

TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Five federally recognized tribal governments are located (at least partially) within North Dakota: Spirit Lake Nation, the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara (MHA Nation).

Coordination on transportation planning issues with the tribal governments and community is critical to the safety and efficiency of the state transportation system. Not only are the tribal members important constituents, but the tribal governments and the US Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) own and maintain hundreds of miles of road in North Dakota. Managing system needs and responding to safety issues, transportation conditions, and travel demand priorities therefore requires the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) to work closely with the tribal governments and share information across these jurisdictions.

SPIRIT LAKE NATION TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Spirit Lake Nation's input indicates that Transportation Connection 2050 should treat reservation transportation as a shared network issue rather than a narrow jurisdictional issue. Although the Tribe directly maintains only part of the system, residents rely on an interconnected network of BIA, tribal, state, county, and township roads to reach schools, healthcare, employment, services, and community destinations. Effective planning therefore depends on coordination across ownership boundaries.

Safety was identified as the most immediate and important transportation concern. Spirit Lake Nation raised concerns about fatal and serious crashes, run-off-road incidents, curve delineation, severe winter visibility conditions, and the need for practical countermeasures on reservation-serving routes. The area near Spirit Lake Casino & Resort and ND State Highways 57 and 20 crossing Devils Lake was discussed as an example where wind, snow, and visibility loss can quickly create dangerous conditions and where additional operational measures may be warranted.

Participants also emphasized that funding and data limitations make it harder to respond effectively to transportation needs. Current formula funding does not appear to reflect the full network used by the community, and maintenance demands continue to strain available resources. In addition, difficulty obtaining complete crash data limits the tribe's ability to target safety investments, prepare grant applications, and coordinate effectively with state and federal partners.

Looking ahead, Spirit Lake Nation identified a need to plan for growth around community facilities, especially in the area near the Spirit Lake Health Center (a local clinic in Fort Totten, North Dakota) where multiple services are becoming concentrated. The Tribe also expressed interest in stronger integration between tribal plans and state plans, clearer input into state project development processes, and improved access to transportation data and emerging roadway technology. Over the 25-year planning horizon, Transportation Connection 2050 should also encourage continued coordination on the implications of automation, advanced data systems, and other transportation innovations affecting rural and tribal areas.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- **Safety:** Systemwide safety remains the foremost concern. The discussion highlighted fatal and serious crashes on roads serving Spirit Lake Nation, including concern about recurring severe-weather crash risk near the Spirit Lake Casino & Resort and North Dakota (ND) State Highways 57 and 20 crossing Devils Lake. The Tribe's perspective is that reducing fatalities and serious injuries must remain a central priority.
- **Weather-Related Safety:** Weather-related operational safety needs targeted attention. High winds, blowing snow, and near-zero visibility were identified as serious hazards on key routes. The discussion specifically raised the need to consider operational countermeasures such as snow gates, roadway closure coordination, and improved winter response protocols where conditions routinely create dangerous visibility loss.
- **Design and Infrastructure Safety Risks:** Run-off-road crashes and roadway delineation are major issues. Participants described recurring problems on curves and rural roads where higher-visibility delineation, larger signs, installation of guardrail posts, and more durable roadside treatments may help drivers stay on the roadway. This supports a broader plan emphasis on low-cost, high-value safety improvements on rural and reservation-serving roads.
- **Crash data access and sharing:** Spirit Lake Nation reported difficulty obtaining complete crash information from BIA sources. Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge the need for better data-sharing arrangements among the Tribe, BIA, law enforcement, and the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) so that safety analysis, grant development, and project prioritization can be based on reliable location-specific crash data.
- **Data accuracy:** The transportation network used by the community is much larger than the mileage recognized in current tribal funding formulas. The meeting contrasted the approximately 560-mile network used within Spirit Lake Nation's jurisdictional area with a much smaller inventory basis used in federal formula calculations. This creates a structural mismatch between transportation needs and available funding.
- **Maintenance and formula funding:** Participants emphasized that current federal tribal transportation funding and maintenance flexibility are not keeping pace with network needs. Transportation Connection 2050 should note the Tribe's interest in stronger state support for advocating more adequate and more equitable tribal transportation funding.
- **Growth management:** Growth around community facilities creates localized access and capacity needs. The new clinic corridor was identified as an emerging traffic generator, with related activity from North Dakota HeadStart Association (an early childhood learning program with preschools across the state), ambulance services, sober-living facilities, and possible future centralized tribal development. Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize expanding civic and health-service hubs can create vehicle turning, access, pedestrian, and capacity needs that require early planning.
- **Interagency coordination:** State-tribal coordination should be formalized in project development and planning. The discussion raised the importance of making sure tribal priorities are reflected in state processes such as the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), and tribal plans and state plans are better integrated. Transportation Connection 2050 should promote routine consultation with the district engineer and other state staff, so Spirit Lake Nation has a clear pathway to influence priorities affecting reservation-serving roads.

