



## **Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group Meeting**

October 20, 2025, 1:00 pm  
Indian Pueblo Cultural Center  
2401 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Albuquerque, NM 87104

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Chair Bill Lee. Chair Lee welcomed members and guests, noting the continued progress of the state's Route 66 Centennial planning and thanking the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center for hosting the group's meeting.

### **Roll Call**

#### *Members Present*

Bill Lee (Chair)  
Raymond Mondragon (Vice Chair)  
Johnny Pena  
Scott Verhines  
Elmer Torres  
Evan Williams  
Acting Secretary Lancing Adams (NMTD)  
Secretary Ricky Serna (NMDOT)  
Daniel Gutierrez (NMEDD – Designate)  
Deputy Secretary Michelle Roberts (NMDCA – Designate)  
Heather Benavidez (Proxy for Deputy Secretary Danielle Gilliam, NMENV – Designate)

#### *Members Not Present*

Alicia Ortega

A quorum was established, and Chair Lee proceeded with the meeting.

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Chair Lee welcomed members, department representatives, and presenters. He highlighted the collaborative nature of the Centennial planning effort, noting significant progress since the February 2025 meeting, including the Department of Tourism's continued coordination of subcommittee activities and successful regional engagement. Vice Chair Raymond Mondragon thanked the members and agency partners for their ongoing participation and noted that the

coordination group's work is serving as a model for Route 66 centennial planning across other states.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Chair Lee called for a motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion by Member Johnny Pena to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Chair Lee presented the February 25, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes and the November 19, 2024 Grants Meeting Minutes for approval.

A minor correction was noted in the February 25, 2025 minutes section to correct a typographical error related to a last name. ☐ Motion by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón to approve the February 25, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes as amended to correct a typographical error in a last name, seconded by Member Johnny Peña. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Member Scott Verhines to approve the November 19, 2024 Grants Meeting Minutes as presented, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Open Meetings Act Resolution Adoption – 2025**

Chair Lee introduced the 2025 Open Meetings Act Resolution for consideration. Novela Salazar, General Counsel for the New Mexico Tourism Department, provided an overview of the resolution, explaining that it reaffirms the Coordination Group's commitment to transparency and compliance with state requirements for public notice, agenda posting, and remote participation. She noted that the resolution mirrors the prior year's version.

Motion by Member Elmer Torres to adopt the 2025 Open Meetings Act Resolution, seconded by Member Johnny Peña. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Amendment to the Bylaws of the Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group**

Chair Lee introduced proposed amendments to the Coordination Group's bylaws. Salazar provided an overview of the revisions. Salazar noted that the updates were designed to ensure consistency with state transparency standards and to reflect the group's current operating practices.

Motion by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón to adopt the amendment to the bylaws as presented, seconded by Member Evan Williams. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Tourism in Tribal Communities Panel Discussion**

Chair Lee introduced the agenda item on Tourism in Tribal Communities. Monique Fragua, representing the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, led the discussion.

Ms. Fragua opened by emphasizing the importance of elevating tribal perspectives within Route 66 Centennial planning. She noted that the centennial provides an opportunity for all 19 Pueblos, the Navajo Nation, and the Mescalero and Jicarilla Apache Nations to share their own stories and histories connected to the Route 66 corridor.

She recalled that a state–tribal tourism working group had previously met on a regular basis to bring together tribal leaders and state agencies to discuss tourism collaboration and shared priorities. Ms. Fragua suggested that reestablishing or formalizing a similar forum under the Centennial effort could strengthen communication, streamline coordination, and provide a consistent space for tribes to inform statewide tourism planning.

To frame the conversation, Ms. Fragua asked members to consider several questions:

- How can the Route 66 Centennial serve as a platform for authentic representation of Native cultures?
- What barriers currently limit tribal participation in statewide tourism initiatives?
- How can state agencies collaborate to provide technical assistance, marketing, or funding support for tribally led projects?
- What role should the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and other tribal institutions play in connecting tribal tourism initiatives to the broader centennial strategy?

