

Wednesday, January 18, 2023, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation formally responded to the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's application to cross two sections of its property for turnpike expansion under the ACCESS Oklahoma plan. Citing Congressionally authorized purposes for the land, the agency denied OTA's application along the route of the South Extension turnpike as it does not meet the land's intended purposes. USBR owns the land on which The Norman Project (Lake Thunderbird, the Norman Dam, and the associated water conveyance system) is located.

OTA's proposed alignment took into consideration the least impactful route, relating to homes, businesses and the environment. It was also the most beneficial for future traffic growth. OTA appreciates the feedback from the agency as well as its willingness to work with the OTA to identify other prospective crossings. "This is the planning process working as it should. New alignments often get changed early on," says OTA Deputy Director and Chief Engineer Joe Echelle. "Now we'll start gathering information to make adjustments. We've got time since the South Extension is in the final phase of the 15-year, long-range plan."

The decision will require OTA modify the direction of the proposed alignment of the South Extension turnpike to avoid USBR fee title land. The agency did indicate willingness to work with OTA on an alignment across pipeline and flowage easements. OTA will continue to coordinate and plan the East-West Connector to ensure the easement crossings are planned, designed and constructed without interfering with the easement interests or the Norman Project's infrastructure or operation.