- **Data collection:** Technology and data systems should be treated as strategic planning issues. The meeting noted that roadway sensors, advanced traffic counters, weather data systems, and related monitoring technologies are becoming more important. Spirit Lake Nation expressed interest in better access to transportation data collected on state routes affecting the reservation.
- **Emerging technologies:** Vehicle-related innovations should be monitored over the 25-year horizon. The discussion identified autonomous freight and related technologies as plausible future issues for reservation-serving roads. Transportation Connection 2050 should call for ongoing state-tribal coordination on the safety, operations, enforcement, and policy implications of automation as those technologies mature.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Safety	Prioritize strategies that reduce fatalities and serious injuries on reservation-serving routes, including low-cost rural safety improvements, improved delineation, and winter operations measures where severe visibility conditions recur.
Coordination	Establish regular state-tribal coordination pathways so Spirit Lake Nation can provide input on state planning, safety priorities, and project development affecting the reservation.
Data	Improve crash-data access, traffic-data sharing, and collaborative analysis among NDDOT, tribal, BIA, and law enforcement partners.
Funding	Acknowledge the mismatch between recognized inventory mileage and the larger network actually used by the community and support advocacy for more adequate tribal transportation and maintenance funding.
Growth and Access	Monitor development around the clinic and related service area and plan early for vehicle turning, access, pedestrian, and capacity improvements as community facilities expand.
Technology	Maintain state-tribal dialogue on roadway technology, data systems, and emerging vehicle automation so policy, operations, and safety practices can adapt over time.

Table 1: Spirit Lake Nation Policy Recommendations

MANDAN, HIDATSA, AND ARIKARA TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize that transportation needs on the Fort Berthold Reservation are shaped by a connected network of BIA, tribal, state, county, and local roads, and preservation and rehabilitation funding must be planned at the network level rather than only by jurisdictional ownership. MHA Nation residents, emergency services, school transportation, economic activity, recreation access, and freight movements depend on all parts of this system. A deterioration or capacity problem on one segment can affect safety, mobility, and economic reliability across the broader reservation transportation network.

Transportation Connection 2050 should specifically identify energy-sector truck traffic as a continuing risk factor for pavement condition, maintenance demand, safety, and traffic forecasting. Oil-field activity can change quickly with commodity prices, production decisions, and regional investment. When activity increases, heavy truck traffic can accelerate pavement damage, increase turning and access conflicts, and create higher-risk operating conditions on routes that were not designed or funded for sustained heavy-load movements. The plan should support ongoing monitoring of oil-related truck volumes, truck classifications, crash patterns, and pavement condition on affected corridors, including BIA 10 and other routes serving oil, recreation, and economic development activity.

Transportation Connection 2050 should establish preservation and rehabilitation of reservation-serving roads as a shared state-tribal priority. This includes support for chip seals, overlays, reconstruction, shoulder and drainage improvements, turn lanes, and other safety and asset-management treatments on BIA, tribal, state, county, and local roads that function as part of the reservation transportation system. Funding strategies should account for the fact that energy-sector truck traffic and other freight-generating land uses can impose impacts across jurisdictional boundaries, while available maintenance and rehabilitation resources may not align with where the impacts occur.

NDDOT, MHA Nation, BIA, counties, and district staff should maintain recurring coordination to identify energy-related traffic changes, prioritize preservation and rehabilitation needs, and align Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), STIP, safety, maintenance, and corridor-planning processes. Coordination should include sharing traffic count data, truck percentage data, crash data, pavement condition information, planned development information, and available cost data so that investments can be targeted before roadway deterioration, access conflicts, or safety issues become more severe.

As an implementation direction, Transportation Connection 2050 should support development of a collaborative funding and prioritization framework for reservation-serving roads affected by heavy truck traffic and economic development. The framework should help identify priority corridors, document system needs, connect tribal priorities to state and federal funding programs, and ensure that preservation and rehabilitation of all roads serving the MHA Nation are treated as a long-term mobility, safety, and economic resilience issue.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- **System preservation and rehabilitation:** Participants identified multiple roadway rehabilitation and reconstruction needs on the BIA and tribal system, including BIA 1, 13, 18, 20, 28, 221, and 603, as well as Wolf Road and other general street rehabilitation needs. Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge preservation, overlays, chip seals, and rehabilitation remain core priorities across the reservation transportation network.
- **Safety at access points and activity centers:** BIA 1 was described as both deteriorated and increasingly pressured by development activity near the casino. Specific concerns included turning conflicts, poor access conditions, and the need for turn-lane or related safety improvements to improve ingress, egress, and overall traffic operations at major trip generators.
- **BIA 10 as an emerging corridor priority:** The meeting highlighted BIA 10 as a corridor deserving explicit recognition in Transportation Connection 2050. BIA 10 is a stretch of road east of Mandaree, North Dakota, in the heart of oil and gas development and it serves as the primary access road to Skunk Bay, a popular local recreation area and restaurant. It was described as heavily traveled, influenced by oil-field traffic and recreation traffic, and already the subject of

recent condition review and prior improvement concepts. This corridor should be framed as a strategic route for continued monitoring, preservation, and future capital planning.

