

# WAYFINDER

2023, Issue 5





# WAYFINDER

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Governor Jim Pillen

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# NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

## ABOUT THE COVER:

*Construction crews pour concrete for the shoulder on the new US-30 alignment northwest of Fremont in September 2022. With projects increasing during the spring construction season, motorists are encouraged to drive cautiously in and near work zones and to buckle up, phone down.*

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

# Navigating Our Challenges Together

As many of you are aware, I began the first chapter of my service at the Nebraska Department of Transportation in April 2016, first as the Communications Division Manager, then as Communications and Public Policy Director until 2020. I am thankful for the opportunity to rejoin the Nebraska Department of Transportation as the director, and I look forward to leading our team through the next chapter as we work *together* to achieve our goals while supporting the mission and serving the people of Nebraska.



Vicki Kramer

During my 4½ years at NDOT, the relationships I developed with teammates, customers, and stakeholders were most important to me in contributing to positive outcomes for the agency. These relationships will be pivotal to continued successes that will impact not just our lives but those of future generations.

I have enjoyed getting reacquainted with familiar faces as well as meeting many new ones, and I look forward to making more visits in the coming months, not only here at central headquarters, but in the districts and beyond. During my visits, I want to continue to listen to and learn from NDOT’s teammates and partners.

During my time at Kiewit Infrastructure Engineering from 2020 to 2023, I took on leadership roles in government affairs and markets and strategy/alternative delivery. This greatly increased my knowledge and experience in areas that will play a major part in our agency’s future, including keeping pace with the pulse of the rapid changes and innovations in transportation, such as the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program and participating in alternative project delivery methods such as Public-Private Partnership.

I look forward to building upon my knowledge and relationships developed in these roles and other roles held over the past 15 years of service to the people of Nebraska, including my service in the military and in US government. All these experiences give me the perspective needed to guide our agency through the next challenging chapter.

Just as Governor Pillen noted in his State of the State Address in January, infrastructure needs for Nebraska are more important than ever before, and we must address roads and broadband. We want to use state funding to leverage federal allocations to improve our bridges and roads, with emphasis on completing the expressway system. We also want to take the lead with the new Nebraska Broadband Office to get broadband completed across the entire state.

These are major undertakings, but by staying focused on our mission and working together, I am confident that we can get this done. In the words of Governor Pillen, *“Together we can.”*

I consider it an opportunity and a privilege to serve as NDOT’s director. I look forward to navigating the challenges ahead *together* as we focus on serving the citizens of this great state of Nebraska! ▲



# NDOT Winter Operations Emphasizes Safety through Technology



By Linda Wilson  
Communications & Public Policy Division

As long-time Nebraska residents are aware, winter storms can be unpredictable. A perfect example is the January 18-19 snowstorm where parts of central and western Nebraska were pummeled by Mother Nature with historic amounts of snow, while southeastern Nebraska's forecast snowfall amounts fell short, with rain, freezing rain, and sleet instead.

Regardless of the forecast, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) is prepared with technology's tools to continue to give their eight highway districts a leading edge in their efforts, including plowing snow to make the state's roads safe for the traveling public and keeping commerce moving.

NDOT's snow fighters play a pivotal role in accomplishing this important work, and their efforts, along with the latest innovations, equipment and materials make it possible to maintain the safe and reliable transportation system that motorists expect.

The Maintenance Decision Support System (MDSS), Plow Tracker, Statewide Radio System (SRS) and other tools continue to provide improved information to increase efficiency and help make winter travel on roads safer. NDOT is dedicated to leveraging technology to provide additional resources to serve our customers as they make their travel plans.

MDSS is a computer application for managing and improving highway maintenance practices during winter weather events. The system provides information to help with weather forecasting, road conditions, the application of materials during storm events, and more, with reports available to supervisors. Each year, districts receive training updates to help assure the system is being utilized to the fullest.

## Plow Tracker on 511

The Plow Tracker website shows real-time locations of NDOT's snowplows on the Nebraska state highway system and has camera images from each plow of road

conditions. The system is available at <https://plows.nebraska.gov/index.html>. Motorists are reminded that sometimes conditions are worse than what the camera image portrays.

A new option provides access to the Plow Tracker icon on the Nebraska 511 system, with a layer showing all NDOT snowplows that are out on the roads on an interactive map. Plow Tracker automatically refreshes information every minute, providing timely information regarding snow removal operations.

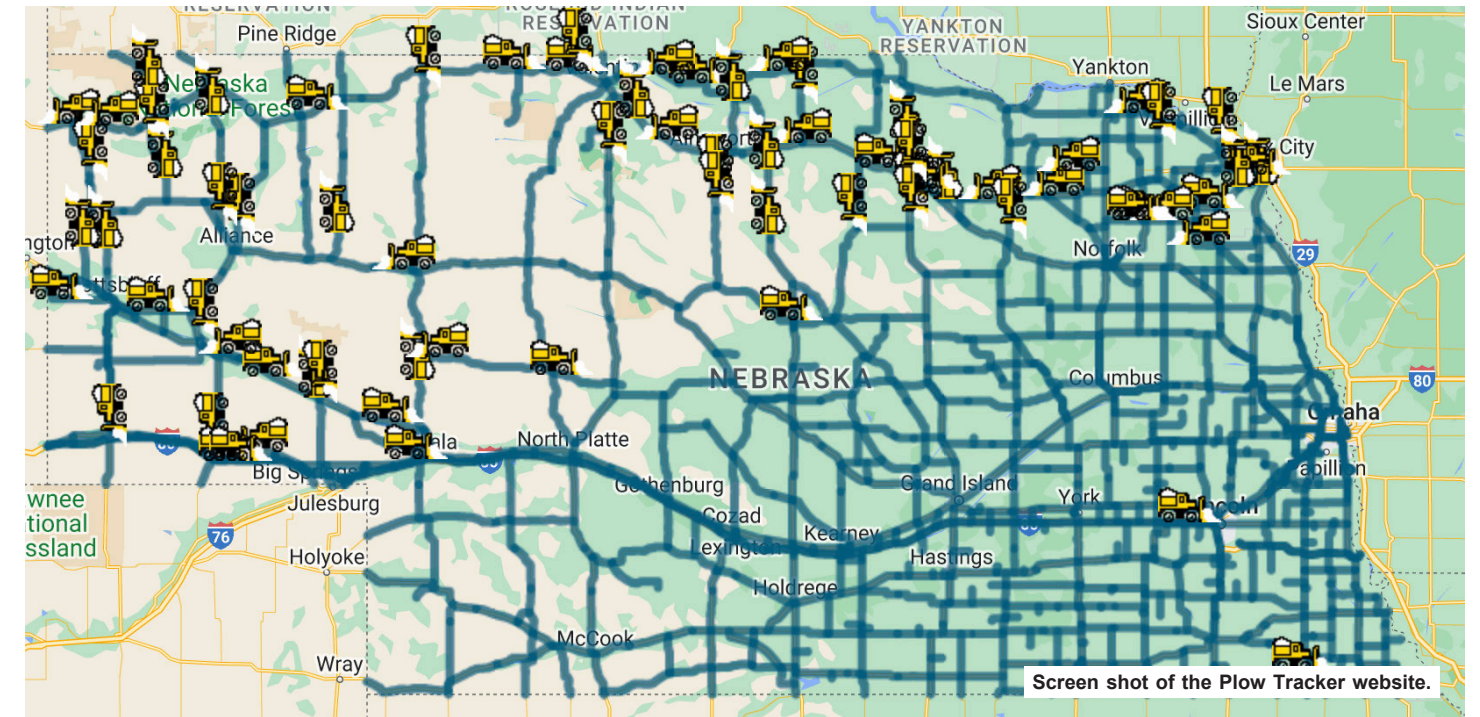
"This extra layer on 511 provides easy access in locating NDOT snowplows and observing road conditions in real time from the cabs," said Jessica Sherwood, NDOT's Highway Communication Services Manager. "It is another tool to help our customers make engaged and informed decisions about their travel during inclement weather."

## Collaborative Effort

The Statewide Radio System (SRS) has been available to all NDOT districts for the past several years. The system makes it easier to coordinate and communicate with NDOT responders and other state agencies, as all operators on the assigned channel can hear all communication, allowing for continuous situation awareness.

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

Throughout the winter weather season, travelers are urged to be alert, be aware, and check the most up-to-date travel conditions available through 511 and plow tracker. Motorists are also reminded to buckle up, phone down. ▲



Screen shot of the Plow Tracker website.



Snowplow equipped with MDSS technology.



MDSS Screen shot.

Truck#: 20099 at 03/23/2023 13:20:22

Truck: 20099  
Heading: East

OK

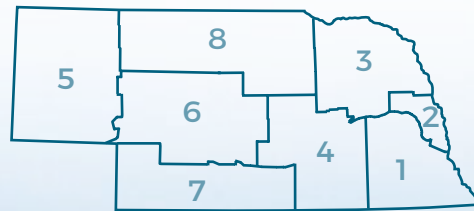


Snowplow operations in the Omaha area.



# NDOT Districts Share Resources During Major Snowstorms

During major winter snowstorms in western and north central Nebraska, NDOT snow fighters in districts not impacted by the storms rose to the challenge by helping their neighboring districts who needed extra resources to clear the roads. NDOT District Operations & Maintenance Managers (DOMMs) reported on their districts' efforts toward keeping state roadways cleared and safe.



