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Oklahoma Turnpike Authority stops work on ACCESS Oklahoma projects

Earlier today, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority notified its board and its consultants that all work on the comprehensive, long-range plan, known as ACCESS Oklahoma, will cease as of Friday, April 14. This stoppage includes the work on the Turner Turnpike as well as the widening and interchange additions for safety and community access on other highly used turnpikes across the state – projects that are high priorities to the board, OTA and the state as a whole.

While OTA remains in a strong financial position in large part due to exceptional accounting practices and financial controls in place, it can no longer continue funding work without a clear timetable for access to the bond market.

“I have mentioned several times, including during the recent board meeting, that our continued ACCESS Oklahoma project work would be impacted or even stopped due to our inability to enter the bond market,” Secretary of Transportation and OTA Executive Director Tim Gatz told the board in the memo.

Several factors impacted this decision. In recent months, legal matters pending before the Supreme Court, including the “validation” case, and an impending state investigative audit, have prevented access to the bond market.

The OTA will continue normal operations and maintenance to existing toll roads as well as moving forward with the conversion to cashless tolling. OTA will also continue to service existing debt. All of these activities are funded through toll receipts that are consistently meeting or exceeding financial projections while the ACCESS Oklahoma projects are funded through bond proceeds.

“Despite the tremendous transportation needs across the state, I feel it is prudent to take this difficult step,” Gatz said. “This is an unfortunate decision that the OTA does not take lightly due to the critical nature of the ACCESS Oklahoma plan and the effect it will have on all our consultants and their employees as well as many Oklahoma communities and businesses that rely on these necessary transportation improvements. While these delays slow progress for the state, it doesn’t eliminate the need for these critical transportation enhancements that will improve safety and the quality of life for all Oklahomans.”

OTA remains committed to its statutory mission to relieve traffic congestion throughout the state through the construction of legislatively authorized turnpike projects which increase safety for the traveling public in a conservative and fiscally responsible manner.

“Once these roadblocks are resolved and a path to the bond market is cleared, I am confident we will resume ACCESS Oklahoma and begin moving forward on behalf of the people of Oklahoma,” Gatz said.

(Editors and News Directors: For questions, please call the Oklahoma Transportation Strategic Communications at 405-521-6000.)



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