- **Heavy truck traffic and energy-sector volatility:** MHA participants noted that oil activity remains a major source of uncertainty for future traffic volumes, especially truck traffic and pavement wear. When oil prices rise, truck activity may increase quickly; when the market slows, traffic patterns change. The LRTP should therefore note energy-sector volatility as an important factor in forecasting traffic demand, maintenance needs, and long-term investment priorities.
- **Routine maintenance and limited tribal resources:** Routine maintenance was identified as a persistent challenge. Chip seals, overlays, asphalt upkeep, snow and ice response, and general roadway condition management were all discussed in the context of limited tribal maintenance capacity and constrained funding. The plan should recognize maintenance is both an operational and funding issue, not merely a technical issue.
- **Data gaps affecting planning and project development:** Participants discussed the need for better traffic information, especially current counts, truck classification data, and reliable crash information. State and BIA data are useful starting points, but the discussion suggested Transportation Connection 2050 should include a policy direction to improve tribal access to traffic, crash, and condition data needed for forecasting, prioritization, and grant development.
- **Interagency coordination and communication:** A strong theme in correspondence was the need for more routine coordination among the Tribe, BIA, NDDOT, counties, and district staff.
- Planned monthly “roads meetings,” hosted by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, were identified as a practical opportunity to strengthen communication among District and County engineering staff in North Dakota and representatives of the Fort Berthold Reservation. These meetings focus on transportation needs near Mandaree and support ongoing coordination related to maintenance, project development, and shared corridor issues. Transportation Connection 2050 should promote formal, recurring interagency collaboration.
- **Economic development and freight-generating land uses:** The discussion referenced the Green Grove facility near Parshall and other growth-related development as examples of land use that may increase freight demand, local traffic, and time-sensitive movements. Transportation Connection 2050 should note that economic development sites can create corridor-specific transportation needs that warrant early coordination and monitoring.
- **Future technology and policy readiness:** Over the 25-year planning horizon, the group discussed autonomous vehicles, autonomous freight, drone delivery, and advanced air mobility as realistic future considerations. Transportation Connection 2050 should not predict deployment schedules, but it should state that the Tribe and state should maintain coordination on regulation, enforcement, infrastructure readiness, data sharing, and public safety as transportation technologies evolve.
- **Public safety and enforcement implications of automation:** The conversation raised practical policy questions related to driverless freight and law enforcement, including how tribal governments would respond to suspected illegal activity involving autonomous vehicles. This supports inclusion of a broader policy statement calling for continued state-tribal coordination on enforcement, emergency response, and governance as automation expands.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Planning	Use Transportation Connection 2050 as a policy document and continue to identify project-specific priorities through the TIP, STIP, and related corridor or safety studies.
Coordination	Continue monthly or recurring coordination meetings with tribal, district, county, and BIA partners to improve maintenance communication and project readiness.
Corridor Monitoring	Monitor BIA 10 and other freight or recreation-sensitive corridors for pavement condition, traffic growth, and safety issues.
Data	Improve access to current traffic count, truck percentage, crash, and roadway condition data for use in tribal planning and funding requests.
Economic Development and Access	Coordinate transportation planning with economic development sites, recreation access, school transportation, and emergency access needs.
Technology	Track the implications of automation, advanced mobility, and related enforcement or regulatory issues over the long-term planning horizon.

Table 2: MHA Nation Policy Recommendations

SISSETON WAHPETON OYATE TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Consultation with Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation indicates that transportation needs affecting tribal residents in North Dakota are impacted by the mixed roadway ownership system in which county and township roads play a substantial role in daily mobility, emergency access, transit service, and economic activity. As a result, the effectiveness of the transportation system depends not only on state and tribal investment, but also on the capacity of local jurisdictions to maintain and improve roadways that serve reservation communities. Many of these jurisdictions have limited funding, staffing, equipment, and administrative capacity to pursue grants, manage projects, or sustain regular maintenance at the level needed for safe and reliable service.

The consultation highlighted that agreements and coordination mechanisms are often the critical factors determining whether needed improvements can move forward. The tribe may have the organizational ability, planning capacity, and practical motivation to advance improvements on roads that serve tribal residents, but formal agreements are frequently required before tribal transportation funds or tribal project-delivery capacity can be applied to roads under township or other local ownership. Where such agreements are absent, serious safety and access needs can remain unresolved. Where agreements are in place, however, the Tribe has demonstrated the ability to help deliver tangible improvements, including drainage and culvert work, bridge replacement, gravel rehabilitation, and roadway stabilization.

The consultation also underscored that low-volume road conditions can have high-consequence outcomes. Impassable snow and mud conditions, poor drainage, inadequate gravel, deficient curves, and limited signage can prevent emergency responders from reaching residences and can expose tribal residents to preventable crash risk and property loss. Accordingly, Transportation Connection 2050 should treat maintenance, emergency access, and intergovernmental coordination on reservation-serving county and township roads as a priority policy area and should identify collaborative implementation strategies that match responsibility with real-world capacity to deliver improvements.

The Tribe identified a need for operator and maintenance training, especially if maintenance responsibilities expand under federal tribal transportation programs. Shared training access with state/local programs would strengthen long-term delivery capacity.

Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge autonomous freight, drones, AI-enabled systems, and expanded transportation data tools as emerging issues requiring continuing coordination, training, and policy development with tribal programs and staff.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- **Safety:** Safety on reservation-serving county and township roads should be elevated as a major concern, particularly where crash history, poor curves, limited signage, rollover risk, and winter conditions create recurring hazards.
- **Emergency access:** Emergency access: should be addressed as a transportation safety issue. The meeting described cases where homes could not be reached by fire response because local roads were impassable, leading to total property loss.
- **Maintenance needs:** Maintenance and preservation of gravel roads, culverts, drainage features, and low-volume connectors should be treated as essential mobility needs rather than secondary concerns.
- **Local capacity:** Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge many township governments lack the staff, equipment, procurement experience, or grant-writing capacity to advance projects on their own, even when clear safety needs exist.
- **Interagency coordination:** State support for practical maintenance agreements, technical assistance, and project delivery partnerships could significantly improve outcomes on roads that serve tribal residents.
- **Workforce challenges:** Expanded workforce development and equipment operator training would help the Tribe prepare for greater maintenance responsibility, including potential expansion under self-determination or self-governance agreements.
- **Emerging technologies:** The plan should include continued monitoring of emerging technologies such as autonomous freight, drones, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled transportation tools, and improved data collection systems, along with policy coordination so tribes are not left out of future deployments and data access.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Safety	Crash reduction is a high priority, especially on county and township roads serving tribal residents, with emphasis on

