



OKLAHOMA
Transportation



Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project

Project Description

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FY23 RAISE Grant Application

RAISE Grant Request: \$20 million

1. Project Description

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project (Project) is a critical infrastructure investment that will improve safety, quality of life, and economic opportunity for Hochatown and the surrounding communities in rural McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) requests \$20 million in Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant funding to support the construction of a new, multi-use pedestrian trail and the reconstruction of US-259 to improve vehicular operations and enhance safety for all roadway users.

1.1 PROJECT NEED

US-259 is a vital transportation link that provides access for recreational opportunities, commercial traffic, logging trucks, tourists, and local and regional commuters. The Project area is located along US-259, approximately 6.25 miles north of SH-3 Junction and extending north 6 miles into Hochatown. Hochatown is a small rural community within McCurtain County, Oklahoma is designated as a Historically Disadvantaged Community as well as an Area of Persistent Poverty (Census Tracts 982 and 985). Hochatown was originally a Choctaw tribal settlement, now known as the Hochatown Valley on the eastern side of the Mountain Fork River. In the 1960s, Hochatown was moved to its current location situated along US-259 so the Federal Government could construct Broken Bow Lake. For generations, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has been the bedrock of the Hochatown community and its culture.



Over the past 3 years, the area has experienced a substantial increase in growth due to land investment opportunities for cabin rentals and popular trending tourist destinations. Hochatown is home to approximately 250 residents; however, on any given weekend, during holidays, or seasonally, the town hosts more than 30,000¹ people. In 2021, Beavers Bend State Park reported approximately 2.2 million visitors making it the most visited state park in Oklahoma. Because of the influx of visitors, congestion and associated safety challenges along US-259 are



Segment of US-259 Approaching Hochatown

¹ <https://www.texarkanagazette.com/news/2022/nov/28/its-official-tourist-haven-hochatown-okla-now-a/>

becoming more frequent and are expected to worsen in the foreseeable future.

The existing US-259 within the Project area contains a two-lane, undivided roadway with limited shoulder widths and stormwater conveyed through roadside ditches. There are only limited left or right turning lanes, but no existing bicycle or pedestrian facilities. The highway also provides access to over 100 residential and commercial driveways. The Project will improve vehicular movements, enhance overall safety, and provide a reliable infrastructure investment in a rural community that is often overlooked.

1.2 TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Improvements to US-259 are needed to address the rapid growth occurring in Hochatown. Congestion along US-259 is becoming more frequent, and the safety of its users is increasingly threatened as traffic volume and collision rates increase. Additionally, there are concerns for access management to local businesses. There are no secondary roads to US-259, therefore, all traffic must use the highway through Hochatown. With the increase in growth and the recent incorporation of Hochatown, the need for transportation planning has become a necessity to support the social and economic infrastructure of a rural community. In addition, logging is the primary industry of this region, with large transport trucks needing to share the same roadway with the very tourist dense highway within Hochatown.

The existing US-259 has limited designated turning lanes and no bicycle or pedestrian facilities. Large towing vehicles, logging trucks, and other trailers are unable to make left turns onto side streets or into commercial areas under existing conditions which causes traffic backups. These backups result in significant traffic delays and rear-end collisions from vehicles attempting to make the left-turn movement. At times, vehicles may make sudden movements across traffic into commercial areas creating a higher safety risk to those traveling along US-259.

These challenges, along with the booming growth in the area necessitated immediate interim relief at several intersections along US-259. In 2022, ODOT installed temporary traffic signals with turn bays located at SH-259A North and South, and Stevens Gap Road. ODOT also restriped the intersection at Stevens Gap Road along US-259 to provide a lengthened two-way left turn lane to help facilitate turning movements and promote safety.



Traffic Backups are frequent on US-259 through Hochatown



Logging trucks utilize US-259 through Hochatown

Although these improvements provided some benefit and relief, the rate of growth through the area is impacting the overall livelihood and safety for both locals and tourists. Not only will the Project relieve traffic congestion and improve operational efficiency along the corridor, but the new multi-use trail will also provide an alternative, healthy, multimodal connection that residents and visitors alike can use to safely access all of Hochatown’s amenities.

Ultimately, the Project will help provide a safe mode of travel for the historically disadvantaged communities in the area and an improved experience to access local businesses and recreational areas in Hochatown. Figure 1 illustrates the project location and the proposed elements.