**District 1** sent a two-person crew with a snow blower to Districts 5 and 6 in December. They also sent a tow plow and truck to District 4 to help with snow removal along I-80 after their last storm on January 19, 2023.

- DOMM Bob Rankin

**District 2** assisted by hauling District 3's snow blower out to District 5 in December. Then, during the January 28 event District 2 sent a tow plow to District 3 on Hwy. 81 between Columbus and Norfolk.

- DOMM Jim Laughlin

**District 3** assisted Districts 5 and 8 with snow removal, sending snow blowers, all-wheel drive motor graders and crews out west for two different storms.

- DOMM Tim Koenig

**District 4** sent several crews and two district snow blowers to the Panhandle to assist with the mid-December storms. They assisted both Districts 5 and 8, as well as Cherry County due to the governor's disaster declaration.

- DOMM Ben Merchant

**District 5** was assisted by 30 employees and their equipment from other districts over a multi-day storm event in mid-December that was complicated by sustained high winds and people who disregarded road closure signs/barricades.

- DOMM John Lutz

**District 6** worked four winter storms in December with the help of surrounding districts as well as districts to the east. This was due to limited snowplow operators and older equipment in the impacted districts. District forces with snow blowers and all-wheel drive motor graders were able to assist Cherry County in clearing their road system from the December 13-18 storm. The district was again asked to help Thomas County with their roads, Thomas County has limited resources or personnel for this service, and they were overwhelmed when hit with a second storm of four events. The Mullen teammates, led by Sonny Scott, were able to open their roads to ranches, feedlots, and hog confinement producers so operations could continue. These routes are dependent on routine supplies to keep operations ongoing. NDOT answered their call.

- DOMM Roger Klasna

**District 7** sent four snowplows to help District 5 around the Kimball area on December 14-17, 2022. A snow blower and crew were sent to District 5 to assist clearing drifts on December 16-18, 2022. On December 26-31, 2022, two snow blowers and crews were sent to assist Cherry County due to the governor's disaster declaration. District 7 has several times provided trucks and operators to assist District 6 on routes near district lines.

- DOMM Kerry Scott

**District 8** had three major winter storms with heavy snow and high winds that caused the closure of all roads in north central Nebraska in December. After the governor issued a proclamation declaring a state of emergency, NDOT employees from across the state helped Cherry County and other counties open roads that were blocked with snow.

- DOMM Chuck Osborn

NDOT districts from throughout the state sent crews and snowblowers to District 5 to assist with mid-December storms in Nebraska's Panhandle, including on Highway 87 north of Alliance.  
Photo by Casey Wirth, District 5 Hwy. Maintenance Superintendent





Photos by Sam Malan, NDOT

# It's "Snow Big Deal" NDOT Celebrates Winners of Second "Name a Snowplow" Contest

What's in a name? When it comes to the newly named snowplows on Nebraska's state roads, the answer is "unique." Among the new names emblazoned on the driver's door are Snowbi-Wan Kenobi, Velociplower, Plowabunga, and Snow Big Deal, four of the winners in the Nebraska Department of Transportation's (NDOT) second "Name a Snowplow" contest.

By Linda Wilson  
Communications & Public Policy Division

These are just several of the winners which were selected from 700 submissions by elementary school students from throughout the state. The list was narrowed down to 16 winners, two from each of NDOT's eight highway districts. Winners were announced in December and received prizes for their efforts, with several snowplows arriving in person to recognize the winners and give students a hands-on experience. This included visits to Omaha's Meadows Elementary School, Norfolk's Westside Elementary School, and Pender Public Schools.

According to Shannon Ankeny, NDOT Director of Communications and Public Policy, the creativity of students' submissions was impressive once again,



NDOT District 3 Engineer Kevin Domogalla presents prizes, including a sign to "Name a Snowplow" Contest winner, Sloane Hoffman, a kindergartner at the Pender Elementary School.



NDOT District 3 Engineer Kevin Domogalla announces a winner of the "Name a Snowplow" Contest, Carlos Martinez, to students in Norfolk's Westside Elementary gymnasium.

*"Not only is it a chance for students to get involved, but it is also a great way to recognize our hardworking snowplow drivers and maintenance workers who are often the unsung heroes in keeping our roads safe during and after winter weather."*

- Shannon Ankeny  
NDOT Director of Communications & Public Policy



Carlos Martinez sits in the cab of "Snow Big Deal," the snowplow that he named, while other students await their turn.

making it difficult to narrow down the list. "We received entries from all corners of the state, including Crawford, Sidney, Falls City, and Pender," Ankeny said.

The selected plows will be branded with their new monikers and will be updated on NDOT's <https://plows.nebraska.gov> and on [511.nebraska.gov](https://511.nebraska.gov) where the name and location of each plow will be available in real time. While NDOT has over 600 snowplows, these 16 winners will be added to the 17 winners from the inaugural "Name a Snowplow" contest and will be the only ones identified by name for now.

NDOT shared additional information on its social media pages, including when the names were placed on the snowplows. ▲

### Schools with winning snowplow names and the districts to which they will be assigned.

Snowplow Name	Dist.	School
Deep Trouble	D1	Dorchester Public - Dorchester
Snow Pirate	D1	Dorchester Public - Dorchester
Snowbi-Wan Kenobi	D2	Meadows Elementary - Omaha
Velociplower	D2	Meadows Elementary - Omaha
Snow Big Deal	D3	Westside Elementary - Norfolk
Snow School Today	D3	Pender Public - Pender
Deep Freeze	D4	Pleasanton Elementary - Pleasanton
Snow Crusher	D4	Pleasanton Elementary - Pleasanton
No Snow Let's Go	D5	Crawford Elementary - Crawford
Snow Blazer	D5	Central Elementary - Sidney
Super Scooper	D6	Hershey Public - Hershey
Power Pusher	D6	Hershey Public - Hershey
Plow Wow KaPow!	D7	Perkins County - Grant
Oh No Snow!	D7	Perkins County - Grant
Plowabunga	D8	Burwell Public - Burwell
Snowswisher	D8	Keya Paha County - Springview



# Lincoln South Beltway Opening Celebrated Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>

By Linda Wilson  
Communications & Public Policy Division

After decades of planning, more than two years of construction, and an outdoor ceremony amid the bracing Nebraska winter weather, Lincoln's South Beltway opened to traffic on December 14, 2022, marking a milestone for the city of Lincoln and the state of Nebraska.

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), together with then-Governor Pete Ricketts, then-NDOT Director John Selmer, and other state and local dignitaries gathered to celebrate the collaborative efforts of NDOT and its partners that resulted in the opening of the Beltway's mainline to traffic.

The \$352 million, 11-mile project connects U.S. Highway 77 (US-77) and Nebraska Highway 2 (N-2). This east-west, four-lane freeway will reduce congestion on the former segment of Hwy. 2 running through Lincoln that was renamed Nebraska Parkway. In addition, it will improve regional mobility and provide economic opportunities.

Gov. Ricketts shared his appreciation and excitement during the ceremony, which was held on the beltway near the U.S. 77 interchange that serves as the western gateway to the bypass, noting that he had wanted to drive on the expressway while he was still governor. His hope became a reality as it was opened six months earlier than the May 2023 date planners had initially expected when primary construction on the beltway began in May 2020.

## Largest, Most Complex

Completing the Lincoln South Beltway has been a priority of my administration as we work to Grow Nebraska," said Gov. Ricketts. "Whether driving their kids to school, getting to work, or delivering essential goods, all Nebraskans in this region will benefit from this 21st century infrastructure. Thank you to Director Selmer and our NDOT teammates, our federal and local partners, and Chris Hawkins and his team at Hawkins Construction for their hard work on the largest NDOT project in state history since construction of the interstate."

NDOT has been working towards delivery of the South Beltway since discussions began in the 1960s. It is one of the most complex projects NDOT has undertaken in state history. Completion of the Lincoln South Beltway was accelerated by historic legislation to fund key infrastructure projects in the state. Following the 2011 passage of the Build Nebraska Act (introduced by former State Senator Deb Fischer), NDOT was able to partner with the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County and the U.S. Department of Transportation to secure funding and prioritize the project.

In 2016, Gov. Ricketts signed into law LB 960, the Transportation Innovation Act, or TIA (introduced at the request of the Governor by former Transportation & Telecommunications Committee Chair Jim Smith and prioritized by former State Senator Lydia Brasch). The TIA targeted \$450 million towards accelerated expressway construction and investments in infrastructure projects to help Grow Nebraska. This legislation was one of the Governor's top priorities for the 2016 legislative session and was passed with overwhelming support from the Legislature.

The 2019 passage of former Senator Mike Hilgers' LB 616 (prioritized by Senator Geist) authorized the state to structure certain highway construction projects as "Build-Finance" projects to speed up construction on key projects like the Lincoln South Beltway.



Former Governor Pete Ricketts



Chris Hawkins



Former Director John Selmer



Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird



Photojournalists document the historic opening of the Lincoln South Beltway on December 14, 2022.



Dignitaries share remarks during Lincoln South Beltway opening celebration held near the US-77 Interchange.



