and ranch home that once served as a way station for the Overland Stage Company needed a new foundation for its remarkably well preserved building. With the Enhancement Program funding it was restored to its early grandeur under a \$505,000 contract in 1998 with Bison Construction of Carson City. D.C. West was the designer for the contract that included new paths, lighting and parking in addition to the foundation. While the exterior was a gem, the interior was left unrestored.

Armed with a \$509,000 proposal to do the interior restoration work, the Nevada State Parks Division came back to complete its commitment to this jewel in Nevada history dating back to 1870 as the home of rancher Samuel Buckland.

When completed, the Nevada Division of State Parks will operate the site now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Enhancement funds helped give Douglas County's former high school a new life.



Anderson said NDOT's first enhancement project was the restoration of the Caliente Depot, a former railroad facility that was now being used as office space and a museum. It was in desperate need of structural improvements to save its very existence.

It survived with the help of the Enhancement Program and a local commitment, an essential ingredient in the program. Proponents must provide five percent of the total cost as matching funds.

"The community really came together for the Sherman Station in Elko," Anderson said, of another former way station near Utah. "They did a lot of local fundraising and got some help from local mining companies. They had a letter from a 90-year-old woman who wrote of her life in the house and encouraging the restoration of the structure. They took the building apart and moved it to Elko



The Buckland Station Pony Express stop renovation is a partnership with Nevada State Parks.



Virginia City's street lighting project will be extended with enhancement funding.

before opening it as a visitor center and chamber of commerce office in August.

More than 50 enhancement projects have been completed throughout the state.

"To me what's so exciting is that the small communities are so enthusiastic and so appreciative," Anderson said of the program that has provided everything

from landscaping at Lake Tahoe to bike lanes through Washoe Valley. While there have been more bike and pedestrian facilities than any other activity, there are many requests to restore Nevada's railroad stations. Landscaping is another popular proposal.

Each year, Anderson begins by sending out applications to local entities including the regional transportation commissions and metropolitan planning organizations that must approve any projects within their jurisdictions. At 90 days before the deadline, Anderson said, NDOT takes out advertising in every newspaper in the state announcing the application process for available funding. A second advertisement appears within 30 to 60 days to reinforce the call.

Since funds are now committed through 2001, the next cycle begins in the

summer of 2000 for the next federal funding available October 1, 2002.

Anderson will review the applications for eligibility in consultation with the Federal Highway Administration's Randy Bellard. A cost breakdown must be included in the proposals which must be consistent with regional air quality plans in some affected areas.

Design Division offers expertise in reviewing proposals to see that the scope of work and preliminary cost estimates are practical.

Among the requirements, proposals must be functional components of the highway, have proximity to the system or be impacted by the road to gain acceptance as an enhancement project.

Once they meet the rules and pass the test, work begins to paint them into the canvas that is Nevada.



Spring Mountain: \$58 Million Interchange Flows into Service

Life in Las Vegas got just a little bit easier. In August, NDOT completed the Spring Mountain Road Interchange, its second-largest highway project ever.

I-15 runs just west of the Las Vegas Strip, with Spring Mountain Road connecting the two near the Treasure Island resort and Fashion Show Mall. With 175,000 vehicles per day using the interstate and 60,000 on the surface street, a captive audience celebrated as welcome new connections improved access and reduced delay.

A new flyover ramp allows motorists to move from southbound I-15 to eastbound Spring Mountain Road toward the Strip without a traffic signal. A southbound on ramp from Spring Mountain Road to I-15 and a northbound exit from I-15 to Spring Mountain Road were also added under the contract that began in 1997 with Max Riggs Construction as the general contractor that worked in cooperation with Granite Construction. Resident Engineer Earl Miller's Crew 903 had the Herculean task of managing the work underway. Traffic volumes dictated that access could not be closed during the day and special attention was given to traffic control plans.

The entire interchange was reconfigured as existing ramps were improved. Also included in the \$58 million project was a brand new overpass that crosses Union Pacific Railroad tracks and busy Industrial Road, eliminating at-grade crossings that can cause delay. Between Sahara Avenue and I-215 to the south, I-15 was widened to three lanes to keep traffic moving on one of the fastest growing traffic hot spots in the nation.

Under a previous contract, Meadow Valley Construction completed a \$17 million widening project between Spring Mountain Road and Sahara Avenue with new bridge structures at Spring Mountain and Industrial roads. The Spaghetti Bowl project at I-15 and U.S. 95 continues the corridor improvements to the north.