Figure 1. Project Elements



1.3 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF WORK DETAILS

For the past several years, ODOT has worked collaboratively with the Hochatown community to advance a thoughtful solution that will address the challenges along the corridor. On October 27, 2022, ODOT held a community outreach event at the Broken Bow Senior High School to present the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project. The presentation included a brief background and existing conditions of the Project area, Project goals, interim improvements, current operational traffic volumes, and the findings of the level-of-service analysis.

The design for the Hochatown Community Access and Safety project is expected to be complete by October 2023. Target construction letting is August 2024 and construction will begin in December 2024. The Project is anticipated to be open and fully operational by May 2026.

The specific scope elements that will be advanced as part of the project include the following:

- Modify the intersection at Stevens Gap Road, SH-259A North and South
- Provide adequate capacity to handle traffic demands
- Install new curb and gutter and retaining walls to minimize project impacts
- Update advanced warning signage for speed reductions
- Improve drainage structures, including headwalls and end treatments
- Improve access management and reduce conflict points
- Install sidewalks and minimum shoulder widths
- Construct a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian trail

1.4 AN IDEAL RAISE GRANT PROJECT FOR A GROWING RURAL COMMUNITY

On November 28, 2022, Hochatown became an incorporated city within McCurtain County. This new local government has limited public services or infrastructure to serve the growing tourists and businesses that are flocking to the area, but is eager to plan and deliver the improvements that are needed for the community.

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project is an ideal RAISE grant candidate as it will provide immediate relief and long-term benefits to a historically disadvantaged community with constrained transportation infrastructure.

The benefit-cost analysis for the project resulted in a benefit-cost ratio of 2 indicating that the benefits of the project are more than double of the costs.

The Project addresses each of the eight RAISE merit criteria as shown in the following table, and described in more detail in the Merit Criteria section of this application.

Table 1. Merit Criteria and Project Benefits

RAISE Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the RAISE Merit Criteria
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protects nonmotorized travelers and communities from safety risks by constructing crossing improvements, new traffic lights at intersections, and completing a multi-use bike and pedestrian path adjacent to US-259. ▪ New street lighting in the urban area of Hochatown will improve nighttime visibility and reduce collisions involving dark conditions. ▪ The US-259 corridor through Hochatown experiences collision rates that are 3x higher than the statewide average. The Project will reduce serious injuries in this underserved rural community. ▪ Project elements such as the dedicated center turning lane and the installation of street and permanent traffic lighting will reduce the risk of vehicular crashes by 50%.
Environmental Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Installation of new curbs and gutters in some locations will help manage stormwater more effectively, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillover into the watershed. ODOT will evaluate drainage solutions along the corridor as design advances. ▪ Warm mixed asphalt will reduce visible air emissions and produce lower greenhouse gas emissions. ▪ Construction of the Project will reduce 16,500 tons of CO2 emissions due to the capacity improvements reducing congestion and reduced VMT from increase in walking/cycling.
Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The lane expansion and multi-use trail will improve access to daily destinations, such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks.
Mobility and Community Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The multi-use trail will include Americans with Disabilities Act improvements and enhance the mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown. Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and feedback from the community. ▪ Expanding US-259 lane capacity will restore the flow of traffic, reduce travel delays, and create a safer experience for motorized and nonmotorized travelers. ▪ Improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists are expected to generate over 162,000 additional pedestrian trips and 34,000 cycling trips in the opening year.
Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beneficial long-term efficiencies for reduced travel time, increased travel time reliability, tourism, and job opportunities in the region. ▪ The lane expansion and designated center turning lane will provide more efficient access to local businesses and planned future job opportunities, and will serve overall to stimulate growth and economic development. ▪ Construction of the Project will create approximately 2,000 jobs.
State of Good Repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construction of the Project will create a modernized, safer expanded highway with a shared-use path to support connectivity along the corridor and improve overall conditions for a traditionally underserved and disadvantage community. ▪ Reduction in vehicle miles traveled from those switching to walking for some short trips will produce a state of good repair savings of \$99,000.
Partnership and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ODOT will continue to collaborate with the community members of Hochatown, McCurtain County, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and others to ensure the Project will support all community stakeholders.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ODOT will employ the use of dynamic message signs to inform the public of public meetings and during construction. ▪ ODOT will continue to explore inclusion of solar powered lighting throughout design development ▪ ODOT will evaluate the use of AI-improved traffic signal systems/components