## Completion Accelerated

Together, these bills provided the resources needed to accelerate the completion of the Lincoln South Beltway and other infrastructure projects throughout the state.

Additional funding sources came in March 2018, when NDOT was awarded a \$25 million TIGER Grant for the project. In February 2019, NDOT announced it would use an innovative financing approach to accelerate construction of the project to allow it to be completed over four years but paid for over the same eight-year time frame originally laid out in the phased approach.

“The teams who got us here today come from all over our agency, our friends at Benesch and many more people who played key roles in getting this work accomplished,” said Director John Selmer. “As with any large project, it takes hours of work and sustained partnerships to get across the finish line. We have so many to thank, including Gov. Ricketts, our Federal Highway Administration partners, State legislators, Senator Fischer, the City of Lincoln, and Lancaster County.”

In December 2019, NDOT announced the selection of Hawkins Construction Company to build the Lincoln South Beltway. In March 2020, construction began. By May 2020, major construction commenced ahead of schedule. As a result, the Beltway’s mainline is now open to the public ahead of schedule.

## Grateful Partners

“It has been an honor to work on the largest project ever for the State of Nebraska,” said Chris Hawkins, Chief Operating Officer of Hawkins Construction Company. “The hard work and dedication that has happened over the last 33 months cannot be understated, and the work should be commended. We are grateful to be partners on this historic project.”

According to Curt Muetting, NDOT District 1 Construction Engineer, the entire project – which includes five interchanges, two of which won’t open until next year – included the paving of 78 lane miles of roadway and the construction of 21 bridges, 42 box culverts and five roundabouts. Interchanges are open at Hwy. 77, 68th Street, and 120th Street, but will remain closed at Jamaica Way and at 84th Street and Saltillo Road as work continues.

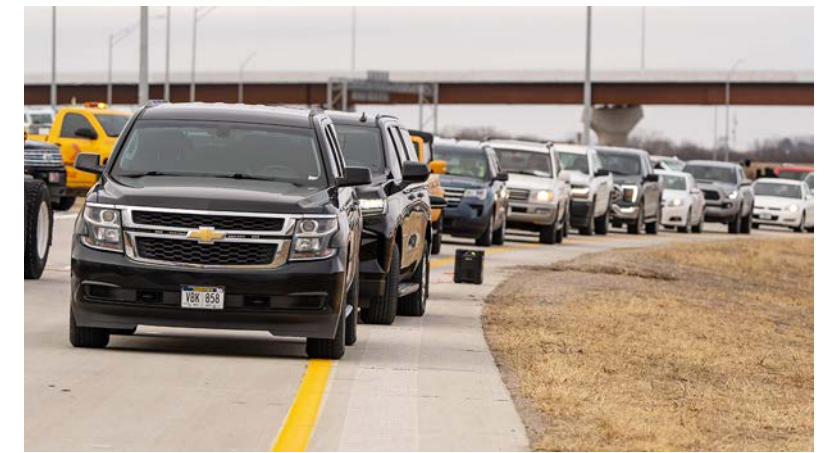
Two of the five roundabouts will be constructed with the two remaining interchanges, three more miles of paved roadway, and two more box culverts. The entire project is expected to be finished by May 2024.

But the bulk of the massive project – which Selmer described as a “tremendous asset to the community” and state – is ready and waiting for the thousands of vehicles that officials expect to traverse the new road.

NDOT has worked to provide updates to major mapping applications to ensure smooth navigation on the new alignment. Please visit [dot.nebraska.gov/lincoln-south-beltway](https://dot.nebraska.gov/lincoln-south-beltway) to learn more. Photos of the events are available at <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjA7FCh>. ▲



Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird, Hwy. Commissioner Mary Gerdes, former Governor Pete Ricketts, former Director John Selmer and Chris Hawkins.



Motorcade after the opening ceremony of the Lincoln South Beltway.



Vehicles parked during the opening ceremony of the Lincoln South Beltway.



Truckers on the newly opened east-west, four-lane freeway.



Crowd gathers on Dec. 22, 2022, to celebrate the opening of the Lincoln South Beltway’s mainline to traffic six months earlier than planned.  
Photos by Clint Mangen, NDOT



# Gov. Ricketts, NDOT Celebrate Progress on the Heartland Expressway

By Linda Wilson  
Communications & Public Policy Division

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), together with then-Governor Pete Ricketts, and other state and local dignitaries gathered in Alliance on October 17 to celebrate progress on construction of the Heartland Expressway. Through the collaborative efforts of NDOT and its partners, progress continues on the Heartland Expressway with this major completion of 14 miles to connect the four-lane, divided expressway from Nebraska Highway Link 62A (east of Minatare) to Alliance.

With support from local advocates, NDOT has been making significant progress on the Heartland Expressway. Funds from the Build Nebraska Act and the Transportation Innovation Act have enabled NDOT to move forward on the corridor. Additionally, the agency won an \$18.3 million grant in the summer of 2018 through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program to complete the 14-mile stretch south of Alliance.

"The Heartland Expressway will be a vital north-south corridor within our national transportation network," said Gov. Ricketts. "Its construction will significantly increase the flow of freight from America's border with Canada all the way to ports along the Gulf of Mexico. The completion of the Heartland Expressway will create great opportunities for economic growth in the Nebraska Panhandle as businesses make use of this strategic transportation route. Congratulations to NDOT, IHC-Scott, and local and regional supporters on the opening of this major segment of the expressway."

The Heartland Expressway is a federally designated, high priority corridor. When completed, the expressway will provide multilane, divided highway access between Rapid City, South Dakota and Denver, Colorado via Alliance, Scottsbluff, and Brush, Colorado.

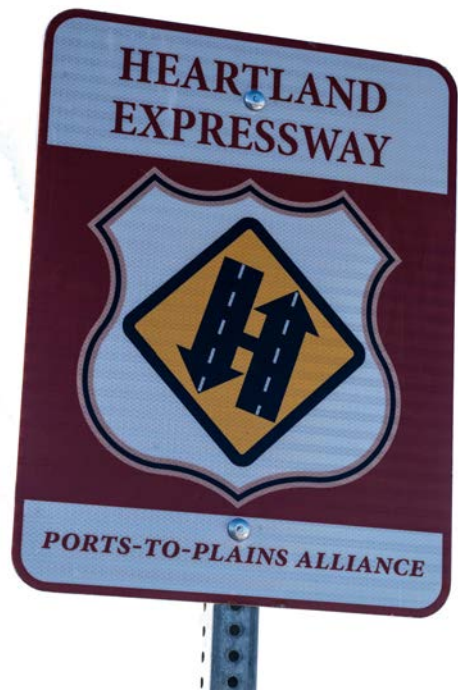
IHC-Scott, Inc. of Centennial, Colorado was awarded the \$32 million contract to complete the 14-mile segment of the Heartland Expressway from the L-62A/US-385 junction north toward Alliance. Work began in the spring of 2021 and included grading, safety improvements, and expansion of the roadway.

"The work completed here is only the next phase in a longer, multi-year project," said NDOT Director John Selmer. "We are here to celebrate progress on a system that will improve mobility in the region and enhance safety. We look forward to being out here again, celebrating the next segment completion."

"The Heartland Expressway has been long awaited by the Panhandle and the citizens who call it home," said Alliance Mayor Mike Dafney. "Our communities and our organizations are committed to this project and its ability to meet transportation needs for Nebraskans in the region for years to come." ▲

*"The completion of the Heartland Expressway will create great opportunities for economic growth in the Nebraska Panhandle as businesses make use of this strategic transportation route."*

- Governor Ricketts



Dignitaries present to celebrate progress on the Heartland Expressway, l to r: Alliance Mayor Mike Dafney, then-Governor Pete Ricketts, then-NDOT Director John Selmer, and NDOT District 5 Engineer Doug Hoevet.



Photographer captures gathering of dignitaries Oct. 17, 2022, to celebrate completion of a 14-mile stretch of the Heartland Expressway south of Alliance.

Photos by Clint Mangen, NDOT



# Niobrara River Overlook Informational Kiosks Highlight NDOT Collaboration with Partners

By Linda Wilson  
Communications & Public Policy Division

The panoramic view of the landscape surrounding the Niobrara West Bridge over the Mormon Canal is a reminder of the Nebraska Department of Transportation's (NDOT) collaboration with contracting and consulting partners to manage a crisis after the bridge was washed out by flooding. A temporary bridge was opened to traffic, followed by the permanent bridge in its original location completed in 2020.