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
	roadway departure risk, rollover risk, signage, visibility, and winter/weather-related access.
Emergency access	Impassable local roads can prevent fire and emergency response. The plan should support better all-weather access standards and stronger intergovernmental coordination for roads serving homes and tribal communities.
Maintenance	County and township roads on and near the reservation often have limited maintenance capacity. Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize gravel maintenance, reshaping, drainage, culvert replacement, and snow response as core safety and mobility needs.
Agreements and coordination	Maintenance agreements are essential to allow tribal participation on non-tribal roads, but they are difficult to secure. The state should support practical agreement frameworks and technical assistance for local jurisdictions.
Funding and implementation capacity	Local governments may lack the staff, equipment, and administrative structure to pursue and manage grants. Transportation Connection 2050 should encourage state-assisted grant development and project delivery support for township and county roads that serve reservation residents.
Workforce and training	The tribe identified a need for operator and maintenance training, especially if maintenance responsibilities expand under BIA contracting.
Technology and future readiness	Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge autonomous freight, drones, AI-enabled systems, and expanded transportation data tools as emerging issues requiring continuing coordination, training, and policy development.

Table 3: Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Policy Recommendations

TURTLE MOUNTAIN BAND OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS' TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

The consultation with Tribal Chairman Jaime Azure indicates that Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize that a large share of the road system used by Turtle Mountain residents is not tribally owned, yet directly affects tribal safety, emergency response, pedestrian mobility, transit access, and economic development. County and township road conditions, state highway maintenance standards, and coordination gaps can therefore create tribal transportation consequences even when the tribe does not own the jurisdiction.

The consultation also suggests that pedestrian and multimodal safety should be treated as a major policy priority, particularly in Belcourt and along U.S. Highway 281, where residents depend heavily on walking and where limited availability of sidewalks, shoulders, lighting, and crossings increase risk. Long-distance medical travel, regional transit limitations, and outdated data systems further reinforce the

need for coordinated transportation planning that reflects daily travel realities on and around the reservation.

Chairman Azure identified the Tribal Transportation Director and the Tribal Nations Research Group as key contacts for continued coordination. The Tribe expressed interest in follow-up discussions, safety studies, and collaborative planning efforts to further inform Transportation Connection 2050 implementation and policy development.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- **Road Maintenance and Jurisdiction:** County and township roads make up a majority of the roadway mileage within the reservation's footprint yet are often not adequately maintained. Despite residents paying state and local taxes, the Tribe frequently responds to emergencies on non-tribal roads due to service gaps.
- **Safety and Crash Concerns:** High crash rates were noted on key corridors, particularly U.S. Highway 281 through Belcourt, North Dakota. Pedestrian fatalities and injuries remain a significant concern due to limited sidewalks, shoulders, lighting, and safe crossings.
- **Pedestrian Infrastructure and Lighting:** Community connectivity depends heavily on walking, especially for residents without reliable vehicles. Cost increases have reduced lighting on new walking trails, undermining safety and accessibility goals.
- **Funding Limitations:** The Tribal Transportation Program funding does not reflect actual roadway use or population growth. Frozen road inventory funding levels and annual obligation limitations constrain the Tribe's ability to address maintenance backlogs and safety improvements.
- **Technology and Data Coordination:** Outdated and inconsistent Geographic Information System (GIS) and road-naming systems complicate navigation, emergency response, and readiness for emerging technologies such as connected and autonomous vehicles.
- **Transit and Medical Transportation:** The Tribe invests significant local funds to support medical travel due to limited regional transit options and the reduction of Indian Health Service transportation support.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Coordination	Establish formal coordination mechanisms between NDDOT, counties, townships, and tribes to address maintenance, operations, and emergency response responsibilities on non-tribal roads serving tribal communities.
Pedestrian and Multimodal Safety	Prioritize pedestrian and multimodal safety improvements in tribal and rural communities, including sidewalks, shared-use paths, lighting, and crossing treatments, as core safety investments.
Maintenance Standards	Develop guidance for equitable application of roadway maintenance standards and timely, durable repairs on state highways within tribal communities.

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Funding Advocacy	Strengthen NDDOT engagement with tribes in federal transportation reauthorization and legislative advocacy to better align funding formulas with actual roadway use, population, and safety needs.
Data Systems	Support modernization and alignment of tribal, BIA, and state GIS and roadway data systems to improve planning, wayfinding, emergency response, and preparedness for emerging vehicle technologies.
Future Mobility	Encourage collaborative planning with tribes for deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure, fleet electrification, and future autonomous freight considerations in rural and cold-weather environments.
Transit and Medical Access	Recognize long-distance medical travel as a critical transportation need for tribal communities and explore state-tribal partnerships to expand regional and intercity transit options.
Safety Analysis	Support data-driven safety studies, including pedestrian safety assessments, in coordination with tribal data governance entities to guide investment and policy decisions.