In response to the first question, participants noted that authentic representation requires tribal communities to determine how their stories are told and to maintain control over interpretation. To the second question, attendees identified barriers such as limited staffing within small tribal tourism programs, difficulty accessing state grant systems, and inconsistent communication across agencies. There was general agreement that building technical-assistance pipelines could help more tribes engage directly in Centennial and tourism activities. Regarding the final question, participants encouraged continued partnership with the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center as a hub for coordination, training, and cultural interpretation tied to the Centennial.

Following this exchange, Vice Chair Mondragon commended Ms. Fragua's leadership and stated that the Route 66 Coordination Group has been working to incorporate tribal priorities into its project recommendations. He emphasized that sustained tribal engagement is key to the Centennial's success. Secretary Serna described the Department of Transportation's collaboration with tribal governments on right-of-way improvements, signage, and safety features that complement tourism access. Acting Secretary Adams reaffirmed the Tourism Department's partnership with tribal organizations, noting that upcoming grant programs and Centennial marketing efforts will continue to prioritize tribal-led initiatives.

Chair Lee thanked Ms. Fragua and all contributors, observing that the discussion reinforced the importance of ongoing intergovernmental communication to ensure tribal perspectives remain central to the Route 66 Centennial planning process.

### **Route 66 Tribal Projects**

Acting Secretary Lansing Adams presented an update on the New Mexico Tourism Department's Route 66 Tribal Projects. He described the department's work to expand tribal participation in the Route 66 Centennial Grant Program and highlighted recent partnerships with the Navajo Nation and the Pueblo of Laguna, both of which joined the Marketing and Promotions track for FY26.

Adams reported that the department has allocated funds supporting an integrated advertising campaign promoting Route 66 communities through digital, social, and traditional media in target metro markets in Texas, Colorado, and Arizona. He explained that the campaign will include rich media display ads, paid search, and digital out-of-home advertising designed to drive awareness and visitation along the corridor.

He also discussed the Special Events Grant Program, which funds community celebrations highlighting Route 66 heritage. Adams noted that the Tourism Department awarded \$20,000 in both FY25 and FY26 to support the Gathering of Nations, the nation's largest intertribal powwow. The FY25 event incorporated a Route 66-themed Main Street with Centennial banners, while FY26 will mark the program's final year of sponsorship with an event titled "*The Last Dance*," featuring Route 66-inspired dances and songs.

Adams added that the Route 66 Centennial Coordination Group continues to accept project submissions through its online portal for potential endorsement as official Centennial projects. To date, seven projects have been endorsed, including Gallup's Summer Indian Dances & Art Market, a downtown celebration of Indigenous cultures featuring artists and performers from Zuni Pueblo, the Navajo Nation, Ohkay Owingeh, and Apache tribes, scheduled to begin June 2, 2026, with performances on Tuesday through Thursday evenings throughout the summer.

Adams concluded by encouraging communities to continue submitting proposals through the Coordination Group's portal, reminding attendees that project ideas are reviewed year-round for endorsement at the state level and certification by the U.S. Route 66 Centennial Commission.

Chair Lee thanked Acting Secretary Adams for the update and recognized the growing collaboration between the Tourism Department and tribal communities in advancing Centennial projects across the Route 66 corridor.

### **Civil Engineering Activities Regarding the Heritage of Historic Route 66 in NM**

Dr. Roger M. Zimmerman, P.E. (Ret.), F.ASCE, Section Representative, American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) presented an overview of ASCE's involvement in recognizing Route 66 as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark (NHCEL). He explained that this designation, new for 2025, marks the first time an entire historic highway system has been recognized under ASCE's landmark program, rather than a single bridge or structure.

