



PRESS RELEASE

Friday, Dec. 12, 2025

OTA Public Relations

405-425-2849 | <https://pikepass.com/>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release #016-25

December Board Meeting Wrap-Up

Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board awards \$137 million in construction contracts, including the state's longest bridge

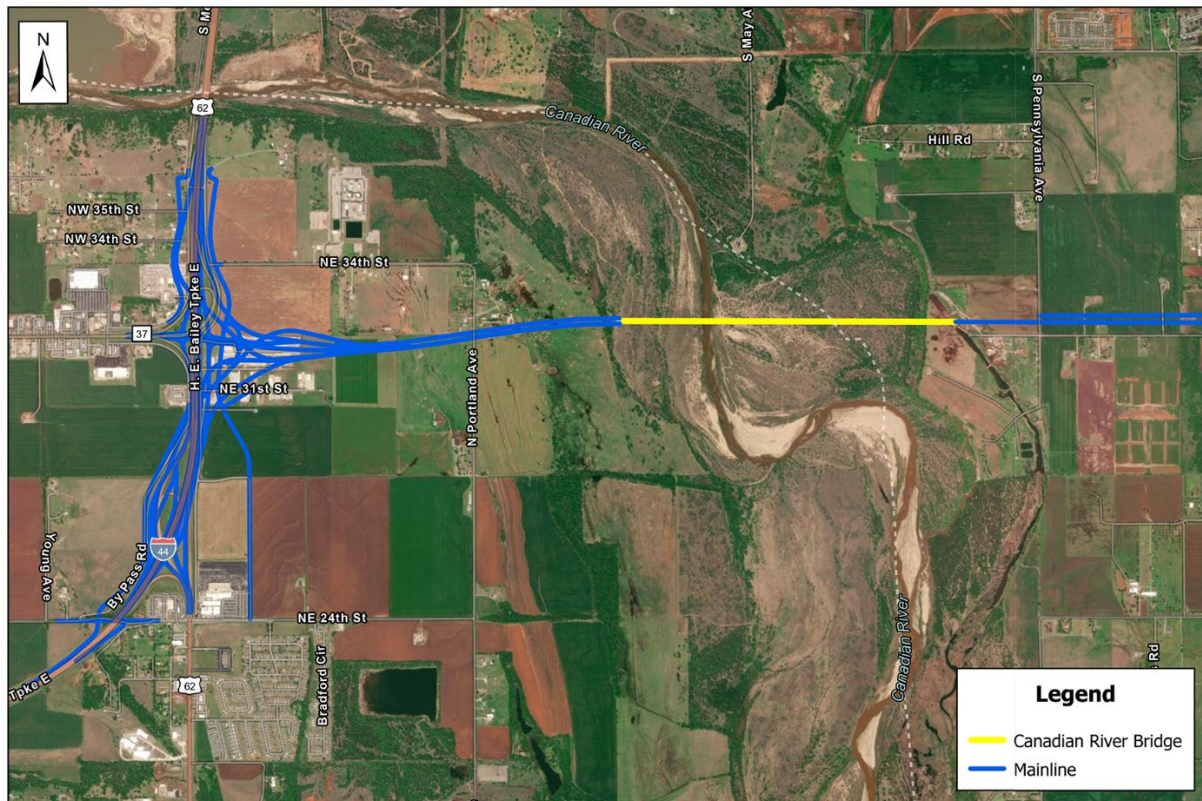
The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board awarded nearly \$137 million in construction contracts for five projects across the turnpike system at its monthly meeting Tuesday.

Three awards are part of the ACCESS Oklahoma long-range plan, including a \$97 million bridge project to construct the first section of the new East-West Connector Turnpike between I-44 and I-35. This will be the longest bridge in Oklahoma at more than 1.25 miles long. Work will begin in early 2026 and is expected to be completed by late 2027. The project was designed to minimize impacts to the Canadian River to protect water quality and the habitat of threatened species; the bridge piers will be constructed outside of the river channel and OTA will monitor construction closely to ensure the contractor complies with all environmental safeguards.

The board also awarded a \$27.8 million six-lane widening project on the I-344/John Kilpatrick Turnpike, a nearly \$12 million pavement rehabilitation project on the southern end of the I-44/H.E. Bailey Turnpike, a \$2.4 million bridge rehabilitation project on the US-412/Cimarron Turnpike northwest of Morrison and an additional \$3 million construction project on the East-West Connector. Most of the awarded bids came in significantly below engineers' initial estimate.

Construction will begin in early 2026 to widen I-344/John Kilpatrick Turnpike from Wilshire Boulevard to Northwest 122nd Street to six lanes. This will include a bridge widening over SH-3/Northwest Expressway. OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle emphasized that the John Kilpatrick Turnpike has the most rapidly growing traffic of all turnpikes in Oklahoma, with steady growth between 8 and 12 percent annually. Widening the turnpike helps accommodate this growth. The \$27.8 million project is expected to be completed by spring 2027.