To allow complete movement in all directions at Spring Mountain Road, NDOT added the new lanes and shoulders, widened four bridges and built seven more. Louis Berger and Associates designed the interchange. NDOT Design Division's Kathleen Weaver was project manager. Materials Division, Right of Way and a host of other support sections were instrumental in delivering the project as a grateful community got back to business.

Train Tunnel on the Horizon

New Alignment For U.S. 50 Near Ely

When the construction season of 2000 hits Ely, Resident Engineer John Muller's Crew 909 will be thinking trains. The 11-member crew will oversee a \$5.9 million project to tear down a railroad bridge and realign U.S. 50 two miles west of Ely.

Contractors will begin by building a new tunnel for the trains. Motorists will then travel on the highway and the old bridge will be torn down, Muller said. Since the project is in a gorge, local geography made it impossible to divert traffic onto a detour during construction.

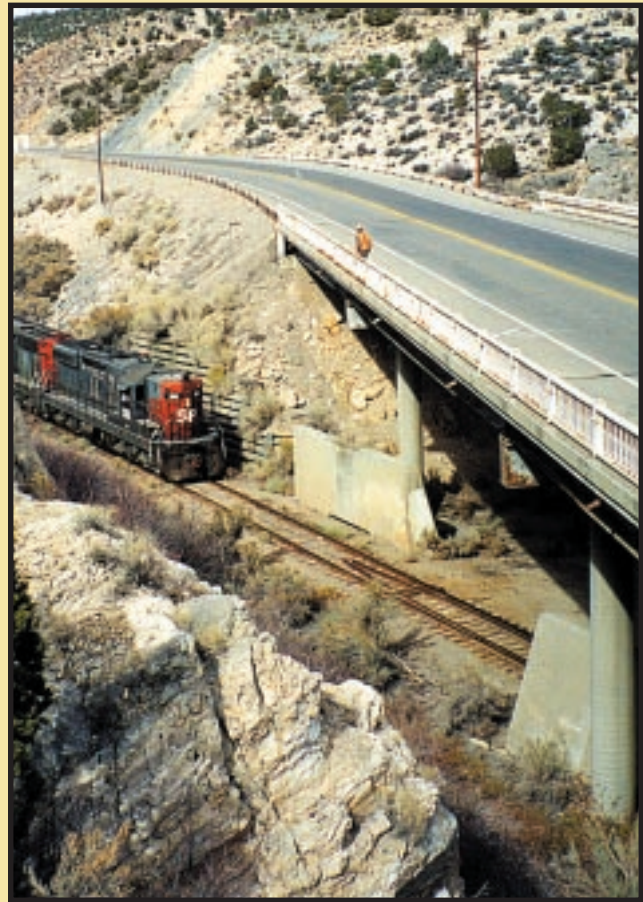
Traffic flow could not be stopped on U.S. 50, the major east-west link between California and Utah.

Designers chose the tunnel option or an alternate alignment to allow traffic to continue while the new structure is built. Once the tunnel is

completed and open to traffic, the old bridge will be removed. Work is expected to be completed in the 2000 construction season, according to Bridge Division's Mike Premo, project manager for the job. HDR Engineering served as the design consultants, with Paul Tremel project manager for HDR.

Premo said the old bridge is about 50 years old. It began to show signs of deterioration and needed to be upgraded to newer earthquake standards. The costs of repairs were considered prohibitive.