He reviewed the engineering history of Route 66 in New Mexico, noting that early alignments were rerouted several times to shorten travel distance and improve safety. Key civil engineering achievements included the Santa Rosa Cut-Off, which saved 90 miles between Santa Rosa and

Moriarty, and the Laguna Cut-Off, which shortened the route by an additional 17 miles. He described how construction of the Central Avenue Bridge (1930) and Underpass (1937) in Albuquerque provided the state's first grade-separated crossing and established Central Avenue as the principal Route 66 corridor through the city.

Dr. Zimmerman highlighted ASCE's plans to celebrate the designation with a plaque dedication ceremony at 4th Street and Central Avenue, in partnership with the City of Albuquerque, and additional events recognizing key infrastructure sites such as the Rio Puerco Bridge and Central Avenue Underpass. The New Mexico Section of ASCE will also coordinate a series of 2026 library presentations titled "*Rerouting of Route 66 Through New Mexico*," showcasing the engineering innovations that transformed regional travel.

Chair Lee thanked Dr. Zimmerman for documenting the civil engineering legacy of Route 66 and commended ASCE's efforts to ensure that New Mexico's engineering contributions are nationally recognized.

### **Route 66 Connected: An Interactive Exploration of the "Mother Road" through New Mexico**

Dr. Donatella Davanzo introduced the Route 66 Connected project, a long-term research and documentation effort she leads examining the historic and contemporary landscape of Route 66 in New Mexico. She explained that the project began in 2022 and was conceived to offer an interpretive and interactive exploration of the Mother Road through visual documentation, media, and publications.

Dr. Davanzo described herself as a cultural anthropologist who first came to New Mexico in the late 1990s and developed a lasting interest in the cultural and architectural heritage along Route 66. During her doctoral research she worked as a photographer on a UNM-based survey of Central Avenue and the pre-1937 alignment through Fourth Street in Albuquerque, documenting each building, mural, statue, and sign. That documentation evolved into a deeper study of Route 66 as a cultural landscape, forming the foundation of her dissertation in American Studies and Historic Preservation.

She stated that Route 66 Connected focuses on the road's multiple "connections" — its original 1920s role linking urban communities across the country, its Depression-era symbolism as a route of migration and opportunity, and its later transformation through popular culture in the 1960s into an international symbol of Americana. Dr. Davanzo emphasized Route 66's multi-ethnic character, noting the blending of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo influences visible in art, architecture, signage, and cuisine throughout the corridor.

The project's methodology includes photographic surveys, interviews with business owners and managers, and analysis of architectural styles, neon design, and adaptive reuse of historic roadside structures. She reported that the final outputs, include a public-facing website for Route 66 Connected, which provides historical overviews, mapped points of interest, and stories gathered from property owners about preservation, change, and the future of their sites.

Dr. Davanzo concluded by inviting Coordination Group members and community partners to contribute materials and narratives to the project to ensure statewide representation of Route 66's living legacy.

Chair Lee thanked Dr. Davanzo for her presentation and commended her for capturing the cultural and historical dimensions of Route 66 in New Mexico through community-based research and documentation.

### **Visit Albuquerque Route 66 Centennial Marketing**

Ceela McElveny, Vice President of Marketing and Communications, Visit Albuquerque  
Ms. McElveny presented Visit Albuquerque's Route 66 Centennial Marketing Campaign, designed to elevate Albuquerque's visibility as the epicenter of the Route 66 experience. She outlined the city's 18-month advertising campaign featuring online banners, social media and streaming video ads, audio spots, and airport and print placements in partnership with the New Mexico Tourism Department. She shared examples of creative assets, including two new 30-second video spots titled "*The Soul of Route 66*" and "*The Kitsch of Route 66*," and previewed the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport window wrap installation featuring Albuquerque's Route 66 imagery.