Table 4: Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Policy Recommendations

STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe input indicates that the Long Range Transportation Plan should treat the reservation transportation system as a shared, mixed-jurisdiction network with significant implications for safety, freight movement, economic development, transit access, and future technology policy. Tribal residents depend on BIA, tribal, state, county, and township roads, as well as bridge crossings and shoreline-access corridors, to reach employment, services, schools, health care, and community destinations. Because the most heavily used and highest-impact corridors often cross jurisdictional boundaries, transportation outcomes at Standing Rock depend on effective state-tribal coordination rather than isolated action by any one agency.

A primary concern raised during consultation was the impact of heavy truck traffic and overweight loads on reservation-serving roads. Participants described repeated truck activity through the reservation, including loads that may exceed what older roadway facilities were designed to carry, while the tribe lacks sufficient enforcement resources and does not share adequately in the economic benefit generated by that traffic. The LRTP should recognize that freight impacts on reservation corridors create ongoing preservation, maintenance, and safety burdens and that tribes need better access to the traffic and vehicle data required to document those burdens and compete for funding.

The consultation also emphasized the importance of more responsive and transparent coordination with NDDOT on state-system issues inside the reservation. When safety concerns arise on bridges or corridors maintained by the state, tribal staff need timely communication, visible follow-up, and

opportunities for collaborative review. The LRTP should therefore support stronger district-level communication, recurring coordination on corridor conditions, and practical information-sharing so the Tribe can participate more effectively in protecting public safety and planning future improvements.

Looking ahead, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe identified the proposed Lake Oahe bridge connection as both a major opportunity and a major planning responsibility. Improved access could support economic development, tourism, and stronger regional connectivity, but it could also increase traffic volumes, truck activity, safety exposure, and development pressure along corridors that are not yet prepared for those changes. The LRTP should encourage proactive planning for bridge-related growth, including corridor preservation, traffic monitoring, tourism access planning, state-tribal coordination on shoreline and US Army Corps of Engineers-related development constraints, and strategies to ensure that Standing Rock can capture the benefits of growth rather than absorb only the impacts.

Finally, the consultation showed that Standing Rock views emerging technology as an area where the tribe should be an active participant rather than a passive observer. Drones, autonomous freight, advanced traffic sensors, and related data systems may create useful tools for winter response, medication delivery, search and rescue, and safety management on reservation lands. The LRTP should support tribal access to transportation data, inclusion in policy development, and continued coordination so that future technology deployment reflects tribal priorities, public safety needs, and economic opportunity.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- Heavy truck traffic and overweight loads are major concerns. The discussion emphasized that substantial truck traffic moves through the reservation, including overweight vehicles and gravel trucks, while the tribe does not receive commensurate benefit or compensation for the roadway impacts. Participants raised concern that existing roads, including older facilities such as Kenel Road, were not designed for sustained heavy-load traffic and are incurring continuing damage.
- Access to transportation data is a high priority. Standing Rock indicated that tribes should have access to state-generated data sources, especially if autonomous or sensor-equipped freight vehicles increasingly use reservation-serving routes. Better access to freight, traffic, and corridor data would help the tribe document impacts, support funding requests, and improve planning and enforcement coordination.
- Improved state-tribal coordination on maintenance and corridor management is needed. The conversation described cases where bridge or roadway safety issues were reported to the state but did not appear to receive timely or visible follow-up. Participants expressed a need for a more collaborative working relationship with NDDOT, including better communication when state inspections occur and opportunities for tribal staff to observe, learn, and coordinate corridor related issues.
- Bridge-related and roadway-condition safety concerns remain significant. A specific example involved visible rebar and safety concerns on the Porcupine Creek Bridge. More broadly, participants indicated that heavily traveled routes on the reservation, including BIA roads and state corridors, require more responsive attention to emerging safety and maintenance issues.
- The proposed bridge connection is viewed as a major long-term opportunity, but it will also create new demands. Standing Rock sees the bridge project as a potentially transformative economic-development opportunity that could increase traffic, commerce, tourism, and

regional connectivity. At the same time, the tribe stressed that it must prepare in advance for the resulting increase in traffic volumes, roadway demand, and corridor-management needs rather than reacting after growth occurs.

- Tourism potential is constrained by inadequate infrastructure and access. The meeting highlighted that Standing Rock has meaningful tourism potential, but limited infrastructure, inadequate execution capacity, and restricted access to shoreline and destination areas constrain development. If access improves, especially through bridge-related growth, transportation planning should help ensure that the reservation is positioned to benefit rather than simply watch development occur elsewhere.
- Shoreline and Corps-managed lands create added coordination complexity. The discussion noted that development opportunities associated with the bridge and the reservoir shoreline may be affected by US Army Corps of Engineers land ownership and related land-transfer or access questions. The LRTP should recognize that transportation-linked economic development in this area may depend on multi-agency coordination beyond NDDOT alone.
- Workforce mobility and transit access are important issues. Participants stated that some residents want to work but lack a vehicle, driver's license, or dependable ride to jobs such as casino employment. The conversation suggested that transit access, fare policy, and workforce mobility should be viewed as transportation and economic issues, not solely social-service issues.
- Training and technical coordination would strengthen tribal capacity. Standing Rock expressed interest in stronger coordination with state staff not only to solve immediate issues but also to help tribal personnel learn what to look for in roadway and bridge conditions. Limited staff availability makes it difficult to attend trainings, so coordination models that bring learning opportunities closer to real projects would be valuable.
- Federal funding formula reform remains an important long-term issue. The discussion pointed to the mismatch between the large transportation network serving Standing Rock and the much smaller mileage counted in the current tribal funding formula. Participants supported the idea that the state and governor should help advocate with the congressional delegation for changes that more fairly reflect tribal transportation needs.
- Emerging technology should be approached as an opportunity as well as a policy challenge. Standing Rock expressed support for participating in discussions about autonomous vehicles, drones, air mobility, and related technology. The tribe noted potential uses for winter medical delivery, emergency response, search and rescue, and other public-safety needs, and indicated that tribes should be at the table as policies are developed.
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety data collection remains important. The meeting also referenced interest in pedestrian safety assessment work and corridor-level data collection to identify where people walk and bike, where risks are concentrated, and what improvements may be needed to support safer nonmotorized travel.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Freight and truck traffic	Recognize that heavy truck traffic and overweight loads on reservation-serving corridors impose preservation, safety, and enforcement burdens on Standing Rock and support better