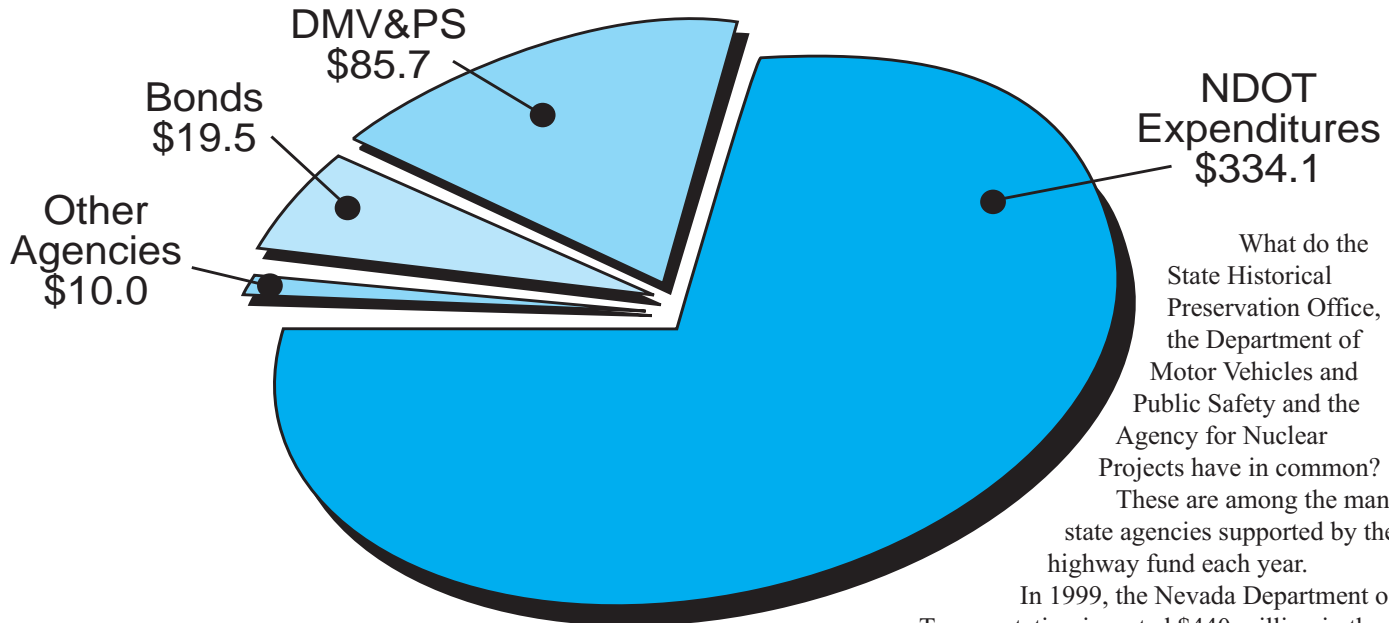
The railroad tracks are designed to serve both the local tourist trains and copper mining operations in the Ely area.



A new tunnel will realign U.S. 50 and replace an aging railroad bridge structure west of Ely.

The Business of Transportation

1998 State Highway Fund Administered by the Nevada Department of Transportation



What do the State Historical Preservation Office, the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety and the Agency for Nuclear Projects have in common? These are among the many state agencies supported by the highway fund each year.

In 1999, the Nevada Department of Transportation invested \$440 million in the economy of the state it serves and some of it into state government. The economic impacts of highways and the people they serve are felt throughout the 110,540 square miles that make up the Silver State.

Known in financial circles as Fund 201, the highway fund supports and supplements the budgets of many state agencies and employs nearly 1,600 workers at NDOT alone in addition to engineering and operational consultants also on the payroll.

“The highway fund does contribute a lot of funds to other public agencies,” according to NDOT Senior Budget Analyst Jerry Ross who is charged with keeping tabs on the budget.

Clearly the largest portion of the budget goes to the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety to support licensing and vehicle operations and the Nevada Highway Patrol. The two functions split \$95 million in highway funds in 1999, up from \$33.6 million in 1990 before record population growth staggered the state. Funding includes \$34 million for Project Genesis, the new comprehensive computer system.

Additionally, the highway fund will pay \$12 million for a new NHP facility in Las Vegas built by the Public Works Board.

Since computers are the nuts and bolts of government record keeping, the state built a new Integrated Financial System. The new computer system coordinates data operations and gears up for the Y2K to the tune of \$15 million provided by Fund 201. It incorporates accounting, payroll and contractor pay information among other systems and statewide functions.

NDOT pays a fee to the Department of Information Services for other data processing services not provided in-house including radio system microwave communications. It invests \$1.7 million in the



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Among the projects funded with highway dollars is the State Office of Historic Preservation's program that pays for materials for maintenance of highway historical markers.

attorney general's office for legal representation in the business of transportation from liability claims to right of way litigation.

The Transportation Services Authority regulates some trucks and taxis within the state. Formerly the Public Service Commission, the transportation-related agency taps 201 for \$1.8 million annually.

Gas Taxes Fuel the State

NDOT pays about \$900,000 for administration of collecting gas and fuel taxes and fees to the Department of Taxation.

