

Open House Public Involvement Summary



SOUTH EXTENSION TURNPIKE Cleveland and McClain Counties, Oklahoma

Prepared by:



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OVERVIEW

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) has initiated a renewed evaluation of the South Extension Turnpike (SET) alignment. The SET is a proposed turnpike intended to improve traffic flow and safety along the I-35 corridor by providing an alternative route to alleviate congestion and support regional mobility. This renewed effort focuses on identifying a revised alignment that avoids the Bureau of Reclamation property at Lake Thunderbird and addresses community concerns.

At the March 2025 OTA Board Meeting, the Authority formally announced the start of this alignment modification process. An email update was also sent to key stakeholders, encouraging public participation and directing them to a dedicated project website for updates and feedback opportunities: AccessOklahoma.com.

Following the announcement, OTA engaged Poe & Associates to lead the engineering review and public engagement efforts. The engineering team began by reassessing the South Extension area, with a specific focus on avoiding impacts to Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) fee title lands around Lake Thunderbird.

Two public open house meetings were organized to gather public input:

- May 21, 2025 | 5–7:00 p.m. | Purcell Multi-Purpose Center, 1400 Chandler Road
- May 27, 2025 | 5–7:00 p.m. | Countdown Event Center, 3201 Deskin Drive

These were informal, come-and-go style meetings that began with a brief presentation. Attendees could review large-scale maps, mark concerns using sticky notes and markers, and access an online interactive map. OTA staff were available to answer questions and provide additional information. After the meetings, the online map remained open for continued public input through June 30.

Throughout the meetings, OTA emphasized its commitment to listening to community feedback while also addressing long-standing safety and congestion issues along I-35. The Authority reiterated that the SET project has received legal validation from the Oklahoma Supreme Court, and that public input is essential to refining the alignment into the most effective and community-sensitive solution.

INTRODUCTION

The South Extension Turnpike is a key component of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's ACCESS Oklahoma Long Range Plan. This proposed turnpike extension is designed to connect the East-West Connector to Interstate 35 near Purcell, serving as a reliever route for the congested I-35 Corridor. The project has undergone several stages, including planning, public engagement, legal challenges, and proposed design considerations.

SOUTH EXTENSION PROJECT OVERVIEW

Initially announced in February 2022, the South Extension Turnpike is part of the ACCESS Oklahoma program, 15-year \$8.2 billion initiative to improve Oklahoma's turnpike system. The original alignment proposed a route near Lake Thunderbird. However, in January 2023, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation responded to OTA's application to cross sections of its property, citing that it did not meet the congressionally authorized purposes for the land. This decision necessitated a shift in the proposed alignment westward. OTA had paused work on the South Extension Corridor in December 2022 and resumed planning efforts after the announcement at the March 2025 OTA Board meeting.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND MEETINGS

OTA has emphasized public involvement throughout the project's development. In April 2022, a series of four public meetings were hosted to discuss new alignments in the ACCESS program. Following the announcement of the alignment shift, OTA organized additional public meetings to gather input from residents, property owners, and business owners in Cleveland and McClain counties. The meetings were May 21, 2025 in Purcell and May 27, 2025 in Norman. The public meetings were held to collect feedback on the original proposed alignment shifting to the west and to inform the public about the project's purpose, timeline, design process and right-of-way process.

The meetings provided a platform for community members to express concerns and suggestions, particularly regarding the impact on properties and local environments. OTA encouraged attendees to share information with the engineering design team to help modify the previous alignment and determine the least impactful location while addressing growing traffic needs in the area. Public comments were accepted on the South Extension Realignment Virtual Meeting platform through June 30, 2025, allowing for continued community input beyond the in-person public meetings.

SOUTH EXTENSION TIMELINE AND STATUS

- **December 7, 2021:** OTA announced the intent to develop a 15-year long-range transportation infrastructure improvement plan.
- **February 22, 2022:** Details of the ACCESS Oklahoma Program were announced, and the supporting website was published.
- **March 11, 2022:** Engineering teams were assigned to specific projects to begin preliminary design and necessary studies.
- **April 14-21, 2022:** OTA hosted a series of four public meetings to discuss new alignments in the ACCESS program. (Noble, Newcastle, Norman and Moore)
- **December 8, 2022:** OTA placed all work on the South Extension Corridor on pause.
- **January 18, 2023:** The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation found OTA's application to cross sections of its property to not be compatible with the intended use of the lake.
- **April 14, 2023:** OTA placed all work on the ACCESS program on pause.
- **October 17, 2023:** The first ACCESS Program bond sale occurred.

