

Title: Turnpikes in the Great State of Oklahoma

Ten turnpikes crisscross the state of Oklahoma today covering 606 miles, helping motorists get across the state quicker and safer than ever.

Traveling across Oklahoma was made much easier in 1947 when the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) was originally authorized to construct, operate and maintain the Turner Turnpike, which continues to run today from Oklahoma City to Tulsa on I-44.

The call for toll roads began in Oklahoma because at the time, the state did not have the money to pay for the construction and maintenance of new roads. That limitation continues today.

Once the Turner Turnpike was opened in 1953, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority was redefined by the state legislature to not only maintain the Turner Turnpike, but to construct new turnpikes across the state. This decision to expand the turnpike system into less developed areas increased growth and spurred economic development in the surrounding communities. The cycle of constructing roads leads to more economic development and growth for all areas across Oklahoma.

In 1954, Oklahoma citizens voted to “cross-pledge” the turnpike system, and by doing so, committed the money collected on all turnpikes to pay the debt of the turnpikes’ construction, maintenance, operating costs and expansion.

Every road in Oklahoma is paid for by taxpayers, whether it is through state taxes or tolls. The only difference is that turnpikes are paid for by the motorists who use them. The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is funded purely by toll revenue. So if someone does not use the turnpike, they do not pay for the road. OTA does not receive any additional funding from state or federal governments. Also, during 2011 and 2010, the Authority received and subsequently remitted to ODOT \$40,414,346.00 and \$40,865,917.00 respectively of motor fuel excise taxes.

Oklahoma turnpikes are some of the safest and quickest ways to travel in Oklahoma, while at the same time having the lowest tolls per mile across the nation. The average passenger vehicle toll for Oklahoma is \$.04 per mile, while the national average is \$.14 per mile.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority collects three types of revenue: tolls collected from motorists using the turnpike, concession revenue and violation revenue.

The Authority uses those funds to pay debt on the turnpikes (37.1 percent,) asset preservation (34.6 percent,) toll operation (10.2 percent,) road maintenance (8.5 percent,) Oklahoma Highway Patrol (5.3 percent) and administration and support (4.3 percent.)

In order to continue maintaining and operating the turnpike system with excellence and care, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority created a Five Year Capital Plan to identify all current revenue and plan for long-term improvements. The Capital Plan will ensure continued customer service and extend the useful life of the turnpike system.

In 2013, OTA's projected budget of operating revenue will be \$238,290,000.00 (38% of which is collected from out-of-state customers.) Of that, \$73,020,722.00 will be for rehabilitation and maintenance of existing roadways. Another \$16,348,726.00 of preplanned OTA General Revenue Funds will be for additional capital expenditures. Over the next five years, OTA has committed \$406,259,072.00 for its capital plan in keeping Oklahoma's turnpikes safe and convenient while providing improved customer services.

One of the long-term goals of OTA is the massive overhaul of its service plazas. This project will provide travelers with more functional and convenient plazas that provide fuel, food and a place to rest.

The most recent upgrades were completed on Cimarron Turnpike's (US 412) Lone Chimney Service Plaza, H.E. Bailey Turnpike's (I-44) Chickasha Service Plaza and Muskogee Turnpike's Muskogee Service Plaza.

OTA will manage the redesign and reconstruction of the Will Rogers Turnpike's Vinita Service Plaza beginning in the summer of 2013. It's scheduled to be completed near the end of 2014. After reconstruction, the service plaza will have two restaurants, two convenience/fuel stores, real-time weather data updates and include tourism to promote Oklahoma. The Authority is also in the process of designing a new service plaza site near McAlester on the Indian Nation Turnpike. This service plaza will replace plazas currently near Eufaula and Antlers.

Another major upgrade to help better serve travelers is near completion. Expansion projects on the Kilpatrick and Creek Turnpikes will add additional lanes over an 8-mile segment. The expansion will also include rehabilitation of several bridges throughout the turnpike system to ease congestion and accommodate for future traffic over the next 30 years. These improvements were possible through new bonds issued during December 2011. This debt was issued and projects completed without raising toll rates for customers.

While these expansions, redesigns and reconstructs continue to take place on Oklahoma's turnpikes, OTA has made an effort to increase motorist safety. In 2011, OTA began installing cable barriers along the turnpikes statewide. By 2017, OTA is scheduled to install 123 miles of cable barriers throughout the state, which provide a decrease in cross overs and potential fatalities. To keep drivers and construction workers safe, OTA was proactive and installed informational road signs to urge motorists from using cell phones in work zones.

Another major initiative of The Authority is its partnerships with other agencies and cities and towns across Oklahoma. These partnerships help better enhance Oklahoma's roadways, interchanges and bridges and allow for continued economic growth in these areas. Some of the many partnerships include those with ODOT, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma Department of Tourism, Oklahoma City, Broken Arrow, Jenks, Tulsa and Tulsa County.

Some of the many challenges over the next decade for the Authority will be serving the ever increasing traffic across the State and continuing the needed improvements of an aging System to continue services needed by customers. As one of the fastest growing states, OTA will have to be watchful to increasing traffic on some of its other major turnpikes, including the Turner Turnpike and Will Rogers Turnpike.

As Oklahoma communities, rural and urban, grow and develop, the turnpike system and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority will continue to be a helpful resource providing safe and convenient transportation alternatives for travelers.