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OTA provides ACCESS Oklahoma update

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority appreciates the unanimous, conditional approval Wednesday by the Council on Bond Oversight of a \$200 million line of credit to move forward with some of the first steps in the ACCESS Oklahoma program. This action allows the OTA to utilize this interim financing to move forward with plans to enhance travel on existing toll roads, including widening the John Kilpatrick, Turner and Will Rogers turnpikes; extending the new Gilcrease Expressway Turnpike to the north; building additional access points; and enhancing interchanges along turnpikes.

The Council's conditional approval states OTA cannot use line of credit proceeds on projects at issue in litigation recently filed and pending in Cleveland County.

The OTA will continue planned preliminary engineering design and environmental survey activities in partnership with regulatory agencies to assess the feasibility of the Outer Loop alignments and the South Extension Turnpike. OTA will also fulfill its commitment to several property owners with whom negotiations for property acquisition began prior to approval of the line of credit. These property owners proactively approached OTA about the sale of their property. OTA will pay for these services exclusively from its General Fund. The OTA will monitor and continuously evaluate to determine that these efforts do not violate or conflict with the conditions provided by the Council.

Before OTA sells bonds to finance the construction of new turnpike alignments, the OTA will request judicial validation of those bonds. The Oklahoma Supreme Court has the exclusive original jurisdiction to hear validation actions as defined in state statute, Title 69-1718. Such validation actions give all persons interested in the matter an opportunity to be heard, present legal opposition against the issuance of the bonds, and ensure the Authority has the legal authorization to undertake the projects to be financed by the bonds, thereby providing certainty for all involved. Most recently, OTA had bonds validated to construct the Kickapoo Turnpike and the Gilcrease West Expressway, both component projects of the Authority's Driving Forward Program. The Oklahoma Supreme Court validated the bonds issued to construct these projects in 2016 and 2018, respectively.

Historically, OTA works from a five-year plan, which is much smaller in scope than the ACCESS Oklahoma program. This 15-year, long-range plan provides the agency flexibility in planning, scheduling and construction and represents better opportunities to engage the public well in advance of future turnpike projects.

While both state and federal transportation funding have increased over time for construction and maintenance of the tax-supported highway system, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation struggles to maintain the existing highway infrastructure in reasonable operating condition and cannot keep pace with demands. The OTA takes its responsibility seriously and works to reinvest back into the existing turnpike infrastructure and can sometimes help ODOT meet ever-growing and recognized critical transportation needs that otherwise would go unaddressed. If conditions warrant, OTA can provide alternative routes in areas the tax-supported transportation system cannot. A user-based transportation alternative like toll roads is not a panacea to the state's existing capacity constrained I-35 corridor. State, county and municipal officials must work together in an "all of the above" approach to provide additional modes of transportation to solve today's growing safety and congestion concerns and avoid future gridlock.

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