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
	monitoring, data sharing, and funding responses tied to those impacts.
Data access	Improve tribal access to state-generated traffic, truck, bridge, and corridor-condition data, including information associated with emerging automated and sensor-equipped vehicle systems.
Coordination	Strengthen district-level coordination and communication between NDDOT and Standing Rock so reported safety or maintenance concerns receive timely follow-up and tribal staff can participate in inspections, issue review, and problem-solving.
Bridge and corridor readiness	Plan proactively for bridge-related growth, including traffic forecasting, corridor preservation, safety needs, tourism access, and development pressures associated with new connectivity.
Tourism and economic development	Support transportation improvements that enable Standing Rock to benefit from tourism and economic opportunity, including access to destination areas and coordination where Corps-managed shoreline lands affect development potential.
Transit and workforce mobility	Recognize workforce transportation, job access, and tribal transit policy as important mobility issues affecting economic participation on the reservation.
Training and capacity	Expand opportunities for practical state-tribal technical coordination and on-the-ground learning so tribal staff can build capacity despite limited staffing and training time.
Federal advocacy	Encourage NDDOT and state leadership to support federal transportation funding reforms that better reflect the actual scale and needs of the Standing Rock transportation system.
Technology and innovation	Include Standing Rock in policy development related to drones, autonomous vehicles, air mobility, and advanced transportation data systems so emerging technology supports tribal safety, access, and resilience goals.
Pedestrian safety	Continue supporting pedestrian and bicycle safety assessment, data collection, and corridor planning on the reservation so future funding requests can be grounded in documented need.

Table 5: Standing Rock Tribe Policy Recommendations

BIA GREAT PLAINS REGION TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Consultation with the BIA Great Plains Region indicates that Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize tribal transportation needs as a regional systems issue involving extensive mixed-jurisdiction networks, limited data access, and persistent funding constraints on the public BIA roadway system. In several North Dakota tribal areas, tribal residents depend on a combination of BIA, state, county, township, and local roads to reach schools, clinics, employment, ranching operations, commerce, and community services. Because these systems function together in practice, deterioration or service failure, on any one jurisdiction's roadway network can have direct consequences for tribal safety, mobility, and economic access.

The consultation further indicates current funding conditions create a serious long-term preservation risk for large-reservation BIA systems. Participants described circumstances in which available tribal transportation funding is insufficient even to sustain preventive maintenance on paved facilities, raising the likelihood of accelerated deterioration and eventual loss of serviceability on important reservation-serving roads. Transportation Connection 2050 should therefore acknowledge large tribal land bases and high roadway mileage create needs that are not fully reflected in current transportation funding resources and continued underinvestment will increase long-term reconstruction costs, reduce reliability, and worsen access conditions for residents and businesses.

Transportation Connection 2050 should also identify tribal access to complete crash, traffic, and roadway-condition data as a foundational implementation issue. Without usable crash records and related safety information, tribes and the BIA are limited in their ability to prioritize corridors, prepare competitive safety grant applications, or align investments with real risk patterns. NDDOT should support more consistent data-sharing, coordinated safety analysis, and practical integration of tribal, BIA, and state information sources so tribal planning and project development are not constrained by avoidable information gaps.

Finally, the consultation suggests that Transportation Connection 2050 should place stronger emphasis on implementation-oriented coordination among BIA, tribes, NDDOT, and local governments. Coordination should include recurring consultation, review of adjacent tribal and state projects, use of state safety and data resources on reservation-serving corridors, and exploration of funding or policy strategies that better reflect the actual scale of tribal transportation need. The plan should also encourage state support for federal policy advocacy where necessary to improve funding adequacy, strengthen safety programming, and create more workable pathways for coordinated project delivery across mixed-jurisdiction systems.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize that the public BIA transportation system in North Dakota is experiencing long-term deterioration in some large-reservation areas because available funding is not keeping pace with preservation and maintenance needs.
- Access to complete, usable crash data remains a major barrier to tribal planning, safety analysis, and competitive funding applications. Better data-sharing arrangements are needed among tribes, BIA, state agencies, and law enforcement partners.
- Mixed-jurisdiction systems require stronger coordination among tribal TIPs, the STIP, BIA priorities, counties, and townships, particularly where projects are geographically adjacent or serve the same users.
- Transportation Connection 2050 should acknowledge county and township roads inside reservation boundaries are a significant part of the transportation network used by tribal communities and that service gaps on those systems directly affect tribal mobility and safety.
- Large tribal land bases and extensive road mileage create cost and maintenance challenges that are not adequately reflected in current funding distributions.
- Reservation pedestrian safety should be treated as a legitimate statewide policy concern, including walking access near community destinations and along corridors where people walk because safer alternatives do not exist.

