

PROJECT UPDATE MEETING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMPROVEMENTS TO US-259 IN HOCHATOWN
MCCURTAIN COUNTY
JOB PIECE NUMBER 34333(04)

Prepared for:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) hosted a project update meeting on September 24, 2024. ODOT held the meeting at the Hochatown First Assembly of God in Hochatown, Oklahoma. Eighty-one people signed in at the meeting.

The meeting focused on the ability to walk, park, and keep the unique feeling of the area. The project team presented the existing conditions and potential designs. ODOT staff and consultants provided information and answered questions. ODOT requested input from the public about their concerns. The public could submit written comments at the meeting. They could also submit comments by mail, email, or voicemail during the comment period. A website with project materials was available for the public to view after the meeting.

Public Comment Topics and Responses

ODOT received 27 comments on the potential designs at the meeting. ODOT received 19 comments during the comment period. The topics of the comments are summarized below. ODOT's response is given for each topic. The comments ODOT received often addressed several topics.

Topic – Support of Project

Topic Summary: Commenters expressed support for the proposed project.

Response: *Thank you for your comment. ODOT appreciates you taking part in the public involvement process. ODOT values your feedback and input.*

Topic – Walkability

Topic Summary: Commenters have concerns about walkability. Commenters requested:

- Wider sidewalks
- Crosswalks at high-use areas
- Crosswalk signals to help control traffic
- A multiuse trail, and
- Crosswalks at specific locations (near Hochatown Saloon, between Old West Town Toys & Gifts and The Hochahut, at Choctaw Landing, at the Maze, and at the proposed parking lots).

Commenters worried about the ability of pedestrians to cross five lanes of traffic. One commenter does not believe pedestrians will use sidewalks and requested no sidewalks in front of their business.

Response: *ODOT will consider your recommendations about walkability. ODOT plans to include sidewalks, crosswalks, and medians in the project to improve pedestrian access. ODOT will continue to work with the community about this topic during the design phase and during construction.*

Topic – Parking

Topic Summary: Commenters stated preferences about parking. The comments included:

- The parking lot next to Girls Gone Wine should be a priority.
- The proposed parking area at Stevens Gap Rd and US-259 should be moved to the west and across the street to avoid clearing trees.

- Flooding occurs at the proposed parking area next to Yashau Creek, at the intersection of Camp Ranch Rd and US-259.
- Community parking is needed at the Hochatown Petting Zoo.
- Development is planned for the potential parking area at the intersection of Spearfish Rd and US-259.
- Shuttle bus parking should be considered at the potential parking area at Stevens Gap Rd and US-259.
- Parking areas will be expensive and difficult for Hochatown to maintain.
- Businesses will lose parking spaces because of the proposed project.
- One commenter has land that they would sell to the State for the potential parking area near the Saloon, Petting Zoo, and Shopping Center.

Response: *ODOT and the Town of Hochatown are working together to improve parking in the community. Improvements include adding public parking options and drop-off locations for shuttles to help move large groups of people.*

Topic – Aesthetics

Topic Summary: Commenters stated preferences about aesthetics of the proposed project. The comments included:

- Do not use grass medians because of water usage and maintenance requirements. Brick and concrete medians would avoid maintenance issues.
- Native plants and natural crushed stone should be to be used in the medians.
- Low-impact lighting would minimize light pollution in the area.
- The 5-lane alternative will destroy the unique feeling of the Hochatown area.
- The 5-lane alternative will create a “city” feel and counteract the outdoor feel that attracts people to the area.

Response: *ODOT will look at successful road improvement projects in similar tourist areas to help with project design. ODOT is committed to working closely with the community about how the project can enhance the look of the area. Adding attractive medians and lighting are examples of how ODOT can help make the area safer, keep traffic moving, and make it look nicer.*

Topic – Safety

Topic Summary: Several people commented on safety. These comments include:

- The project will improve safety.
- The lack of shoulders between the sidewalks and the highway is concerning.
- The 3-lane road will allow for safer pedestrian access at crosswalks.
- Crosswalk signals will stop traffic and allow pedestrians to cross safely.
- Safety for travelers during construction is a concern.
- Evacuations in the area is a concern, and a bypass should be built to provide a variety of ways to travel out of the area.
- The 3-lane alternative is safer for pedestrians because crossing five lanes of traffic is not safe.

Response: *The proposed improvements will meet the safety standards set by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and ODOT. The main goal of the project is to enhance safety on US-259.*

Topic – Visibility

Topic Summary: Commenters expressed the following concerns:

- Taller plants in landscaped medians will block a driver’s ability to see oncoming traffic.

- Concrete and brick medians will be low maintenance and will not hinder a driver's visibility.

Response: *ODOT will consider these suggestions during the design phase. ODOT will work with the community about the aesthetic treatments.*

Topic – Turning Left

Topic Summary: One commenter expressed concern about turning left in and out of driveways across traffic because of the potential median.

Response: *Thank you for your recommendations on how we can improve US-259. ODOT will consider your recommendation and continue to work with the community about driveway access. Adding a center lane will help drivers see oncoming traffic. More lanes in each direction will reduce traffic congestion, which allows for increased spacing between signals and interchanges.*

Topic – Semi-Trucks

Topic Summary: Commenters worry that semi-trucks will have trouble navigating the road and driveways because of the medians and sidewalks.