Many other state agencies receive transportation funding for the state's overhead, the day to day operation of services such as the state library and archives.

"We pay approximately \$330,000 to the Department of Administration for the statewide cost allocation," said Ross. "This is for services provided by the general state government to offset their costs.

"The Natural Heritage Program provides databases for archeological, environmental and biological information we use to get environmental clearances," he said. The price tag is several hundred thousand dollars.

As an employer just like any other Nevada business, NDOT buys workers compensation coverage from Employers

Accountability: Keeping Tabs on the Totals

Checks and balances are the name of the game for NDOT's Office of Financial Management. When all is said and done, the Budgeting Section is responsible for coordinating what the Legislature gives to the department, redistributing the budget down to approximately 100 divisions.

Gerry Colquhoun, Cheryl Cooke and Jerry Ross are on the budgeting side of the office, overseeing the various expenditures to make sure they comply with the directives of

the law. Norma Holland, Bob Gori, Jim Orsbern and Darlene Loff complete the office in the Programming Section that sorts out federal funding.

Together, they work closely with NDOT's Operations Analysis Division,

headed by Russ Law, to keep tabs on where the money comes from and where it must go.

Their jobs have kicked into high gear with Fiscal Year '99 a record year for construction spending.

In June alone the department allocated \$62 million in work, roughly 50 percent higher than normal, according to Ross, a senior budget analyst who is sometimes called on to meet with the Interim Finance Committee of the Legislature to update them on budget developments



Managing the finances are, from back left, Jim Orsbern, Bob Gori, Cheryl Cooke, Gerry Ross and Darlene Loff; seated are Norma Holland and Gerry Colquhoun.

between sessions.

The office also keeps NDOT managers alerted to the monthly status of their individual budgets so that everybody is on track as the fiscal year winds to a close.

Insurance Company of Nevada. The department also pays for employee benefits through Risk Management and the Public Employees Retirement System for its labor force and hires inmate labor from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for landscaping, fencing and more.



With a \$95 million budget, the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety operations depend on the highway fund for the DMV and the Nevada Highway Patrol.

Along with business-related expenditures come other bills of a little less ordinary kind. Historical markers along the highways point the way to pieces of the past for a price. Coordinated by the State Office of Historic Preservation, the program earns up to \$20,000 from NDOT to preserve and protect sites.

What about nuclear waste?

Transporting nuclear waste within the state could affect Nevada highways and, to study the impacts, NDOT will invest more than \$400,000 in FY2000 with the Agency for Nuclear Projects.

Each biennium NDOT offers up its budget to the state Department of Administration for incorporation into the governor's executive budget. Then the legislature prepares its own spending plan and the two are reconciled. The final product is the department's marching orders that direct the nearly \$340 million in highway construction, maintenance and administrative activities NDOT delivers each year to the traveling public.

Picture Perfect



After a desert rain, crews pave the Blue Jay stretch of the E.T. Highway. Below: The natural surroundings of Blue Jay include the NDOT oasis, deer that frequent a nearby spring, mineral waters at Warm Springs and a Russian Juniper they said could not survive the terrain.

The desert that surrounds U.S. 6 near Blue Jay is not for the faint of heart. Witness Maintenance Supervisor David Paprocki's collection of license plates abandoned, detached or discarded, left by motorists who remain mostly strangers to the tiny settlement of Blue Jay.

"There are two at the base camp, and Terry. Then there's Joe and his wife at Warm Springs, maybe 10," said NDOT Supervisor Doug Pope, tallying the neighbors of one of NDOT's most isolated stations.

Once a critical connection to projects that changed world history, test sites for the atomic bomb and the Stealth bomber, at six vehicles per hour U.S. 6 serves as a shortcut for most and a vital economic route for an oil refinery 60 miles north of

Blue Jay. State Route 375, the road to Rachel, is the station's other route, best known as the Extraterrestrial Highway. While they may have seen it all in Rachel, there are a few things that cannot be seen in Blue Jay—like a traffic signal.

"We don't even know what a stop sign is," said Pope. There isn't a telephone or even cell service for miles. Paprocki, along with Chuck Jeffrey and Will Barter communicate with the rest of the world via a telephone-like radio fashioned out of necessity years ago. Since they live on site, they share the duties as operator. While they are at work Will's wife answers the phone when the world needs to reach Blue Jay.