- State safety programs and state-generated data resources, including crash dashboards, traffic counts, and strategic safety planning, should be more systematically connected to tribal planning and implementation.
- The LRTP should encourage North Dakota to support tribal transportation needs not only through state programs but also through federal advocacy related to funding formulas, safety resources, and implementation flexibility.
- Recurring consultation with BIA and tribes should continue into the implementation phase of Transportation Connection 2050 so that identified policy issues translate into action rather than ending with the plan document.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Consultation	Include Transportation Connection 2050-specific language supporting regular consultation with BIA Great Plains Region and tribes during implementation—not just during plan development.
Safety Data	Support improved crash-data access, reporting consistency, and safety analysis for tribal and BIA systems so tribes can better compete for safety funds and target improvements.
Preservation	Recognize preservation of public BIA roads on large reservations as a long-term statewide mobility and safety issue, not solely a tribal issue.
State Safety Resources	Encourage NDDOT to examine how state safety, Highway Safety Improvement Plan (HSIP), traffic-count, and strategic –safety planning resources can better support reservation corridors.
Project Coordination	Consider policy language encouraging review of adjacent TIP/STIP projects and opportunities for shared corridor planning where tribal and state priorities overlap.
Pedestrian Safety	Acknowledge pedestrian safety on reservations as an emerging and under-addressed policy concern.
Federal Advocacy	Note the potential value of state support for federal advocacy related to tribal transportation funding adequacy and formula reform.

Table 6: BIA Policy Recommendations

NORTH DAKOTA NATIVE AMERICAN TOURISM ALLIANCE (NDNATA) TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND THEMES FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Native tourism is an important and growing component of North Dakota's cultural, recreational, and economic landscape. Tribal nations and Native tourism partners provide access to heritage centers, cultural landscapes, historic places, scenic routes, casinos, powwows, fishing and hunting opportunities,

parks, interpretive sites, and other destinations that serve residents, regional travelers, and visitors from across the United States and around the world.

Transportation is fundamental to the success of Native tourism. Visitors must be able to safely find, reach, understand, and navigate tribal destinations. At the same time, the transportation network serving tribal lands is complex. Roads may be owned, maintained, or programmed by tribal governments, the BIA, counties, townships, municipalities, NDDOT, or other entities. This jurisdictional complexity can create challenges for maintenance, safety improvements, wayfinding, emergency response, cultural resource protection, and long-term investment.

Through engagement with the NDNATA and tribal tourism representatives, several transportation priorities emerged for the 2050 planning horizon: safe access to tourism destinations, improved signage and wayfinding, better road conditions and approaches, stronger intergovernmental coordination, improved data sharing, protection of cultural resources, climate resilience, and more consistent inclusion of tribal tourism perspectives in transportation planning.

Safe and reliable access to tribal tourism destinations is essential for both economic development and visitors' safety. Many destinations are located in rural areas where travelers may be unfamiliar with local routes, road conditions, distances, services, jurisdictional boundaries, weather conditions, livestock, wildlife, or gravel and low-volume roads. Visitors may rely heavily on signage, GPS, and visual cues to determine whether a road is safe or whether a destination is accessible.

NDDOT should recognize tribal tourism routes and destinations as part of the statewide transportation system's broader role in supporting economic vitality, cultural understanding, and regional mobility. Transportation planning should consider how visitors reach tribal nations, how they move between destinations, and how road conditions, signage, safety treatments, and access improvements influence the visitor experience.

Safety is a foundational priority for tribal communities and tribal tourism. Crash risk affects residents, visitors, workers, emergency responders, and tour operators. Participants identified concerns related to speeding, distracted driving, impaired driving, nighttime visibility, sharp curves, dangerous passing, heavy truck traffic, deer and livestock, lack of lighting, and inadequate warning signs.

NDDOT should continue to prioritize safety improvements in partnership with tribal nations, especially along routes that serve tribal communities and tourism destinations. Safety planning should include both infrastructure and behavioral safety strategies. Road safety audits may be appropriate for corridors with recurring crashes, high truck volumes, dangerous curves, poor visibility, or visitor access concerns.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The NDDOT LRTP should include a policy commitment to sustained government-to-government coordination with Native Nations. This coordination should extend beyond consultation during plan development and continue through implementation, programming, project delivery, emergency response, and performance monitoring.

Data sharing and mapping are critical to effective transportation planning. Participants identified a need for better coordination of GIS data, crash data, weather data, infrastructure condition data, tourism route information, and project information. Shared mapping can help identify gaps, prioritize improvements, track progress, and reduce the risk of overlooking tribal needs.

NDDOT should explore data-sharing protocols with tribal nations that respect tribal sovereignty and protect sensitive information. This is especially important for cultural resources, sacred sites, burial areas, traditional cultural properties, and other locations that should not be publicly disclosed.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE, MAINTENANCE, AND EMERGENCY REPAIR

NDDOT should coordinate with tribal nations to identify vulnerable infrastructure and develop resilience strategies. Monitoring, maintenance, rapid communication, and emergency funding pathways will be important for reducing risk and minimizing disruption.