McElveny described the campaign's target markets, including Amarillo, Austin, Colorado Springs, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Houston, Los Angeles, Midland, Odessa, and Phoenix, and noted that the messaging emphasizes Albuquerque as "*Still Classic... Forever Cool*," connecting nostalgia with modern travel experiences. She highlighted new features on Route66ABQ.com, including an interactive events calendar, a "Then & Now" photo slider comparing historic and current locations, and integration with New Mexico Magazine's Route 66 microsite and app, which extends the reach of the campaign to statewide audiences.

McElveny also discussed the co-op advertising campaign with NMTD running from August 2025 through June 2026, with paid social media placements in Dallas, West Texas, Denver, Phoenix, and Tucson. The campaign is complemented by national media coverage secured in outlets such as *Travel + Leisure*, *TravelAge West*, and *Leisure Group Travel*, which have all featured Albuquerque's Route 66 attractions in recent stories.

Chair Lee thanked Ms. McElveny for her presentation and commended Visit Albuquerque for its strategic leadership in aligning the city's centennial promotions with the statewide Route 66 Centennial campaign.

### **Route 66 Centennial Subcommittee Report Out: Projects and Activities – Coordination Group Endorsement/Approval**

Chair Bill Lee invited Jason Espinoza, who served as staff to the Route 66 Centennial Subcommittee, to present the Subcommittee Memo of recommended projects. Espinoza was joined by Andria Montoya, Program Manager for the Route 66 Centennial Grant Program with the New Mexico Tourism Department, who assisted in presenting and responding to questions.

Mr. Espinoza began with the Hacienda Shopping Center Revitalization in Albuquerque, a project that will rehabilitate a 1950s Route 66 motel into a mixed-use retail and cultural plaza that preserves historic mid-century design while creating new community space. Ms. Montoya described *Driving Change: Route 66 in New Mexico*, an initiative by the Museum of International Folk Art to develop a statewide series of exhibitions and community events centered on the evolution of Route 66 as a cultural corridor. Next, Mr. Espinoza presented the Route 66 Freedom Festival in Gallup, an expansion of Gallup's annual Route 66 celebration that will incorporate car shows, concerts, and local art installations, emphasizing Native and multicultural heritage. Ms. Montoya followed with the *Gathering of Nations 2026: Route 66 Intertribal Showcase* in Albuquerque, which will feature a dedicated Centennial exhibition within the annual powwow highlighting the history and ongoing contributions of Indigenous communities along Route 66. Ms. Montoya described the Santa Fe Railyard Route 66 Festival, a public celebration connecting the Railyard's art, music, and culinary programming with the Route 66 Centennial through historical storytelling and community collaboration. The next project, *Bridges of Celebration on Santa Rosa Route 66 (Monumental Celebration)*, was discussed jointly by the presenters. Mr. Espinoza explained that the event had originally been planned as a large-scale community festival and public art installation celebrating the historic bridges of Santa Rosa. He clarified that the event had already taken place earlier in 2025 but was canceled midway due to the passing of one of its organizers; therefore, the project would be withdrawn from endorsement consideration. Ms. Montoya continued with *Route 66 Summerfest 2026* in Albuquerque, an expanded version of the city's existing Summerfest event, featuring Route 66 heritage programming, performances, and small business engagement along Central Avenue. She then presented the *First Sunday Route 66 Market at Tumbleroot* in Santa Fe, a recurring artisan market and live music event designed to activate community gathering spaces and celebrate Route 66 culture. Finally, Mr. Espinoza described the *City of Moriarty: Historic Route 66 Signage and Summer Festival*, which will install new interpretive and directional signage throughout Moriarty's historic corridor and host an annual summer event celebrating local Route 66 heritage.

Mr. Espinoza and Ms. Montoya also noted that three additional projects reviewed by the subcommittee were not recommended for endorsement at this time due to lack of confirmed funding: *Chasing Ed Ruscha: 26 Gas Stations Revisited* (Corrales), *Gallup New Deal Art Project* (Gallup), and *Santa Fe Avenue Infrastructure Upgrade* (Grants).