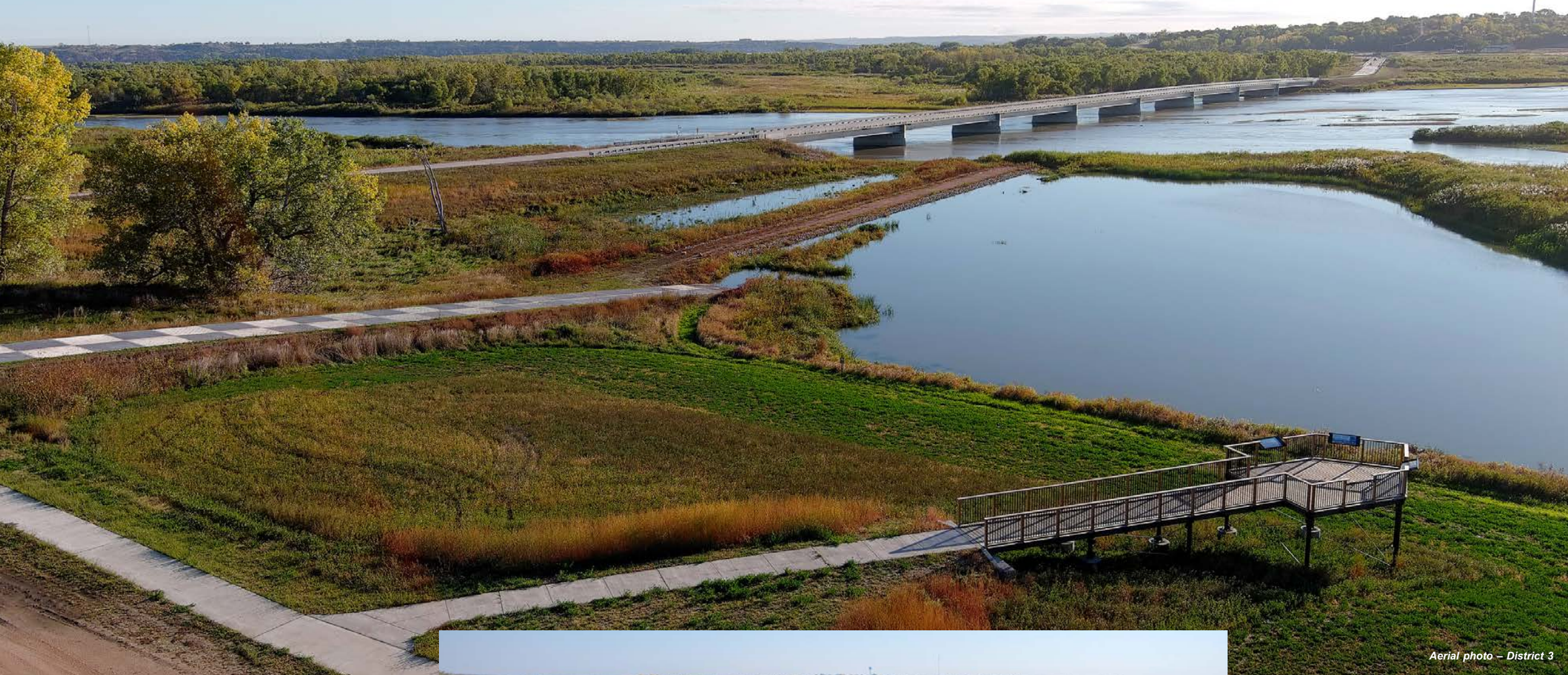
The collaboration continued as NDOT partnered with the National Parks Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska to develop language, photos, and artwork for each kiosk. NDOT was responsible for designing the first kiosk.

"NDOT's kiosk conveys the appreciation to our partners who came together and worked around the clock to ensure safety while restoring mobility and getting Nebraska moving again," said District 3 Engineer Kevin Domogalla. "It is also a tribute to the community that played a crucial role in the recovery."

The second kiosk tells the story of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska that lived on lands where the Niobrara flows into the Missouri River, including their heritage, and contributions. The Ponca Tribe sponsored this kiosk.

A third kiosk sponsored by the National Parks Service offers insight on river ecology and ecosystems in the Niobrara River valley. The fourth kiosk, sponsored by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, addresses the topic of threatened and endangered fish in the Niobrara and its tributaries.

The public is encouraged to visit the area, enjoy the scenic beauty, and take some time to read the illuminating information about the history of the area, ecological resources, and partnerships that restored mobility and preserved the natural landscape. ▲



Aerial photo – District 3

Top - Aerial view of the new Niobrara West Bridge over the Mormon Canal. The permanent bridge was completed in 2020 after the old bridge was washed out by March 2019 floods.



Photo by Sam Malan, NDOT

Left - Panoramic view from the new Niobrara River overlook of the landscape surrounding the Niobrara West Bridge over the Mormon Canal. The overlook features four interpretive kiosk signs.

Four interpretive kiosk signs located on an overlook near the new Niobrara West Bridge over the Mormon Canal were completed and opened to the public last fall. The overlook was built by NDOT as part of a bridge repair project after the March 2019 floods.



# How Nebraska is Excelling at Process Improvement

By Katherine Barrett & Richard Greene  
route-fifty.com - December 15, 2022

Every week Nebraska is contacted by other states to learn how it is saving staff time, streamlining projects and delivering better customer services. Here's why.

Despite past difficulties, the perceived value of process improvement, also called continuous improvement, hasn't diminished and initiatives have caught fire in an increasing number of states, with particularly intense efforts in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania, according to Pam Goins, executive director of the National Association of State Chief Administrators.

"Whether it's looking at a system redesign or a state is unpacking and mapping out work processes, these continuous improvement efforts are showing reduced costs and having a positive impact to address labor shortages," she says.

To see the benefits of these efforts, look at Nebraska's Center of Operational Excellence, which launched in 2015, close to the start of outgoing Gov. Pete Rickett's first term, and has been expanding and improving ever since.

Leaders there get calls from other states on a weekly basis to learn how to emulate Nebraska's success, according to Director Matthew Singh. *Since its inception, the state has engaged in more than 900 projects in 19 of the state's departments, trained 23,000 employees over the last six years, eliminated 900,000 staff project work hours and achieved \$100 million in documented savings.*

## Sustaining Excellence

In the year prior to Singh's arrival in 2016, the center had experienced some leadership turnover and had largely relied on external contractors. Singh, with a strong background in multiple methods of quality management and process improvement, made changes.

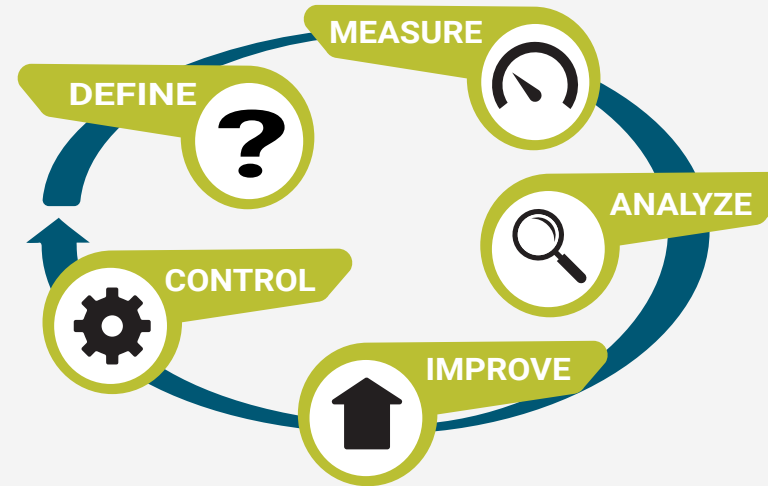
To start, he sought permission to build up internal capacity for carrying out projects to slow turnover, increase morale, and take advantage of institutional knowledge. Next, he chose the Lean Six Sigma method of continuous improvement, which provides a structured approach for defining problems, researching solutions, and measuring results, and yet also offers creative latitude in its application—an important element given the varying cultures of different departments.

This approach combines elements of Lean, a word invented by an MIT professor, based on lessons learned in the Toyota Production System and other manufacturing process innovations from the middle of the 20th Century, and Six Sigma, which is more heavily based on statistics and data analysis. The appeal of Lean Six Sigma was also its highly structured training system, with Karate-like "white belt, yellow belt, green belt, black belt" levels of mastery.

This training program helped the state build an internal network of process improvement managers and coordinators throughout Nebraska departments. "There's a standard way we do it here. We use the same methodology," says Shayne Daughenbaugh, a process improvement project manager and one of six current "black belts" who are embedded in departments.



Top and bottom right: Members of NDOT's Highway Safety Office Grants Process Improvement Team use color-coded sticky notes to identify duplicative steps that could be eliminated.



Daughenbaugh, who was a pastor for 18 years prior to joining the Nebraska government, is stationed in the Department of Transportation, but he also can work on bigger statewide projects and can easily shift to other departments when needed. "I don't want to overstate this, but it does break down silos. We have a common language and a great network," he says. "We're all trying to do the same thing."

## How It Works

Daughenbaugh works on an average of 15 projects a year. One that began shortly before the pandemic was sparked by the Highway Safety Office's concern that too few local law enforcement agencies were applying for small federal grants, which are designed to enforce seat belt use and promote sober driving and other safety initiatives.

"Our office had contacted local agencies to encourage them to participate," says William Kovarik, the Nebraska Highway Safety administrator. "The comment was that the process was too difficult and was not worth it."

To address this potentially lifesaving issue, in early 2020, Daughenbaugh followed *five steps which are standard for Lean Six Sigma: define, measure, analyze, improve, and control.*

In this case, the "define" stage involved working for about three weeks with Kovarik on project goals, which centered on simplifying the process by studying available data and talking directly with local governments. The next three steps—measure, analyze, and improve—mostly took place in one room over a three-day period with nine active participants who used color-coded sticky notes and various writing tools to visually capture duplicative steps and failure points.