And it is quite a reach.

The closest stop light and the nearest pizza parlor are 103 miles away in Ely along what locals say is the longest, straightest stretch of Nevada highway, 22 miles of U.S. 6. Even the mail comes to Blue Jay only three times a week making a 200-mile roundtrip.

It is 66 miles to the nearest McDonalds, 175 to K-Mart and while it is 210 miles to the city life of Las Vegas, the lifestyle is worlds apart.

"The waterfalls off of the mesa after an afternoon rain are beautiful," says Pope, who lives in Tonopah and supervises crews in the surrounding area. His father used to work at the Blue Jay station.

"I love the hills. That's why I love it here," said Paprocki. "It's so quiet. You





Clockwise from far left: Will Barter at work near Warm Springs; Blue skies are Chuck Jeffrey's backdrop; Tonopah Supervisor Doug Pope secures the site of an old NDOT station in the wide open spaces; and Dave Paprocki loves local life with no television.



have to love the isolation.” Since temperatures can reach 35 below for more than a month, the evening antelope, 200 big horn sheep and an occasional mountain lion are their only company.

NDOT's presence adds two dogs, two men, two kids, one couple, one cat and one new hire attracted to all that Blue Jay has to offer.

Among the other things Blue Jay attracts are bats. They have adopted the station for the spring climate. Pope said the crews have worked with conservationists to build acceptable bat houses encouraging the critters to nest somewhere other than in the insulation. Sonar scramblers discourage occupancy too but some things just survive better in Blue Jay. Like the hardy Russian Juniper planted in the mid '40s at a former NDOT yard nearby, now home to a mini forest and a few deer.

“It may be the only one growing in Nevada. The university people said they'd never grow here. It's still growing,” Pope said.

That kind of local “can do” spirit spread to the crew's maintenance duties. A typical day finds them fixing



Below: Dave Paprocki's collection of license plates left behind; Local overlay; Lining up on S.R. 375; The highway leads to Heaven on U.S. 6 at Warm Springs.

guideposts, hand patching, chip sealing and safety sloping the shoulders of the high-speed highways.

When an eight-mile section of S.R. 375, the E.T. Highway, needed restoration, Tonopah's Maintenance Superintendent Charlie Cecchini and Pope committed, “We can do this if you let us.” So for the first time in 10 years surrounding area crews joined to overlay a mile a day in the middle of nowhere.

“A cold mix handles the stress of the temperatures better,” Pope said. Together with crews from Big Smokey, Goldfield

and Tonopah Maintenance and Landscape, the Blue Jay crew took on the task of keeping S.R.375 alive. Traffic volumes are too low to justify work program improvements so NDOT relied on the strengths and skills of its local crews for revitalization.

With a morning shift hauling out plant mix produced at Blue Jay over a 28-day period, the day shift served as the lay down crew and both shifts covered traffic control as neighbor Joe's cows watched the biggest thing to hit Blue Jay in a long, long time.



New Phone Information Set

For the Season Ahead

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Conditions
and Road
Weather
Information**

Dial This
1 (877) NVRoads
For Toll-Free
24-hour
Nevada State
Highway
Information

A brand new weapon in the winter driving war debuts this season. NDOT's toll-free 1(877) NVROADS phone system hits the road, offering a one-stop phone number for conditions statewide but accessed regionally for northern, western and eastern Nevada.

Callers will first hear recorded information for an area selected based on the phone number they call from. A Las Vegas caller will hear southern Nevada and a Sacramento area caller will hear northern Nevada. Soon, by dialing 9, callers will access an individual route merely by speaking the words. Say "I fifteen" and the system will be at a caller's command with up to date information. Callers can also access other Nevada regional recordings if they choose.

Old road condition numbers, including northern Nevada's 793-1313, will no longer carry the information, but will refer callers to the new number, according to Dave Alfred, Data Processing. It can be accessed nationwide.

Information is still gathered and input by the districts so those closest to conditions are the actual source, but getting the word out has become much simpler. During the winter 1998-99 peak, the road reporting system handled as many as 1,800 calls per hour and it will be geared to respond to at least a 30 percent increase this season.

More automated features will be added to save time for crews and to make highway travel easier every day.

U.S. 95 near Hawthorne, as the seasons change.



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On the cover: Traffic breezes along the \$28.8 million reconstruction of Pyramid Way and Interstate 80 in Sparks.

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