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Groundbreaking ceremony marks milestone at Weesh-Chaman Crossing

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its partners celebrated the start of construction for a new project that will improve border control in the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province. The groundbreaking ceremony was held July 6.

The new border control point will be constructed at the crossing between Weesh (Afghanistan) and Chaman (Pakistan), a key entry point for trade passing through Pakistan from East Asia to Afghanistan.

“Customs, the gateway to Afghanistan through Spin Boldak, is in fact a crucial point of entryway to this country,” said Brig. Gen. Abdul Razziq, Kandahar police chief, through an interpreter.

“The Weesh-Chaman crossing is the second busiest entry point into Afghanistan,” said Annette Evans, program manager, Water and Infrastructure Branch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South.

“The border control point will provide the immigration and customs facilities needed by the Afghan border police to improve the flow of traffic across the border,” Evans said. “Because the border control point is designed to make moving goods more efficient, the new facility will increase business opportunities and the collection of customs revenues. This contributes to improved commerce in Afghanistan.”

The existing border facility cannot keep up with the increasing needs, according to an article from the Wakht News Agency.

In addition to Razziq, the groundbreaking ceremony was attended by Associate Professor Dr. Tooryalai Wesa, governor of Kandahar province; Abdul Ghani, district governor; Tim Martin, Representative of Canada in Kandahar; Col. James Edwards, commander, 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade; several Afghan media representatives; and others.

Evans said that the new entry control point project has been in the works for years, and getting to the point of contract award was a collective effort among the government of the Kandahar province, Canada, and the United States.



Col. James Edwards, commander, 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, and representatives from the U.S. State Department, Canada and the Weesh district government, break ground for the customs depot expansion project in Weesh, July 6. (Photo by Senior Airman Jessica Lockoski, 525th BfSB Public Affairs)

“The Canadian government through the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team played a pivotal role in the success of this project,” said Elliott Porter, project manager, Water and Infrastructure Branch. “When GIROA determined the location for the border control point, there were some 80 businesses that were located on that site.

“The relocation was a collective effort among the Afghan, Canadian and U.S. governments,” Porter said. “It was important to the Afghan government to take care of the businesses, and Governor Wesa, General Razziq and the Minister of Finance participated in the discussions. The Afghanistan government provided a land grant for their relocation.

“KPRT developed the plan for relocating the businesses, keeping in mind any cultural sensitivity,” he continued. “They inventoried the businesses and provided them the same amount of space in their new location. They helped them move and compensated them during the move. This was done thoughtfully; it took about 18 months to complete the entire process.”

During the ceremony, Razziq said, “The people that were compensated for the customs land should be proud ... and must know that their support in this matter will help build and strengthen Afghanistan.”

Once the businesses were moved, AED-South awarded a \$21 million construction contract that includes a customs police compound, administrative areas, dining facilities, warehouses, pump house, water treatment facility and entry control points. The contract also includes living facilities for the full-time police personnel stationed there – both male and female.

“The new border control point will have about 10 times the footprint of the current border control point,” Porter said. “Before construction fully starts, the existing customs area will be relocated from the area where the new construction will take place.”

AED-South is working with the Border Management Task Force, which is mentoring the police force, to make sure the facilities meet the needs of the Afghan government.

“The new border facility is part of a broader program – called the borders package – to improve freedom of movement from the Pakistan border to Kandahar City,” Porter said. The package includes construction of roads in and around Spin Boldak and bypasses around the Arghistan and Tarnak bridges.

“The roads contract includes building a paved road from Spin Boldak to the Weesh border control point and widening the road to four lanes through Spin Boldak,” Porter said. “The improved roads will ease traffic from the border crossing which is currently a chokepoint, through Spin Boldak which is heavily populated. The bypasses are a redundant measure to keep traffic moving on Highway 4 if the bridges are damaged or attacked.”

The 525th, under ISAF Regional Command South, provides security for Highway 4 (from the Pakistan border through Spin Boldak to Kandahar City) and the Weesh border crossing point. The Brigade has been working with the government agencies to prepare and secure the site for the border facility. In addition to the businesses, the Brigade rebuilt a school and moved students from the site.

“All these efforts together – the border control point, the roads through Spin Boldak and the bypasses – will help create the conditions for GIROA to benefit from increased revenue to put back into government services,” Evans said.

The Afghan border police are part of the Afghan National Security Forces. Border police provide a general law enforcement capability at international borders and entry points and in the Border Security Zone, which extends 50 km into Afghan territory. Border police also deter and detect illegal entry and other criminal activity, and they control pedestrian and vehicular traffic at border crossing points.

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