This process revealed where project managers and supervisors were duplicating efforts and where too much physical paper documentation was creating bottlenecks that impede the approval and dispersal of grants.

As a result, Kovarik set up a cover page and electronic signature system so that those in the department who needed to sign off on the grants

## NEBRASKA'S PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS SINCE 2015

900+ projects



19 departments



23,000 employees trained



900,000 work hours eliminated



\$100M savings





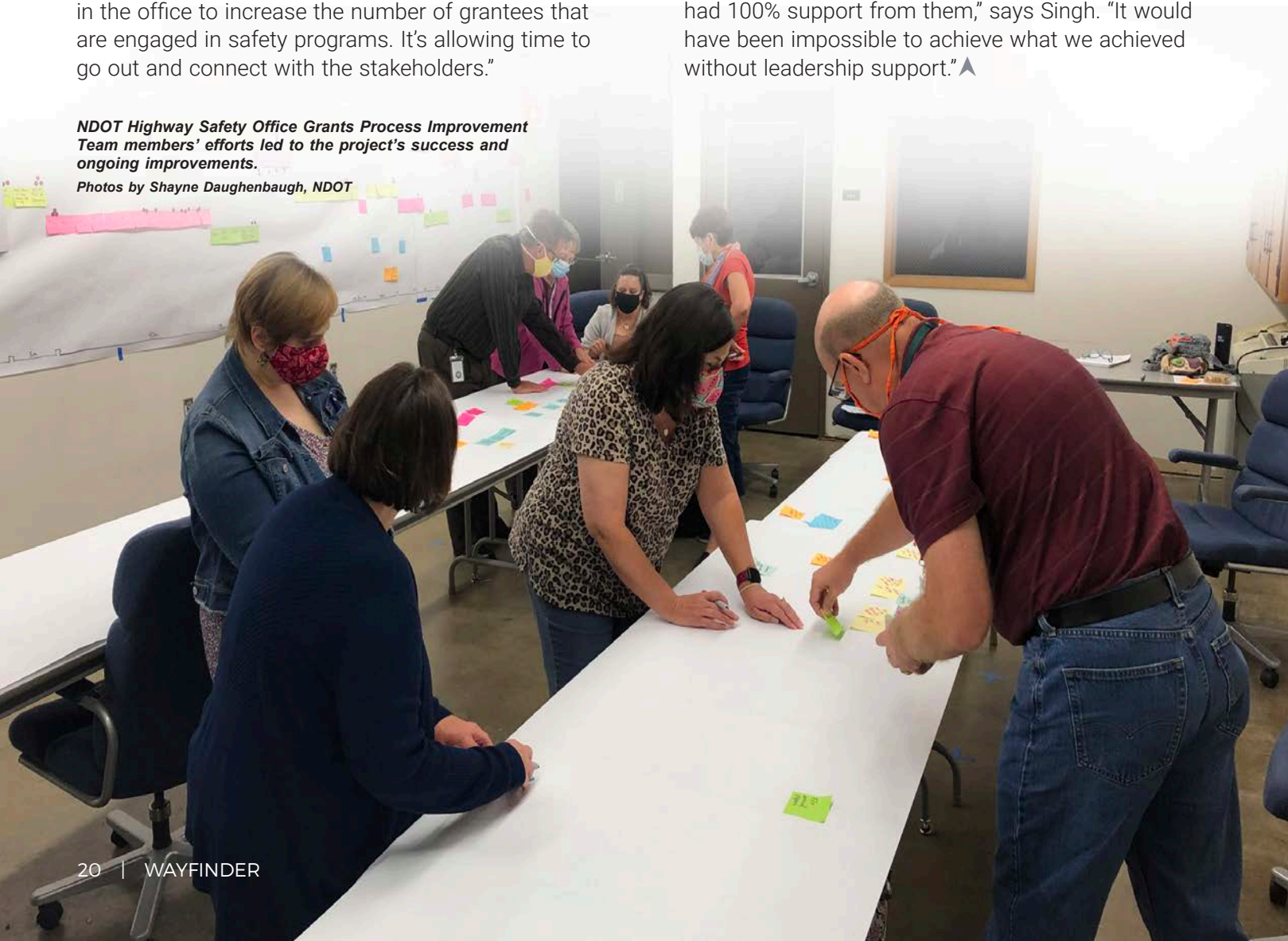
could do so on their computers rather than printing out and physically handing around multiple copies. This and other changes were tested in a pilot that ensured that the improvements were effective. When the pilot was a success and the changes were implemented statewide, a “control” phase followed to be certain that the new process was not saddling workers with unnecessary new steps.

By 2021, Kovarik’s office had recorded a reduction of 102 hours per month for invoice submission and a 58% reduction in team member time. Moreover, the time it takes for local governments to get reimbursed by the state for overtime or other expenses has been reduced by 50%. With a continuous improvement lens, improvements are still ongoing, with the hope that the Highway Safety Office will soon have grant management technology that will fully automate the process.

In a video that describes the project’s success, Tina Rockenbach, former Highway Safety Office supervisor, says, “It’s reducing our menial tasks with the long-term hope that it will free up project managers and others in the office to increase the number of grantees that are engaged in safety programs. It’s allowing time to go out and connect with the stakeholders.”

**NDOT Highway Safety Office Grants Process Improvement**  
Team members’ efforts led to the project’s success and ongoing improvements.

Photos by Shayne Daughenbaugh, NDOT



### Keys to Success

A key factor to success cited by Singh and others is the importance of including all levels of employees in the discussion. These are not top-down exercises in which higher level managers dictate what needs to be done, but also include the insights of frontline staff into what is working and what is not. “It’s not the magic of the system, it’s the magic of the leaders leading the system,” Singh says.

Nebraska’s whole state approach and the commitment of state leadership over a long period has helped to create a sense of sustainability and has provided other benefits. On Dec. 12, 2022, the Center of Excellence held its second annual summit, which was attended by Gov. Ricketts, who acted as host, and Singh, who was emcee. Incoming Gov. Jim Pillen, elected on Nov. 8, 2022, also attended.

That leadership support has been crucial—not just from the governor, but from his chief of staff and the director of the Department of Administrative Services. “Even when we did stuff that didn’t work out, we still had 100% support from them,” says Singh. “It would have been impossible to achieve what we achieved without leadership support.” ▲

**Two Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) teammates were recognized by Governor Pete Ricketts during the Center of Operational Excellence (COE) Summit on Dec. 12, 2022, for leading their team to improve the Right of Way-Property Acquisition process.**



Pictured, l to r: Karla Smith, former Gov. Pete Ricketts, and Tom Weber.  
Photo by Jessica Elsener, OCIO

## NDOT Teammates Recognized for Right of Way Process Improvements

Tom Weber, Right of Way Chief Negotiator, and Karla Smith, Right of Way Project Manager, received the Mountain Mover Award/Admiralship for making significant improvements to the process. With their leadership, deeds will be recorded in less than half the time, and work to improve or expand highway infrastructure can begin sooner.

Prior to improvements, the process was paper-heavy, involved printing/copying, assembling paper forms and packets with wet signatures, and mailing via certified mail to the county offices. Once accepted by the county, NDOT was billed the recording fee and payment was required before the deed could be recorded. This took 67 steps, occasional rework when a deed was rejected, averaging 23 days.

Most of the process was moved to digital, eliminating printing, and completed with digital signatures. It was also discovered that nearly every county in Nebraska utilizes a cloud-based platform to receive and approve or reject deeds. This platform also calculates and submits the recording fees upfront, eliminating the external billing and payment process that adds additional time to the process. Nebraska counties under this platform average 24 hours to record deeds.

Other solutions were also implemented to reduce the number of handoffs, provide additional training and cross training of staff, and focus on reduction of errors that lead to rejections and rework.

### Happy Customers

“The system not only reduces process time on the state’s side; it also reduces the process time on the county’s side,” Smith said. “Our customers are also happy.”

“In addition, this process improvement created a positive ripple effect as the staff member who previously devoted time to processing recordings is now re-focusing that time to scan old paper documents to our digital archive,” Smith said. “This in turn allows other staff to access those old records directly resulting in additional time savings for NDOT staff.”

“Rachel Kilcoin, the process improvement coordinator for this project, really showed the merits of having the P.I. team available,” Weber said. “She kept us organized, on task, and motivated to see it through to completion.”

Smith concurred. “With any change in process, a few barriers arise. Rachel broke down those barriers. Our staff would never have had the time or patience to work through those obstacles without her.”

The COE Summit convenes leaders, change agents, and decision-makers from across the state to discuss the opportunities to build on successes with the COE. It provides a unique chance for leaders who share a passion for continuous improvement to get together in the same room to exchange ideas. ▲



# Mari Sandoz Historical Marker Restored South of Gordon

By Shannon Smith  
President of the Mari Sandoz Society

On Tuesday, October 25, 2022, the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Senior Highway Maintenance Workers from District 5 in Gordon—Chris Franson, Ryan Kozal, and Taylon Pascoe—reinstalled the Mari Sandoz Nebraska Historical Marker about 30 miles south of Gordon.

The marker was first unveiled on Sunday, August 11, 1968, two years after Sandoz died of cancer in New York City on March 10, 1966. Mari did not want a big ceremony or funeral, and she requested that she be buried in the Sandhills on her family's land overlooking the orchard her father, Jules, had planted and about which she had written in her award-winning memoir of the homesteading life, "Old Jules."