Following discussion, Chair Lee facilitated individual votes on each project.

#### *Motions and Votes*

1. **Hacienda Shopping Center Revitalization (Albuquerque)** – *Motion by Member Johnny Peña to endorse the project, seconded by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón. Motion carried unanimously.*
2. **Driving Change: Route 66 in New Mexico (Santa Fe)** – *Motion by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón to endorse the project, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously.*
3. **Route 66 Freedom Festival (Gallup)** – *Motion by Member Scott Verhines to endorse the project, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously.*

4. **Gathering of Nations 2026: Route 66 Intertribal Showcase (Albuquerque)** – Motion by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón to endorse the project, seconded by Member Johnny Peña. Motion carried unanimously.
5. **Santa Fe Railyard Route 66 Festival (Santa Fe)** – Motion by Member Elmer Torres to endorse the project, seconded by Member Scott Verhines. Motion carried unanimously.
6. **Bridges of Celebration on Santa Rosa Route 66 (Monumental Celebration)** – No motion was made on the Bridges of Celebration on Santa Rosa Route 66 (Monumental Celebration) project; the group agreed by consensus to withdraw the project from consideration due to the passing of an organizer.
7. **Route 66 Summerfest 2026 (Albuquerque)** – Motion by Member Scott Verhines to endorse the project, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously.
8. **First Sunday Route 66 Market at Tumbleroot (Santa Fe)** – Motion by Member Johnny Peña to endorse the project, seconded by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón. Motion carried unanimously.
9. **City of Moriarty: Historic Route 66 Signage and Summer Festival (Moriarty)** – Motion by Member Elmer Torres to endorse the project, seconded by Member Scott Verhines. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Coordination Group Member Updates**

Chair Bill Lee opened the floor for Coordination Group member updates, noting that time was limited but inviting any members who wished to share announcements or progress reports.

No formal updates were provided by members at this time. Chair Lee acknowledged that all members had participated actively throughout the meeting and expressed appreciation for their continued collaboration on Route 66 Centennial initiatives.

Chair Lee then thanked Member Elmer Torres for his leadership in organizing and advancing the day's earlier conversation with tribal representatives, recognizing it as a significant step forward in ensuring tribal perspectives are fully integrated into Centennial planning.

#### **Public Comment**

Chair Bill Lee opened the floor for public comment.

A community member spoke about volunteer opportunities connected to Route 66 Centennial events and shared appreciation for the Coordination Group's outreach. The speaker highlighted preservation work taking place in the Clines Corners area and suggested establishing a network of local volunteer coordinators to assist communities preparing for Centennial celebrations.

A representative from Santa Rosa commented on regional interest in continuing Route 66-related programming despite the earlier cancellation of the *Bridges of Celebration* event. They emphasized that the community remains engaged and would like to pursue additional cultural and tourism activities in partnership with the Tourism Department.

A business owner from Albuquerque discussed the importance of consistent Route 66 signage and wayfinding throughout the corridor. They expressed support for the state's efforts to coordinate marketing and infrastructure investments under a unified Centennial brand.

Following the comments, Chair Lee thanked all speakers for their input and noted that written comments or follow-up materials could be submitted to the New Mexico Tourism Department.

**Adjournment**

With no further business before the Coordination Group, Chair Bill Lee thanked members, agency partners, and guests for their participation and ongoing contributions to Route 66 Centennial planning. He expressed appreciation to the New Mexico Tourism Department staff for coordinating the day's presentations and acknowledged the collaboration of state, tribal, and local partners represented at the meeting.

Motion by Vice Chair Raymond Mondragón to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Member Elmer Torres. Motion carried unanimously. Chair Lee adjourned the meeting at 4:04 p.m.

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Approved by Coordination Group vote at public meeting held on **December 15, 2025**

 *12/15/2025*  
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Coordination Group Chair Bill Lee