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## **Officials unveil first look at ACCESS Oklahoma turnpike plan Projects connect corridors, communities**

Gov. Kevin Stitt and Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz presented ACCESS Oklahoma, a \$5 billion, 15-year long-range plan, to the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board of Directors during its February meeting Tuesday.

ACCESS Oklahoma, which stands for Advancing and Connecting Communities and Economies Safely Statewide, is a comprehensive, long-range planning process that looks at ongoing highway infrastructure needs for the next 15 years. It is designed to improve access to communities and help meet the state's future infrastructure needs. This is the first plan of its type by OTA, and it will complement the agency's five-year Capital Improvement Program.

Stitt, an ex-officio member of the board, and Gatz highlighted for the board the benefits ACCESS Oklahoma will bring to the state and previewed the proposed new turnpike alignments.

"The future of our economy will depend on having a modern highway system that manages congestion and reliable travel times," Stitt said. "ACCESS Oklahoma is a bold investment in our future that provides needed corridor connections and expansions while making travel easier and leading to more economic development across the state."

Features of ACCESS Oklahoma include:

- Widening the Turner Turnpike to six lanes between Oklahoma City and Bristow, which will create a six-lane highway for the entirety of the turnpike between the state's two largest metros.
- The construction of reliever routes around Oklahoma's two largest metropolitan areas.
- Off- and on-ramps constructed on the existing turnpike system, improving traffic safety for additional rural Oklahoma communities.

Many communities have offered tremendous positive feedback on the future of the turnpike system following the completion of recent projects such as the Kickapoo Turnpike in eastern Oklahoma County and the John Kilpatrick extension in southwest Oklahoma City as well as the ongoing Gilcrease Expressway project. These

communities are seeking opportunities to coordinate infrastructure planning with their ongoing economic development efforts.

“ACCESS Oklahoma is a strategic corridor plan that focuses on travel time reliability, easing congestion in our metro areas, moving freight across the state and adding access to communities that previously were not connected to turnpikes,” Gatz said. “Addressing these needs will directly impact citizens’ quality of life while enhancing the state’s infrastructure for future growth. But most importantly, each of these projects will improve highway safety for motorists.”

The board hired Poe & Associates, an Oklahoma City-based engineering consultant, during the January 2022 board meeting to provide program management services for ACCESS Oklahoma’s long-range plan projects.

ACCESS Oklahoma will be fully paid for with bonds and will not affect any part of the state budgeting process. Revenue will not be diverted from other state priorities. Revenues from tolls, investments and concession leases pay all operating and maintenance costs for the turnpikes and pay off the bonds issued to finance their construction.

To learn more about the plan, go to [www.AccessOklahoma.com](http://www.AccessOklahoma.com).

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#### **ABOUT OKLAHOMA TURNPIKE AUTHORITY**

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board of Directors consists of the Governor (ex-officio) and six members serving without pay for eight-year terms from districts established in state statute. The members are appointed to represent geographical districts. OTA operates in compliance with trust agreements that define operating procedures.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority uses cross-pledging, which was voted upon by Oklahoma citizens in 1954 and placed into Oklahoma statute the following year - Title 69-1705. Cross-pledging allows tolls from one turnpike to be used to build, expand or maintain other turnpikes as needed. Turnpikes are always built where an alternate, non-tolled road exists.