Because there was no memorial celebration, Sandoz's many friends and fans felt deprived of a way to pay their respects. Soon a veritable flood of visitors started to come to the Sandhills to go to her yet unmarked grave. Mari's sister, Caroline Pifer, was the host of most of these visits and she soon realized that more should be done to memorialize her famous sibling. She ensured signs to the gravesite and a headstone were erected.

Then, the community of Gordon came together through the Chamber of Commerce and the Sheridan County Historical Society to install a historical marker, one of the earliest of the Nebraska Historical Marker Program. The now familiar blue and silver signs bearing the great seal of the State of Nebraska required local sponsorship to provide half of the cost of the marker and Gordon quickly came through.

As you can imagine, years of sandblasting by our Sandhills winds had worn away the writing and the sign was in disrepair. The Mari Sandoz Society researched the process to get the sign repainted, raised the necessary funds, and arranged with the Sheridan County office of the State Department of Transportation to take it down and haul the heavy sign to Alliance where it was professionally restored.

Article and photo reprinted with permission of the Sheridan Journal Star



Pictured with the newly restored Mari Sandoz historical marker located 30 miles south of Gordon are, l to r, Chris Franson, Ryan Kozal, and Taylon Pascoe, NDOT Senior Highway Maintenance Workers from District 5 in Gordon.

In Alliance it took quite a team to restore the sign. Jim Todd of Todd's Body and Frame Shop took the lead and had Ralph Hoxworth at H and H Sanitation sandblast all the paint off. Local artist, Greg Garret, hand painted the sign, then Todd's put several coats of protective coating on. After months of work, the sign was ready and the great DOT team, under the direction of District 5 Hwy. Maintenance Supervisor Justin Meeks, retrieved it and reinstalled it at its beautiful location just a few hundred feet south of the road to Sandoz's grave and the homestead's orchard.

Be sure to stop and look at the gorgeous marker the next time you pass by, and don't forget to visit Mari's grave—though the signs marking directions to the grave are in disrepair and are next on the Sandoz Society list of projects.

It takes a village to ensure our important cultural heritage is preserved and promoted, and the Sandoz Society is very grateful to all the people at the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Nebraska Department of Transportation, the Alliance team, and especially the people who donate to the Society so we can accomplish this significant work. Special thanks go out to Mari Sandoz Society Vice President Dan Kusek of Alliance for his year-long effort to renovate this marker. ▲

# NSP, NDOT IT Partnership Receives National Recognition

A collaboration between the Nebraska State Patrol (NSP), Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), Nebraska Crime Commission (NCC), and Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) has been awarded a national honor for their effort to streamline crash reporting and data collection for law enforcement agencies across the state.

The team was honored with the Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships Award on October 12, 2022, at the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The Nebraska entry was selected as the winner from among ten programs from states across the country.

The effort focused on the development of a new statewide crash database. NDOT was in the process of upgrading and significantly expanding its crash reporting system. Rather than rewrite their electronic crash reporting form, NDOT partnered with the NSP to utilize the existing foundation of NSP's Traffic and Crime Software system (TraCS) to create the new crash reporting system.

NSP's TraCS team onboarded 60 new law enforcement partners that were transitioned to the TraCS system

from the sunseting NDOT system. This onboarding took place in a four-month period, bringing the total number of partners on the TraCS platform to over 130 agencies across Nebraska.

"I'm incredibly proud of the outstanding work that our TraCS team has accomplished over the last few years," said Colonel John Bolduc, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol. "From our troopers, deputies, and officers on the front lines, all the way to our data analysts at NDOT, this tool has been invaluable and has been the ultimate collaboration."

Data collected through the TraCS crash reporting system is delivered to NDOT for research into Nebraska's roadways and how drivers are operating on roadways to evaluate improved safety features. Additionally, data collected provides information on future planning for transportation across the State.

"The safety of the citizens of Nebraska is paramount to multiple agencies and partners," said John Selmer, then-NDOT Director. "NDOT is proud to help advance TraCS with additional partners in the State and modernize both the collection of data, and how it is used." ▲



2023 Cross-Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships Award – Back, l to r: Andy Smith, Charlie Lucas, Sean Owings, Don Butler, Sampath Kavuri. Front: Monica Spanke, Kim Keniston, Nathan Clement.

Photo by Sam Malan, NDOT



# 2022 Challenge Showcase Continues Tradition of Success



The 6th Annual Innovation Challenge Showcase held on July 22, 2022, at the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Central Headquarters in Lincoln continued a tradition of success with great creativity, enthusiasm, and involvement by NDOT teammates.

The event wrapped up another exciting year with 19 outstanding submissions and a spirited competition, with only eight votes standing between first and second place winners. The Culvert Inspection Vehicle submitted by District 8 took home the Innovation of the Year honors.

As in past years, innovations were submitted by NDOT team members and were voted on in rounds by other NDOT teammates. Innovations with the most votes advanced until the best innovation was identified. More than 400 people voted on their favorites and the auditorium was filled to capacity as everyone gathered to support their fellow teammates' efforts and cheer on the winning teams.

Continue reading for information on all award-winning innovations, including prizes awarded and links with details on each innovation. Also, remember you can submit your nominations for the 2023 Innovation Challenge any time!

## Innovation of the Year - \$500 each

(from NDOT Recognition Program)

**Culvert Inspection Vehicle** – District 8: A remote control vehicle allows surveying of small culverts more efficiently.

*Justin Ripley, John Raymond, Eddie Vodopich, Bo Painter, Carl Hart*

## 2nd Place - \$250

**Plow Protection System** – District 1, Palmyra: Sensor that can detect when a plow blade needs to be replaced.

*Curt Steiner, Don Warnke, Andy Stander, Carl Rorie*

## 3rd Place - \$125 each

**Weather Event Mobile Application** – BTSD, Bridge, Operations, District 8, District 3: Mobile GIS application allows district workers to capture and send weather event data right from their phones.

*Matt Samuelson, Gene Colfack, Mark Kovar, Matt Baker, Jesse Schulz, Julie Greenwood, Kirk Harvey, Corvin Hinrichs, Julie Ramirez, Jessica Sherwood, Claire Inbody*

## 4th Place - \$100 each

**Mechanical Rocker Test Ice Capacity** – Materials & Research, Operations: Utilizing this test provides a reliable way of evaluating the performance of deicing materials

*David T. Hansen, Jasmine Dondlinger, Maria Olomi, Fahad Qassim, Mike Mattison, Barb Gerbino-Bevins, Lieska Halsey*

## 5th - 8th Place - \$75 each

**Hay Permits** – All Districts, Operations, Controller, BTSD: An automated system for hay permit applications benefits.

*Tom Sands, Liz Salisbury, Penny Clark, Penny Beran, Natalie Johnson, Vicky Simon, Teri King, Dat Hong, Margaret Repass, Cindy Olsen, Kathy Pahre, Jeane Plihal, Chris Wiebke, Cole Davison*

**Shoulder Material Striker** – District 3: Time-saving device to shape materials on the road shoulder.

*Leonard Nadrchal, Dave Pokorney, Mark Paprocki*

**Right of Way Deed Acquisition** – Right of Way, Strategic Planning: Redesigned process for filing deed registrations with the county reduces work and cuts waste.

*Rachel Kilcoin, Karla Smith, Tina Yates, Sindy Counts, Stephanie Camerone*

**Interactive Bike Map** – Strategic Planning, BTSD: provides valuable information about the highway system to the cycling community.

*Shelley Schulte, Claire Inbody, David Schoenmaker, Craig Wacker, Curtis Nosal, Jill Kuhel*

## Director's Office Picks - \$75 each

**Training Intake One-Stop Shop** – Human Resources, Strategic Planning, Right of Way, and District 5: A one-stop shop for all training-related requests.

*Karen Lenz, Jacki Schrotberger, Rachelle Van Cleave, Mindy Whiteley, Jarrod Walker, Davey Jones*

**Clarity Task Assignment Transfer Tool** – Program Management: Automation of preconstruction project schedule task transfers from one owner to another.

*Steve Moore*

Photos by Sam Malan, NDOT



Innovation of the Year – Bo Painter accepts award for Culvert Inspection Vehicle.



3rd Place – Claire Inbody and Jesse Schulz accept award for Weather Event Mobile Application.

## 2022 Innovation Challenge Team Members

Korey Donahoo, *Strat. Planning*  
Stephanie Camerone, *Strat. Planning*  
Ava Dunne (*UNL Workstudy Assistant*)  
Charlene Shaw, *BTSD*  
Emily Schweitzer, *Communications*



2nd Place – Curt Steiner accepts award for Plow Protection System.



4th Place – Jasmine Dondlinger accepts award for Mechanical Rocker Test Ice Capacity.



# Signature Award Goes to Martin Potgieter

Martin Potgieter, Superintendent for Graham Construction, Inc., was recognized with the 2023 Signature Award for his outstanding leadership and involvement with the “Fremont Southeast Beltway” and “Scribner Bypass” projects. He was honored at ceremonies on March 8 during NDOT’s 2023 Project Managers’ Conference at Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

Barb Gerbino-Bevins, NDOT District 2 Construction Engineer, presented the award. She noted that Martin exemplifies the characteristics described in the award guidelines as he represents the prime contractor (Graham) on these projects.