Response: *Thank you. ODOT is considering semi-truck access as part of the design considerations.*

Topic – Shoulders

Topic Summary: One commenter wants a shoulder between the road and the sidewalk.

Response: *ODOT will consider this suggestion.*

Topic –Highway Lighting

Topic Summary: Comments on lighting include:

- Lighting is necessary for the highway.
- Low-impact lighting will avoid light pollution.
- Lighting is not wanted.

Response: *ODOT will consider these suggestions about lighting during the design phase. ODOT will keep working with the community about preferences.*

Topic – Bypass

Topic Summary: Some people want a bypass around Hochatown instead of the proposed roadway expansion through Hochatown.

Response: *ODOT has no plans for a bypass or alternate route at this time. The proposed project will improve US-259 within the existing right-of-way to enhance safety and operation. These improvements are necessary due to substantial growth in the area.*

Topic – Traffic

Topic Summary: Commenters have opposing opinions on traffic in the project area, including:

- The proposed project will reduce congestion in the area.
- The area between Broken Bow and Hochatown have worse traffic congestion than the northern part of Hochatown.
- Traffic improved after ODOT installed stop lights.

Response: *ODOT studied the traffic flow on the US-259 corridor. The proposed project is being designed to make the corridor safer while reducing congestion. ODOT evaluates traffic demands for short term needs as well as estimated long term needs when planning projects. ODOT will monitor traffic in the area to guide the design.*

Topic – Traffic Data

Topic Summary: Commenters questioned ODOT's use of traffic data.

Response: *ODOT used current and past traffic data to evaluate the corridor. ODOT collected data from throughout the project limits. The data covers current and past timeframes. This data guides the design and is used to monitor traffic patterns.*

Topic – Prefers 3-Lane Alternative

Topic Summary: Several commenters prefer the 3-lane option.

Response: *ODOT understands some people prefer a 3-lane option. ODOT selected the 5-lane option because of:*

- *The need for safe and effective traffic flow along the corridor,*
- *Public support for the 5-lane over the 3-lane configuration, and*
- *Hochatown's resolution endorsing the 5-lane design.*

Topic – Effects to Business

Topic Summary: Commenters are concerned that construction will affect local businesses.

Response: *ODOT will maintain business access during construction. This project will stay within the current right-of-way to limit effects on private property.*

Topic – Traffic Speed

Topic Summary: Several people requested the speed limit be lowered on the roadway. Some are concerned that drivers will weave in and out of lanes and create dangerous road conditions.

Response: *The speed limit ranges from 45 to 65 miles per hour in the area. ODOT plans to decrease the speed limit to 45 miles per hour in this area. More developed areas of Hochatown where people walk across the road will have an even lower speed limit.*

Topic – Construction

Topic Summary: Commenters are concerned about safety during construction. They requested that construction occur when traffic is not busy. Construction should avoid weekends, holidays, and other busy times.

Response: *Roadway safety is of utmost importance to ODOT. ODOT will consider variable construction times and non-holiday work times to lessen the effects on traffic and access. ODOT will consider these suggestions as construction sequencing and schedules are set.*

Topic – Cost

Topic Summary: Commenters have concerns with the cost of the proposed project when compared to the 3-lane option.

Response: *ODOT chose the 5-lane option because it meets traffic needs and the community's needs. ODOT is committed to providing a road that meets current and future needs.*

Topic – Right-of-Way

Topic Summary: One commenter is concerned that the right-of-way will be fully used up to their gate/fence.

Response: *The planned improvements are expected to stay within ODOT's current right-of-way. This will limit effects on private properties. Any structures or additions currently located within ODOT's right-of-way may need to be removed before construction begins. ODOT and the design engineers will work through those details as the design progresses.*

Topic – Utility Impacts on Property

Topic Summary: Commenters are concerned about the installation or relocation of utilities. They are worried that future sewer, cable/internet lines, and electrical utilities may affect private property.

Response: *This project plans to stay within the existing right-of-way. It will leave room for utilities within the right-of-way. This will limit effects on private property. ODOT considers existing and proposed utility lines in their design. ODOT is working with the Town of Hochatown on the town's proposed utility projects.*

Topic – Additional Research/Data

Topic Summary: Commenters want more economic, tourism, and traffic studies included in project planning.

Response: *We appreciate your suggestions for improving the proposed US-259 project. In developing these improvements, we carefully considered traffic data collected over several years. This includes growth projections, historical trends, and other data specific to the US-259 corridor. We continue to watch traffic patterns to ensure the final plan addresses current and future needs. ODOT is committed to working closely with the community throughout the design and construction phases. We believe ongoing collaboration will promote a smooth project and a successful outcome for everyone.*

Topic – Tourism

Topic Summary: Commenters are concerned about the effect of construction on tourism.

Response: *Tourism is vital to the Hochatown economy. ODOT is designing the project with tourism in mind. Access to local businesses will be maintained throughout construction. The roadway improvements for this project are proposed to remain within the current right-of-way to limit effects on private property and tourism.*

Topic – Restrooms

Topic Summary: Commenters would like public restrooms at the potential parking areas.

Response: *Thank you for your suggestion about public restrooms. We will share this recommendation with the Town of Hochatown.*

Public Entity/Agency Responses

No public entities or agencies responded to the notification letter.