OTA will begin pavement rehabilitation of the I-44/H.E. Bailey Turnpike from mm 5 to mm 20 between Walters and Randlett in Cotton County and the interchange ramps at SH-36. This \$12 million project will begin in early 2026 and is expected to be completed by summer 2026.



East-West Connector Canadian River Bridge



I-44/Turner Turnpike construction updates

Executive Director Echelle provided updates on three projects along the I-44/Turner Turnpike. Westbound Turner Turnpike traffic shifted onto the new bridge in Wellston for the first time last week. Eastbound Turner Turnpike traffic in Wellston moved to its permanent configuration on Monday. Additionally, Echelle noted that SH-66 will open to traffic underneath the new bridges by mid-December. He emphasized that OTA appreciates the Wellston and Lincoln County communities for their patience during the construction process. While work on the roadway is nearing completion, some work on the outside of the lanes will continue into early 2026. OTA encourages motorists to watch for workers in these areas.

Director Echelle noted that OTA plans to celebrate the opening of this project in early spring with a ribbon cutting following completion of Route 66 art installations. These installations will put Wellston on the map as one of the newest iconic Mother Road destinations for tourism.

“Most people might not know this, but Wellston is very near the midpoint of Route 66 in Oklahoma, so we’re going to try to highlight that with the artwork (near) the bridge,” Echelle said.



This aerial view shows the newly reconstructed I-44/Turner Turnpike bridges over SH-66 in Wellston. Turner Turnpike traffic is now off the detour and back on mainline lanes.

Eastbound and westbound traffic on the Turner Turnpike between Bristow and Kellyville has been shifted to the inside lanes as of this week. This allows crews to do the final paving on the new outside lanes for the completion of a new 6-mile segment of the Turner to be widened to six lanes. This project is expected to be completed by spring 2026. Director Echelle expressed OTA's appreciation for the traveling public's patience while this important upgrade to the Turner is being completed and reminded motorists to continue slowing down in this work zone.

OTA began work on a bridge-widening project on I-44/Turner Turnpike at County Rd. NS 3310 just west of Wellston in Lincoln County this week. This \$3.1 million project will widen the bridge in preparation for the future six lanes. Traffic impacts will be minimal, and work is expected to be completed by late 2026.

Winter weather preparedness and reminders

Last week, Oklahoma kicked off the winter weather season with four weather events — two snow/ice and two freezing fog events. During those four events, OTA employees worked 1,930 hours, treating 4,772 miles of bridges and other troublesome areas with 10,385 gallons of mag chloride and 216 tons of salt and sand.

OTA also partnered with Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Department of Health, Oklahoma Corporation Commission, National Weather Service, Department of Public Safety and Oklahoma Highway Patrol to push winter weather preparedness messaging to Oklahomans during this time. These partnerships will extend through the winter weather season to ensure Oklahomans know how to prepare for safer travel during winter weather.

OTA encourages motorists to stay safe this winter by planning additional travel time, slowing down, not following too closely, and giving snowplows and road equipment plenty of space. As always, OTA also encourages drivers to wear a seat belt no matter the distance. Motorists can see snowplow cameras and road conditions at www.okroads.org or in the Drive Oklahoma app.

With holiday travel quickly approaching, OTA wants to remind drivers to plan for an increase in traffic on Oklahoma's turnpike system — it's estimated that there will be 10 million transactions statewide for the 16-day holiday travel period that includes Christmas and New Year's Day.

OTA honors retiring employees

Two retiring OTA employees were honored for their service to the agency, Mike Collins and Rick Burgess.

Collins served 42 years in the agency's maintenance department, working his way up from maintenance worker 1 to assistant director of maintenance. He led operations on the I-44/Will Rogers Turnpike for more than two decades, during which time traffic tripled. His mentorship and coaching had a profoundly positive impact on others at OTA, said Jeremy Smith, OTA maintenance director.

"I wouldn't be surprised if a little asphalt and concrete is running through his veins. Every decision he's made has been for the good of the OTA, for the good of our employees and for the good of the people traveling our roads," Smith said.

Burgess started at OTA as one of the original members of the information technology team when the division was in its infancy and served 29 years at the agency.

"Through the years, Rick has been a vital part of IT, quickly resolving issues and always there when you needed help," said OTA Director of IT Amanda Boulden

OTA thanked both employees for their dedication to public service and their many contributions to the Turnpike Authority over the years.

TO WATCH the full December Board meeting go to [OTA Board Meeting Dec. 9, 2025](#)



Mike Collins, center front row, was honored ahead of his retirement for 42 years of service to OTA and the State of Oklahoma by the OTA Board, back row, and front row from left, Executive Director Joe Echelle, Deputy Director Joni Seymour, Collins, Maintenance Director Jeremy Smith and Chief Engineer Trent January.



The OTA Board along with Executive Director Joe Echelle, IT Director Amanda Boulden, Deputy Director Joni Seymour and Assistant Director of IT Matt Loeffelholz honored longtime employee Rick Burgess, front row center, on his retirement.