“Martin is extremely organized, communicates effectively, and is very diplomatic in tough situations. In the projects’ weekly status/coordination meetings, he always creates an agenda with a clear plan of everything to be accomplished that week.”

Gerbino-Bevins highlighted additional examples of Martin’s leadership that contributed to a successful team effort, including tracking progress and planning for contingencies.

## Action Items

“Martin runs through the list of outstanding items from the previous week, politely calling out items that are pending for the subcontractors, NDOT, and himself, keeping track of how long those items have been pending.” she said. “He brings up the possibility of future issues before they become issues. For example, if heavy rain is forecasted for Scribner that week, he briefly runs through the flood-fighting plan with everyone; this was a very effective way of determining if all the equipment needed was still on site. Lastly, he develops a list of action items for the group, making sure everyone understands what they need to do.”

“I appreciate the way Martin politely reminds the subcontractors of their roles and responsibilities and his roles and responsibilities as the prime contractor. He also communicates well with nearby communities and makes granting any requests of theirs a priority.”

Gerbino-Bevins concluded by stating, “Martin has simply been a joy to work with on these complex, high-profile projects. I very much hope we get to work with him again on future projects.” ▲



Photo by Sam Malan, NDOT  
Martin Potgieter accepts 2023 Signature Award from NDOT District 2 Construction Engineer Barb Gerbino-Bevins on behalf of NDOT District Construction Engineers.

The Signature Award is given by NDOT District Construction Engineers to individuals in the contracting industry possessing certain characteristics, including excellence in leadership, good communication, problem solving, organization, attitude, safety, and achieving above and beyond standard management practices. Nominations for the award are submitted by NDOT Project Managers, then the winner(s) (occasionally there is more than one) are selected by NDOT Construction Engineers. In addition to receiving a trophy, plaque and having their names added to a permanent plaque at the NDOR Central Headquarters, a \$500 scholarship is given in the recipient’s name to a University of Nebraska student majoring in construction engineering or construction management. Prior to this year’s recipient there had been 21 Signature Award winners since it was first awarded in 2002.



Photo by Sam Malan, NDOT  
Pictured l to r: Tyler Chicoine, AGC Nebraska Chapter President and Darrell Lurz, NDOT District 8, Project Manager of the Year.



# Darrell Lurz Named Project Manager of the Year

Darrell Lurz, of Valentine, was honored by the Nebraska Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) with the Lyle Leader Award as Nebraska Department of Transportation’s (NDOT) Project Manager of the Year. Lurz received a traveling trophy and plaque on March 8 during NDOT’s Project Managers’ Conference at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney.

Lurz started with NDOT in September 1992 as an Engineering Aide in District 8. He was promoted to Construction Tech III in 1997 and has been the Lead Inspector on countless projects. In November 2014, he was promoted to Highway Project Manager in Valentine and currently has over 30 years working for NDOT.

Lurz has managed many projects in District 8 over the last 8 years as project manager in the Valentine office and has been a great asset to NDOT, especially in District 8. He is organized, detail oriented, has high expectations for everyone that works around him (NDOT staff and contractors alike), and cares deeply about providing quality projects to the citizens of Nebraska. He has mentored and helped many people start their careers at NDOT including his boss, Jason Lehn District 8 DCE. ▲

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



# Paving Awards Presented in Kearney

Nebraska Department of Transportation project managers and construction technicians were honored with awards for both concrete and asphalt pavements at the annual NDOT Project Managers' Conference held March 7-9, 2023, in Kearney, Nebraska. The awards recognized their work on Nebraska highways during 2022.

According to Assistant Construction Engineer Andy Dearth, the annual paving awards program has three purposes: 1) Showcase Quality: In addition to presentation of the award-winning project, other quality nominated projects are presented to industry stakeholders; 2) Promote Industry: Those who are not familiar with the construction industry are able to see an example of the pride that goes into their work; and 3) Improve Cooperation: The program provides recognition for work well done that is accomplished through cooperation.

The Nebraska Department of Transportation sponsors the awards for excellence in asphaltic concrete pavement construction. Awards of excellence for highway construction projects using concrete pavement are sponsored by the Nebraska Department of Transportation and the Nebraska Concrete Paving Association (NCPA).

## Concrete Pavement Quality Awards

### Best Secondary State Highway Project:

**US-6 and US-34 In Hastings; District 4**

Project Manager: Kevin Kohmetscher  
Inspection Crew:

Kevin Bykerk, Austin Himmelberg

Prime Contractor:

Werner Construction, Inc., Hastings, Nebraska

### Best Interstate Highway Project:

**I-80, Brule – Ogallala; District 6**

Project Manager: Troy Pedersen

Inspection Crew: Justin Willard, Andrew

Reinhard, Charles Stoeger, Todd Dailey,

Gene Halsey, Sam Ghaleb, Ben Bartholomew,

Brad Miller, Chase Stallup, Ray Berry

Prime Contractor:

Koss Construction Company, Topeka, Kansas

## Excellence in Hotmix Asphalt Pavement Construction

### Best Hot Mix Overlay Maintenance Project:

**West "O" Street and North 27th Street Bridges, District 1**

LPA Project Rep.: Ernest Murillo

Owner: City of Lincoln

Consulting Engineer: Speece-Lewis Engineers

Prime Contractor:

K2 Construction, Lincoln, Nebraska; and  
Pavers Inc., Waverly, Nebraska

### Best Single Lift Overlay Project:

**N-29, In Mitchell and North; District 5**

Project Manager: Maryanne Jacobs

Inspection Crew:

Timothy Vach, Nathan Franklin, Tadd Clarey

Prime Contractor:

Werner Construction Co., Hastings, Nebraska

### Best Project with Two or More Lifts:

**US-20, US-81 to Belden; District 3**

Project Manager: Toni Vogel

Inspection Crew: Nick Brittell, Bryan Lovejoy,

Mustafa Al-Khaled, Mark Jahde

Prime Contractor: Constructors Inc., Lincoln, Nebraska

### Best Quality Controlled Project:

**US-283, In Arapahoe and North, District 4**

Project Manager: Wayne Witt

Inspection Crew: Mark Whittaker, Ian Einspahr,

Hunter Rookstool

Prime Contractor: Paulsen, Inc., Cozad, Nebraska

### Smoothest Pavement Award - TIE:

**US-385, Dalton North; District 5**

Project Manager: Martin Gillen

Inspection Crew: James Smith, Nicholas Harpold,

Jeff Hack, Joe Salazar

Prime Contractor:

Werner Construction Co., Hastings, Nebraska

**US-6, Holdrege to Funk; District 7**

Project Manager: Aaron Gottsch

Inspection Crew: Corbin Rookstool, Trev Johnson

Prime Contractor: Vontz Paving, Inc., Hastings, Nebraska

# Renninger New NDOT Operations Division Manager



*"I am a true believer in investing in the talented individuals that the NDOT has on their team and being a source to assist with their professional growth."*

- Tom Renninger  
NDOT Operations Division Manager

Tom Renninger is the new Operations Division Manager for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). He replaces Tom Sands who retired in December 2022 with 44 years of state service, 17 years as NDOT's Operations Division Manager.

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

After 29 years with NDOT, Renninger took a position with the Alaska DOT & Public Facilities as the Southcoast Region Deputy Director. After three years in Alaska, he returned to Nebraska to accept the position of District 2 Operations and Maintenance Manager in Omaha. In 2021, he moved back to Lincoln as the Assistant Operations Division Manager until his recent role as Operations Division Manager, where he is responsible for delivering services, materials, and equipment to NDOT's districts and divisions.

Renninger said he has enjoyed seeing the people he has worked with use their abilities to rise to the challenges they are faced with in their jobs as NDOT has evolved in technology,

equipment, facilities, materials, practices, and available resources.

"A career in transportation offers great opportunities to grow professionally," he said. "I have had the opportunity to work in the transportation industry from the Sandhills of Nebraska to Lincoln, to Alaska, to the Omaha metro area, and back to Lincoln. Each of those locations brings a different set of challenges with different learning opportunities."

In discussing goals, Renninger noted that he wants to help NDOT become a leading force in the industry by leveraging technology and growing future leaders. "I am true believer in investing in the talented individuals that the NDOT has on their team and being a source to assist with their professional growth."

His area of focus in the immediate future is to ensure that Operations customers have the tools and resources they need to accomplish their missions. He will also be focusing on the mobility of the transportation system through technology.

Renninger considers himself blessed to have grown up in the Sandhills where his family is involved in agriculture. He has three children and six grandchildren who reside in Ogallala and Amarillo, Texas. In his spare time, Tom enjoys family gatherings, spending time with his kids and grandchildren, golf, racing, and as much Nebraska athletics as his schedule will allow. ▲



# Lily Kathee New Chief Financial Officer



*"I am excited to lead my team by encouraging innovative thinking and creative strategies that help the Controller Division achieve its objectives."*

- Lily Kathee, Chief Financial Officer

Lily Kathee is the new Chief Financial Officer for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). She succeeds Aaron Teachout, who led the Controller Division for a brief time after Lyn Heaton, who served from 2018 to 2022.

