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May Board Meeting Wrap-Up

OTA program manager: ACCESS Oklahoma projects on schedule

Ongoing construction work to widen the I-44/Turner Turnpike to six lanes near Bristow, Stroud and Wellston is progressing on schedule the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board learned at its monthly Board meeting Tuesday.

OTA is using safety innovations such as a bridge conveyor belt to more safely move concrete into the middle area of the Bristow work zone and temporary rumble strips when entering the Wellston bridge reconstruction project to signal that motorists should slow down in this area, said Ladan Nelson, OTA's ACCESS Oklahoma program manager, during her quarterly update to the Board. Both measures improve motorist safety and travel time.

"The bridge conveyor (over the Turner Turnpike) has delivered more than 20,000 cubic yards of concrete to the middle of the project," Nelson said of work completed since the conveyor's installation in January. "This is (equivalent to) filling more than 200 residential swimming pools with concrete." Using the conveyor belt for concrete materials significantly lessens the number of trucks that must enter and exit traffic to reach the area where new lanes are being added on the \$98 million project between Bristow and Kellyville. The project is just more than 50 percent complete with work expected to be finished in early 2026, weather permitting.

Another key safety feature on the Turner Turnpike project is a service patrol vehicle that made 106 motorist assists within the Bristow to Kellyville work zone during the first quarter of 2025. This free service provided by OTA helps stranded motorists who may have run out of fuel, or their vehicle was disabled. Moving stranded vehicles out of the

work zone as quickly as possible significantly lessens the possibility of crashes, Nelson said.

Other ACCESS Oklahoma long-range plan highlights include:

- The I-44/Turner Turnpike widening and the Stroud service plaza reconstruction project is 35 percent complete. This \$38.5 million project will realign westbound I-44/Turner Turnpike lanes to the south next to existing eastbound Turner Turnpike lanes. Motorists should expect a major lane shift in early summer to move westbound lanes to the south of the service plaza. New facilities for the Love's Travel Stop and the McDonald's plus additional truck parking are under construction at the service plaza. Currently, the parking lot and McDonald's are closed due to construction, but motorists may still pull in for fuel and restrooms. Work is expected to be completed in early 2026, weather permitting.
- The \$48 million I-44/Turner Turnpike bridge reconstruction and widening project at SH-66 in Wellston has reached the half-way mark and is scheduled to be completed in fall 2025. Last week, the contractor began installing new bridge beams. Nelson also noted that the temporary rumble strips have been very successful at signaling motorists to slow down as they enter this work zone. Speed was the main factor in several crashes in this area prior to the rumble strip installation. Crews will be updating the rumble strips in the next couple of weeks.
- The \$14.7 million project to widen the I-344/John Kilpatrick Turnpike to six lanes between Eastern Ave. and I-35 in Oklahoma City is 30 percent complete and expected to be fully open to traffic in fall 2025. This project also includes improving the eastbound John Kilpatrick ramp to northbound I-35 with a 12-foot acceleration lane to I-35 and adding a 10-foot shoulder.
- Four new interchanges on three turnpikes are now in the design phase. A significant part of the ACCESS Oklahoma improvements will be new interchanges on existing turnpikes to improve safety and add connections to communities. These new interchanges are made possible due to the cashless conversion of all turnpikes completed in late 2024. These new interchanges include:
 - An estimated \$28.6 million interchange on US-412/Cimarron Turnpike at SH-108/Rose Rd. to Glencoe;
 - An estimated nearly \$13 million interchange on SH-375/Indian Nation Turnpike at US-69 to McAlester;
 - An estimated \$20 million interchange on I-44/H.E. Bailey at US-277 to Cement and Ninnekah; and
 - An estimated nearly \$7 million interchange on I-44/H.E. Bailey at SH-92 to Chickasha.

- Nelson also noted the upcoming public meetings in Norman and Purcell to gather resident input on the location of the South Extension Turnpike. More information about the public input meetings and other ACCESS Oklahoma projects including 60 percent design plans may be found at www.accessoklahoma.com.

The board also approved an on-demand design contract modification with Olsson Inc. The new amount is not to exceed \$5.8 million of the total \$21.8 million contract. Olsson Inc. will provide engineering design work on eight projects for the I-44/Turner Turnpike, the SH-375/Indian Nation Turnpike and the I-344/John Kilpatrick Turnpike.

Cleveland County frontage roads

OTA also shared that it soon would restart the design process for frontage roads along the East-West Connector, following a resolution passed in March by the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners. The resolution requested that frontage roads be added back to the design after the City of Norman initially declined to take on their maintenance. Since OTA proceeded with the design of the East-West Connector without incorporating frontage roads, some sections will be added after turnpike construction begins and, in some cases, after turnpike construction completes.

OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle praised Cleveland County's leadership, noting that the county's commitment to maintain the frontage roads ensures residents and motorists have options for connectivity.

"We think this is a great decision," Echelle said. "It's going to provide the best flow of traffic in the local area and will provide benefits to the area once it's complete."

'Smishing' scam texts in Oklahoma

In recent weeks, OTA has increased communication and customer service to alert the public about a recent surge in scam texts sent to Oklahomans. In these texts, scammers pose as OTA or PIKEPASS, attempting to deceive people into thinking they owe money on a PlatePay or PIKEPASS toll. To date, more than 420 fraudulent websites have impersonated PIKEPASS.com, and more than 60,000 scam-related sites have been identified nationwide.

OTA is working to raise awareness through media stories, social media posts, advertising and signage, urging people to be vigilant. Report suspicious texts to the Federal Trade Commission by copying and pasting the scam text and sending it to 7726 or visiting www.pikepass.com/updates for an Oklahoma specific reporting link. Director Echelle also encouraged people to share this information with loved ones, who possibly might be tricked by the scam.

OTA recognized by Keep America Beautiful

OTA's partnership with Keep Oklahoma Beautiful received the 2024 Keep America Beautiful State Agency Partnership Award. Evelyn Schaefer, executive director of Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, presented the award for OTA's commitment to environmental stewardship and its unwavering dedication to ensuring more beautiful communities. OTA supports several Keep Oklahoma Beautiful programs including anti-litter education, the Great American Cleanup and the Environmental Excellence awards celebration.



The OTA Board and executive leadership are joined by Keep Oklahoma Beautiful Executive Director Evelyn Schaefer, center front row, on Tuesday at the May OTA Board meeting. Shafer presented the 2024 Keep America Beautiful State Agency Partnership Award to the agency.

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