Transportation needs related to tourism overlap with broader mobility needs for tribal residents. Participants identified medical transportation, VA Hospital access, dialysis and cancer care trips, casino worker shuttles, elder mobility, ADA compliant access, intercity bus connections, and visitor mobility as important considerations.

Transportation Connection 2050 should recognize transportation access to tribal lands is multimodal. Roads are important, but so are transit, shuttles, pedestrian access, ADA compliant facilities, and connections to regional medical and employment centers. Improvements that support tourism may also improve quality of life for tribal residents.

Over the 2050 planning horizon, tribal and rural transportation systems will need to prepare for electric vehicles, autonomous freight, autonomous passenger vehicles, digital mapping, GPS-enabled safety alerts, new vehicle safety technology, and changing freight and energy development patterns. Rural and tribal areas should be included early in these planning conversations to avoid future infrastructure gaps.

KEY ISSUES AND THEMES

- Signage and wayfinding are major priorities. Many participants identified the need for welcome signs at Native nation entrances, interpretive signage for historic and cultural places, directional signs to tourism sites, safety messages such as “drive safe” and “drive sober” campaigns, warning signs for curves and hazards, and improved scenic byway and visitor information. Participants also noted the potential value of coordinating with GPS and digital navigation tools.
- Road conditions, approaches, and access roads have the ability to impact tourism. Many tourism destinations depend on roads with potholes, gravel surfaces, unsafe turnoffs, rough approaches, poor shoulders, or otherwise uncertain conditions. Participants noted that visitors may avoid tourist destinations if roads do not appear safe or navigable, and that these conditions can damage vehicles and undermine tourism development.
- Safety requires infrastructure, data, and education. Safety concerns included crash clusters, nighttime visibility, distracted and impaired driving, speeding, unsafe passing, heavy truck traffic, wildlife, livestock, sharp curves, and dark road segments. Participants discussed road safety audits, lighting, reflectors, delineators, rumble strips, guardrails, longer passing lanes, warning systems, public education campaigns, and improved crash data coordination with tribal police and BIA reporting.
- Jurisdictional complexity is a barrier to progress. Participants repeatedly noted that tribal lands involve multiple road owners and governments such as tribes, BIA, counties, townships, municipalities, federal agencies, and NDDOT. This complexity can obscure responsibility for

maintenance, safety improvements, signage, emergency response, and project delivery. Participants called for clearer intergovernmental coordination and defined processes.

- Stronger tribal consultation and liaison capacity are needed. Participants recommended regional listening sessions, expanded tribal liaison roles within NDDOT, clearer integration of tribal input into planning, ongoing feedback loops, and coordination among tribal transportation departments, tribal leadership, NDNATA Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), and other tribal offices.
- Funding formulas and funding access are inadequate. Participants discussed the mismatch between formula mileage and actual road needs on tribal lands, the insufficiency of tribal transportation funding, and the need for the state to support tribal priorities and advocate for improved funding mechanisms. They noted tribal transportation investments also benefit the broader state economy, tourism, emergency response, and regional mobility.
- Data sharing and GIS collaboration are needed. Participants recommended better sharing of GIS data, crash data, weather data, infrastructure condition data, tourism route information, project information, and protected cultural resource screening information. They stressed that sensitive cultural information must be protected and not disclosed publicly.
- Cultural resources must be protected in transportation planning and emergency work. Transportation projects and emergency repairs can affect sacred sites, burial areas, traditional cultural places, plants, wildlife, and other cultural resources. Participants recommended early consultation with THPOs, tribal cultural offices, treaty councils, and tribal governments before construction, detours, emergency repairs, or earth-moving activity.
- Climate resilience and infrastructure monitoring are emerging concerns. Participants raised concerns about sinkholes, culverts, bridges, washouts, road collapses, flooding, and environmental impacts. The group asked who monitors these conditions and how tribes are notified or supported when infrastructure deteriorates.
- Transit, medical access, and mobility needs should be part of the discussion. Participants linked tourism access with broader mobility needs such as Veteran's Affairs Hospital (VA) access, dialysis and cancer care trips, casino worker shuttles, elder mobility services, American Disabilities Association (ADA) compliant access, intercity bus service, and regional medical transportation.
- Future technologies should be planned for now. Participants raised questions about electric vehicles, autonomous freight, autonomous vehicles, Global Positioning System (GPS) warnings, digital mapping, vehicle safety technology, and changing freight or energy development patterns. Tribal and rural areas should not be left behind in future infrastructure deployment.

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION CONNECTION 2050

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Tourism Access	Support safe and reliable access to tribal tourism destinations.
Signage and Wayfinding	Improve signage, wayfinding, and visitor information in coordination with tribal governments.
Safety	Prioritize safety improvements on routes serving tribal communities and tourism destinations.

Policy Area	Direction to Consider in Transportation Connection 2050
Coordination	Strengthen government-to-government coordination and tribal liaison capacity.
Data and GIS	Support data sharing and GIS collaboration while protecting sensitive cultural information.
Cultural Resources	Coordinate early and respectfully with THPOs and tribal cultural resource managers.
Resilience	Address climate resilience, bridge and culvert monitoring, and emergency repair needs.
Funding	Support tribal access to transportation funding and advocate for improved funding mechanisms.
Future Mobility	Plan for emerging technologies in a way that includes rural and tribal areas.

Table 7: NDNATA Policy Recommendations