After graduating with her Bachelor of Science degrees in Horticulture and Microbiology from Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, Kathee earned her master's degree in Business Administration – MBA, with an emphasis in Finance and Operations Management from Stevens Henager University in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Before joining NDOT, she gained 17 years of experience in accounting, finance, and operations management in various positions, including five years as a Branch Manager at Citigroup/CitiFinancial; four years as a Finance Manager at a law firm in Lincoln; three years as Accounting Operations Manager at DAS; and five years at DHHS, as Accounting Costs Manager and as Deputy Director of Finance, Operations, and Data Analytics.

In her new role as Chief Financial Officer at NDOT, she will oversee and administer all agency financial matters, including financial planning, programming, and reporting; revenue and expenditure projections; budgeting, fund controls, audits, financial systems, project finance and cash flow management.

Among her achievements, Kathee earned her MBA and graduated with honors while working full time. She led key financial initiatives at DHHS, including curating various financial models and successfully disbursing \$47 million ARPA funds to providers within the first month

of being promoted as Deputy Director of Finance, Operations and Data Analytics. While at DAS, she collaboratively oversaw the grants draw/disbursement process, eliminating over 10 steps and reducing processing time from four days to 24 hours.

Kathee derives great enjoyment from meeting and working with new people. "One thing I've enjoyed the most is the ability to meet new people throughout my career and the friendships I've cultivated over the years. I have formed lifelong connections that I'll forever cherish."

Future goals include ensuring the Standard Operating Procedures are documented for each process within the Controller Division and cross training her team to maintain continuity of business. Another top priority is team building.

Regarding her leadership approach, Kathee noted that her philosophy is built on communication, trust, delegation, and appreciation.

"I value clear and honest communication, the ability to adapt to my teammates' diverse ideas and communication styles in order to subsequently lead my team effectively and collaboratively toward success," she said. As far as delegation and appreciation, she noted, "I feel that the abilities to delegate effectively and give clear direction while remaining available to provide guidance or assistance are important for my team to feel empowered and supported. I am all about recognizing my team and making them feel valued and appreciated."

Kathee resides in Lincoln with her daughter. In her spare time, she enjoys working out at the gym, dancing, walking the trails in Lincoln, travel, binge watching shows, concerts, and napping. A fun fact is that she speaks five different languages fluently. ▲

# Scott New District 7 Operations & Maintenance Manager

Kerry Scott is the new District 7 Operations and Maintenance Manager (DOMM) for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) office based in McCook. Mr. Scott succeeds Kelly Doyle, who retired in January 2023, with 35 years of NDOT service, 14 years as the DOMM.

Kerry has worked at NDOT for 36 years, all in District 7 and 18 years of those years in McCook. He began working as a temporary Highway Maintenance Worker in McCook in 1984. He began full time employment in 1986, working for one year as a Highway Maintenance Worker in Alma, three years as a Highway Maintenance Worker Sr in McCook, four years as a Highway Maintenance Crew Chief in McCook, 15 years as a Highway Maintenance Supervisor in Arapahoe, and was promoted to Highway Maintenance Superintendent in McCook in 2009 where he served for 13 years until his recent promotion.

Aspects of his job that have brought the most enjoyment include being a part of a team that accepts the challenge and does their best to provide a quality outcome. "I'm excited for the opportunity to work with new teams in our district throughout the state," he said.

As far as goals, safety is at the top of the list. "I want to continue to emphasize safety in everything we do," Kerry said. "We also want to continue to provide the traveling public with the highest level of maintenance for the highways in the district."

Additional goals include focusing on employee recruitment and retention, using every opportunity to promote NDOT's people and the outstanding work they do, and to learn and grow as a manager and a teammate.

Kerry says that his approach toward management hasn't change in the many years that he has been involved with supervision and management: "Approach every day and every interaction with honesty, integrity, and respect for others."



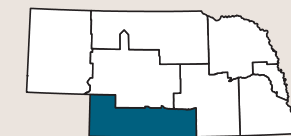
*"Throughout every step of my career from a temporary worker to DOMM, I've continued to look forward to new challenges and new opportunities."*

- Kerry Scott, District 7 DOMM

Kerry grew up in Indianola, Nebraska, and graduated from Republican Valley High School. He also attended Northwest Kansas Vo-Tech welding department in Goodland, Kansas. He and his wife JoHanna have been married for 38 years. They have five children and seven grandchildren, who are scattered across the country.

In his spare time, his hobbies and interests include golfing, hunting, fishing, watching Husker sports, and traveling to spend as much time as he can with his family. ▲

District 7 includes Chase, Dundy, Franklin, Frontier, Furnas, Gosper, Harlan, Hayes, Hitchcock, Kearney, Perkins, Phelps, and Red Willow counties.





# Osborn New District 8 Operations & Maintenance Manager



*"I look forward to hearing new ideas."*

- Chuck Osborn, District 8 DOMM

Chuck Osborn is the new District 8 Operations and Maintenance Manager (DOMM) for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) office based in Ainsworth. Osborn succeeds Corvin Hinrichs, who retired in January 2023 with over 44 years of NDOT service, 13 years as the DOMM.

After graduating from Ainsworth High School in 1990, Osborn began working at an autobody repair shop until 1996 when he began his career at the NDOT. Over the past 27 years, he has held several positions, all in Ainsworth, including eight years as a Highway Maintenance Worker, six years as a Highway Maintenance Supervisor, and 13 years as a Highway Maintenance Superintendent until his recent promotion.

In his new role, Osborn will be managing the highway maintenance program throughout District 8 and providing leadership for the maintenance personnel. A goal that he wants to achieve is to build a stronger maintenance culture within the department.

His approach toward management is simple: "Don't forget where you came from!" He said that he has appreciated all his relationships with fellow NDOT teammates throughout the state over the years and looks forward to building on that foundation in the future.

Osborn wants NDOT teammates to know that he is very approachable, and his door is always open. "I want people to come in and voice their concerns or compliments."

Chuck grew up in Ainsworth, Nebraska. He and his wife Lendi recently married. He has two grown children, Marcus, who lives in Lincoln, and Morgan, who lives in Kearney, and three stepchildren, Airyan, Emily, and Calin. In his spare time, he enjoys working around the house or in his shop and mowing in the summer. ▲

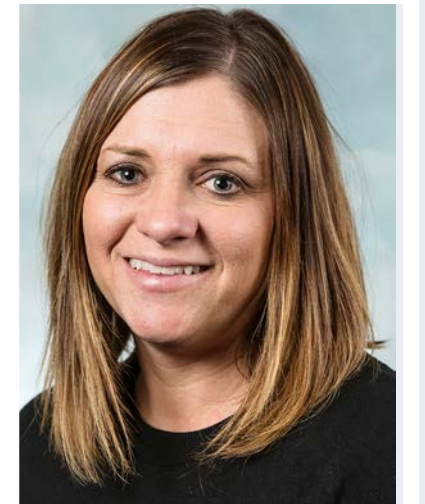


District 8 includes Blaine, Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Garfield, Holt, Loup, Keya Paha, Rock, and Wheeler counties.

# Weigel New NDOT Assistant Operations Division Manager

*"Creating a positive and encouraging environment is important."*

- Michelle Weigel,  
NDOT Assistant Operations Division Manager



Michelle Weigel is the new Assistant Operations Division Manager for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). She succeeds Tom Renninger who was promoted to Operations Division Manager in December 2022 after Tom Sands' retirement.

Weigel is a 1998 graduate of North Platte St. Patrick's High School and attended Wayne State College in Nebraska, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Information Systems.

Upon graduation, she started her career with NDOT in the District 6 internship program. She began her full-time career with NDOT in the Business Technology Support Division (BTSD) in a technical support role and then moved to the Construction Division to manage the AASHTOWare Section. In 2013, she accepted the Contracts Supervisor position, which she held for nearly 10 years until her current role as the Assistant Operations Division Manager.

In her new role, Weigel will be working closely with districts and divisions to deliver materials and services in the most efficient way possible. Her goals include learning the operations side of NDOT and having the opportunity to analyze applications and processes with her team to see where improvements can be made to better serve customers.

One thing that stands out in her 20-year career at NDOT is the people. "I have been blessed with amazing teammates who were always willing to run with change and implement new ideas, always striving to provide the best customer experience possible," Weigel said. "The supervisors I have had the opportunity to

work with in my career at NDOT have been fantastic mentors and have provided me the tools necessary to perform at the highest level and have provided excellent guidance that has allowed me to grow as a person and a leader."

She looks forward to the opportunity to build on these relationships in her new role, including making the workplace an enjoyable place to come to each day. Weigel said, "I believe in providing teammates enough guidance to be successful and empower them to make decisions, putting them in a position to succeed. I also believe building trust with teammates and our external partners helps improve the overall performance of not only the Operations Division, but the Department."

Michelle grew up in North Platte. Her mom, Ronda Lewis, is the Administrative Technician in Construction and her husband, Jeremy is a Highway Construction Tech IV in the Construction Division. They have three children, Brandon, Kaylee, and Taryn. In her spare time, she loves attending sporting events with her family. Her oldest son, Brandon will be playing baseball at a junior college in Iowa. Daughters Kaylee and Taryn both participate in basketball and volleyball. ▲