



# PRESS RELEASE

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**Communications & Marketing Division**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **OTA announces South Extension Turnpike Homeowner Open House dates for late September**

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority announced Tuesday at its September Board meeting the dates for three Homeowner Open House events for those potentially impacted by the upcoming South Extension Turnpike in Cleveland and McClain counties.

Following several months of study, public input and initial design work, a new alignment to the west of what was proposed in 2022 will be shared with the public in a livestream event at 2 p.m. Sept. 23. Following the livestream, information about the alignment will be found at [accessoklahoma.com](https://accessoklahoma.com).

“OTA’s priority is to these homeowners and property owners that we’re getting ready to affect,” said OTA Chief Engineer Trent January. “We have scheduled three homeowner open house events in the following few days after the official announcement, including a Saturday, to make it easy for them to talk with us about their particular needs and hear any details we have available.”

The Homeowner Open House events will be:

- **Sept. 24 | 5-7 p.m.**  
Nancy O'Brian Center for the Performing Arts  
1801 Stubbeman Ave., Norman, OK 73069
- **Sept. 27 | 2-4 p.m.**  
NCED Conference Center and Hotel  
2801 E. State Highway 9, Norman, OK 73071

- **Sept. 29 | 5-7 p.m.**  
Noble High School, commons area  
4601 E. Etowah Rd., Noble, OK 73068

The public is encouraged to watch the announcement live on OTA's [Facebook](#) page, [YouTube](#) channel or on the livestream [website](#). Links to each of these may be found at [accessoklahoma.com](#). Those with questions before and after the Sept. 23 announcement are encouraged to reach out to the hotline at 1-844-56-ACCESS or [info@accessoklahoma.com](mailto:info@accessoklahoma.com).



## OTA honors fallen worker Zachary Rinehart

A moment of silence was observed during this month's Board meeting for Zachary Rinehart, an OTA maintenance employee who was struck by a distracted driver on Aug. 18. Rinehart and his coworker Colton Armstrong were conducting debris removal on I-44/Will Rogers Turnpike near Miami when the driver of a semi-tractor trailer swerved onto the turnpike right-of-way and struck them. Rinehart had exited the vehicle, and Armstrong was inside the truck, which had its lights flashing, when the crash occurred. Rinehart was killed and Armstrong sustained critical injuries. Rinehart is warmly remembered as a husband, father of three children, military veteran, Vinita volunteer firefighter and generous community member. Armstrong was recently released from the hospital and is recovering from his injuries.

This fatality marks the first time in 26 years that an OTA worker was killed in the line of duty. Echelle thanked the community for its support, including through the Oklahoma Department of Transportation Memorial Foundation. The Foundation provides the families of fallen ODOT and OTA workers with support for unexpected expenses and financial assistance for post-secondary education for their children.

Every teen who seeks an Oklahoma driver's license will learn about Rinehart and his family through the Work Zone Safe online course, which is required by law for teens to complete as part of obtaining their driver's license. This course educates new drivers on how to safely navigate a work zone, the importance of buckling their seat belts, putting away distractions and putting a face to highway and turnpike workers who gave their lives in service to the state while trying to keep the traveling public safe. More information about the course may be found online at [www.workzonesafe.com](http://www.workzonesafe.com)

## September is Seat Belt Safety Awareness Month in Oklahoma

OTA and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation jointly launched the "Never Skip the Click" seat belt safety campaign for September to encourage Oklahomans to buckle up. In conjunction with the campaign, Gov. Kevin Stitt issued a proclamation that September 2025 is Seat Belt Safety Awareness Month. Wearing a seat belt improves chances of surviving a crash by 50 percent, yet Oklahomans rank 44th in the nation for seat belt usage. The groups most likely to forgo wearing a seat belt include males, rural residents and young adults aged 16 to 24.

Executive Director Joe Echelle shared a public service announcement featuring a survivor of a vehicle crash on I-44/Turner Turnpike in which Echelle happened to be first on the scene. The driver, Trey Weber, wasn't wearing his seat belt and sustained severe injuries in the crash. He sustained multiple broken bones and couldn't walk for months. Weber's message to his fellow Oklahomans is simple: buckle up.

"Especially in the more rural areas of our state, where you think 'I'm just going to hop in the vehicle to run across town, go check the mail or run over to a neighbor's house' wearing a seat belt is so critical. Nobody leaves their house intending to get into an accident," Echelle said, emphasizing that wearing a seat belt can increase by 50 percent the chances of surviving a crash.

To watch Weber's testimonial video, for more information about the campaign or to download a seat belt safety toolkit, visit [www.DriveSafelyOklahoma.com](http://www.DriveSafelyOklahoma.com).



Trey Weber, 20, recalls the day just more than a year ago when he was critically injured in a crash on the I-44/Turner Turnpike. He was not wearing a seat belt. Today, he shares with Oklahomans the impact of that choice and what he wants them to know about seat belt safety.



Oklahoma Turnpike Authority employees stand with the OTA Board and Executive Director Joe Echelle at the September Board meeting displaying Gov. Kevin Stitt's proclamation naming September 2025 as Seat Belt Safety Month in Oklahoma.

## **OTA's monthly financials remain strong**

OTA's Director of Finance Wendy Smith provided an update to the Board on net toll revenue for July 2025 at \$42.5 million. Total transactions stayed flat compared with last year, but truck traffic remains strong. Year-to-date toll revenues continue to outpace budgeted projections by 8.8 percent.

Smith reported that OTA's funding sources remain strong, fully funded by toll revenues paid by those who choose to travel on turnpikes. Turnpikes receive no state appropriated funding, and 50 percent of OTA's toll revenue is generated by out-of-state travelers. OTA continues to see high credit ratings on bond debt while maintaining one of the lowest toll rates in the nation.

The General Fund is used as a reserve for unforeseen emergencies, such as helping to make up shortages, like those seen during the COVID pandemic when traffic dropped as much as 42 percent in one month, Smith said. It is also used as funding for OTA's 5-year Capital Plan, which is the plan for system rehabilitation and extends the life of the Authority's roads and bridges.

"The Authority does not make a profit. Excess General Fund dollars are always converted to needed projects on a system that dates back 72 years. There's always a project that can be moved up in the plan," Smith said.

**WATCH** the full meeting on YouTube at [OTA Board Meeting September 9, 2025](#)