- **March 4, 2025:** OTA announced that it will begin planning efforts to realign the South Extension Turnpike in accordance with the findings of the Bureau of Reclamation.
- **April 21, 2025:** Announcement of public meeting dates, times and locations.
- **May 19, 2025:** Public meeting scheduled for Norman postponed due to extreme weather conditions. Meeting was rescheduled for May 27, 2025.
- **May 21, & 27, 2025:** Public meetings were held in Purcell and Norman to gather input on the revised alignment.
- **June 30, 2025:** Deadline for public comment submissions.

OPEN HOUSE PUBLIC MEETINGS

MEETING NOTIFICATIONS

A total of 1,032 email notifications were sent to emails we have received through the ACCESS contact log announcing the public meeting dates, times and locations. Additionally, press releases were reported by multiple television and newspaper outlets in the area along with social media posts encouraging attendance and engagement with the program team.

INFORMATION AND FORMAT

The open house public meeting in Purcell was held from 5-7 p.m. Wednesday, May 21, 2025 at the Purcell Multi-Purpose Center at 1400 Chandler Park Road in Purcell. This meeting was opened with a brief presentation and then attendees had an opportunity to visit the project tables. The open house had multiple stations where people could visit and speak to staff representing expertise in engineering, utility coordination and relocation, right-of-way acquisition, and environmental permitting and compliance. At these stations there were handouts that included comment cards where attendees could provide written comments and access the virtual meeting platform using the QR code and 4-foot-by-6-foot rollout maps where attendees could write comments. Additionally, posters were placed throughout the room that included a QR code to access the virtual meeting platform.

The open house public meeting in Norman the following week was conducted in the same format. This meeting was held from 5-7 p.m. Tuesday, May 27, 2025 (after weather postponement from May 19) at the Countdown Event Center at 3201 Deskin Drive in Norman. As with the Purcell meeting, this meeting was opened with a brief presentation and then attendees had an opportunity to visit the project tables.

COMMENTS

A total of 606 comments were received from various sources as indicated in the table below.

	Purcell Public Meeting Comment Summary	Norman Public Meeting Comment Summary	ACCESS SET Online Comments	Public Meeting Comments On Maps	Total
General Support	4		7	7	18
General Opposition	2	15	75	75	167
Structure - Home, School, Cemetery	2	3	43	42	90
Bureau of Reclamation Ruling	1		5	1	7
Turnpike Alignment Suggestion/Question	6	10	54	27	97
General ROW Suggestion/Question			6	3	9
Environment - Air Quality			2	6	8
Environment - T&E Species/Wildlife		1	4	3	8
Environment - Water Quality/Flooding		10	16	24	50
Environment - Noise		1	9	2	12
East-West Connector Inquiry		1	8		9
Environment - Rose Rocks		1	2	12	15
Multimodal Suggestion			1	2	3
Utility Identification			3	24	27
Environment - General			15	7	22
General Inquiry	3	4	42	15	64
Total	18	46	292	250	606

One-third of the comments provided general support, opposition or inquiries that did not directly relate to the realignment of the South Extension Turnpike. Another one-third of the comments gave recommendations to consider as more detailed design is undertaken in form of noise mitigation, multimodal suggestions, wildlife considerations, or air quality concerns. About one-third of the comments provided alternate alignment options to consider or identify structures to avoid, areas prone to flooding, and utility locations. Alignment suggestions included:

- Keep the proposed 2022 alignment
- Along SH-9 east and SH-102 north to I-40
- Close to I-35 or a second level to I-35
- Alignment between SE 60th and SE 72nd Streets
- Alignment between SE 48th and SE 60th Streets
- Alignment between SE 48th and SE 60th Streets that goes west to I-35, just south of SH-9
- New location of I-35 Interchange just north of proposed 2022 alignment
- A few various alignments east of Lake Thunderbird

CLOSING

The ACCESS Oklahoma team sincerely thanks all community members, stakeholders, and attendees who participated in the South Extension Turnpike public meetings and contributed feedback through the virtual platform. The thoughtful, constructive comments and suggestions have been invaluable in assisting with the alignment refinement process. The team deeply appreciates the time, insight, and engagement shown by everyone involved. Public input plays a critical role in helping to develop a solution that balances transportation safety and needs with community values and environmental stewardship. The constructive nature of this input helps the team maintain the proposed timeline of releasing a new alignment in Fall 2025.