

NMDOT: Permian Basin oilfield roads receive millions in state funds, projects underway

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Three of southeast New Mexico's most notorious oilfield roads are in for major rebuilds in the coming years as the New Mexico Department of Transportation aims to use surplus state funds from oil and gas revenue to ensure workers in the industry can travel safely through the region.

In a Monday meeting with Carlsbad area business leaders in Santa Fe, New Mexico Cabinet Secretary of Transportation Michael Sandoval said a \$130 million project to update U.S.

Highway 285 from the Texas State Line 22 miles north to Loving was fully funded.

The road became increasingly dangerous as truck traffic increased during the area's recent oil boom as workers traveled south from Carlsbad out to the oilfield and back into town at the end of their shifts.

Sandoval said NMDOT was also working to develop alternate routes to be used during the rebuild, committing to match up to \$10 million in funds provided by the industry or local community.

We know that project will be a big inconvenience to the oil and gas industry. We want to make sure people have options," he said. "We want to make sure oil and gas is still mobile in that area."

Eddy County Director of Community Services Wes Hooper said funding for the alternative route off 285 would likely come from the industry, as the routes would be primarily used by oil and gas workers.

"We're going to industry to help us fund projects that will help the industry run a bit more smoothly," he said.

Another project to upgrade New Mexico State Road 31 to four lanes, between its intersections at U.S. 285 and U.S. 128 was also funded to the tune of about \$110 million, Sandoval said.

A project to add another four lanes to US 128 from Carlsbad to Jal had about \$60 million funded of the \$200 million needed, he said.

Overall, Sandoval said about \$150 million was still needed to fully repair and update the three priority roads in southeast New Mexico: 285, 128 and 31.