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## **Oklahoma Turnpike Authority response to SCR28**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority wishes to clarify information recently published relating to OTA's plans for turnpike extensions within the ACCESS Oklahoma program south of the Oklahoma City metro area. The OTA does not use interim financing or bond proceeds on unvalidated turnpike routes, which includes the East-West Connector, the Tri-City Connector and the South Extension.

The OTA will seek validation of the proposed new routes mentioned above from the Oklahoma Supreme Court. To get to that point, OTA must begin engineering design and environmental studies. OTA will pay for this preliminary work from its general fund, which is common practice. The \$200 million line-of-credit will only be used on existing routes. OTA never intended to use the line-of-credit for unvalidated, new routes in ACCESS Oklahoma south of the Oklahoma City metro.

Upon announcement of the ACCESS Oklahoma program in late February, property owners along Indian Hills Road in Norman and Moore contacted OTA about the possibility of early acquisition many of whom had recently placed their property for sale or were constructing new homes. OTA has an obligation to continue working with these individuals as their properties are situated along Indian Hills Road. To date, OTA has not purchased any property for new routes in the ACCESS Oklahoma program. All OTA and ODOT property acquisition documents are public records, and the agencies follow state law that dictates property acquisition and always negotiate in good faith.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation work in a fiscally responsible manner and are confident of the safeguards in place and transparency practiced. By statute 69-1720, the Authority must undergo annual financial audits performed by an independent firm of certified public accountants. Both agencies embrace their statutorily defined governance responsibilities and the idea of identifying ways to develop processes of continuous improvement. The Transportation Cabinet recently developed a more robust, cabinet-wide internal audit division. These internal audits are used as a management tool to monitor performance in a variety of areas and ensure we are utilizing best practices, complying with our policies and procedures, and helping determine if those practices, policies and procedures are yielding the desired results.

To address concerns about OTA harming the water source for several south Oklahoma City metro cities, the Authority understands the sensitivity of the State's water resources, and water quality is always of primary concern for all transportation improvement projects. The

OTA strives for strict compliance with all regulatory requirements and best practices as required by the jurisdictional state and federal oversight agencies.

Large scale transportation improvement projects in Oklahoma and across the nation are regularly implemented that meet or exceed all water quality requirements, and the improvements often present opportunities to create wetlands, buffer areas and drainage filters that even enhance the quality of surface runoff. The OTA will have a construction compliance team in place to monitor environmental protection measures during construction, documenting and reporting their findings.

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 every-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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