



PRESS RELEASE

Friday, March 6, 2026

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release #005-26

OTA Board supports legislative resolution to designate the East-West Connector Turnpike as the Toby Keith Expressway

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board approved the naming of the East-West Connector Turnpike as the Toby Keith Expressway during its March meeting, following unanimous passage of House Concurrent Resolution 1019 through both chambers of the Oklahoma Legislature. It marks the first time in OTA history that the Legislature has named a turnpike.

The Toby Keith Expressway will run along the planned corridor from I-44 East to I-35 near Indian Hills Road, continuing east and north to I-40 at the I-335/Kickapoo Turnpike — completing a long-needed loop around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

Keith rose from humble beginnings in western Oklahoma to become one of the most recognized names in American country music, selling more than 40 million albums and earning more than 20 No. 1 singles. He was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame and supported U.S. service members through more than 300 USO performances in combat zones. He passed away Feb. 5, 2024, after a battle with stomach cancer.

Members of Keith's family were present as the resolution was formally adopted, and a ceremonial sign was unveiled.

"Naming this expressway in his honor is a small tribute compared to the enormous legacy he leaves behind, but it's only fitting that his accomplishments and patriotism be remembered for generations to come," said Sen. Lisa Standridge, R-Norman, who co-

sponsored the resolution. "With this new road, Toby Keith will forever be a part of Oklahoma's history."

OTA awards \$35.4 million in construction contracts across three turnpikes

The Board approved three construction contracts totaling about \$35.4 million. All three came in below engineers' estimates, with bids on the I-44/Will Rogers pavement project about 29 percent under.

The Board awarded a \$5.4 million contract to Built Right Construction to complete the diamond interchange on SH-375/Indian Nation Turnpike at Ragan Road near mm 81 in Pittsburg County. The location has long operated as a half interchange. The project adds a southbound entrance ramp and northbound exit ramp, completing a full diamond interchange near Indianola. Nine contractors submitted bids.

"I've driven that turnpike my entire life, and I've seen people go the wrong way at that location more times than I can count," said OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle. "This is absolutely a safety and access improvement for that community."

The newly approved Ragan Road project marks the first interchange addition on the Indian Nation Turnpike under the ACCESS Oklahoma long-range program. Planning continues for additional rural improvements at Blanco and along US-69.

The Board awarded a \$22.9 million contract to Sherwood Construction to relocate two City of Moore wastewater lines within the footprint of the planned Toby Keith Expressway. The lines must be moved east of the Canadian River before turnpike construction can proceed. Moore has already secured pipe materials, which OTA will reimburse through a separate agreement.

The Board awarded a \$7.1 million contract to APAC Central for pavement rehabilitation on the Will Rogers Turnpike from mm 312 to 320 in Ottawa County — roughly between 10 miles northeast of Afton and 9 miles southwest of Miami — addressing aging asphalt and improving ride quality.

ACCESS Oklahoma opens first project, advances work across state

On Feb. 16, OTA opened six lanes of the Turner Turnpike east of Bristow — the first ACCESS Oklahoma project to break ground. The 6-mile widening has already produced a measurable reduction in collisions.

The I-344/John Kilpatrick Turnpike is now under construction west of Oklahoma City, where OTA is widening it to six lanes from Wilshire Boulevard to N.W. 122nd St.

OTA completes bridge repair, renews maintenance fleet

OTA has begun permitting loads up to 16 feet wide on portions of the Creek, Will Rogers, and Turner Turnpikes, matching the standard used on Oklahoma interstate highways. Previously, converted toll lanes limited widths to 13 feet, 6 inches. Maintenance crews have been removing bollards and addressing pinch points at ramps to accommodate the change.

The Board approved the acquisition of 27 wheel loaders through a lease-purchase structure over 48 months, subject to Council of Bond Oversight approval. Twenty-five John Deere 544 P-Tier loaders will replace aging equipment across the system, and two larger John Deere 624 P-Tier loaders will replace units paired with OTA's snowblowers. Comprehensive maintenance is included, with an option to purchase at a fixed price at term's end — an approach that has proven more cost-effective than rental while ensuring reliable equipment availability year-round.

Maintenance crews also identified and repaired impact damage to a bridge carrying East 290 Road over the Will Rogers Turnpike near Vinita in Craig County. Minor heat-straightening repairs were completed following a contract award of about \$37,500 through the ODOT letting process. No turnpike lane closures were required.

OTA, OHP recognizes outstanding safety efforts across turnpike system

OTA Chief Engineer Trent January and Safety Manager Cooper Duke recognized OTA maintenance divisions for their 2025 safety records. The Creek and Kickapoo Turnpikes each received the Perfect Safety Record Award, recognizing zero incidents resulting in personal injury for the entire year. The Cherokee, H.E. Bailey, and Indian Nation turnpikes each received the Outstanding Safety Record Award, recognizing zero lost-time injuries. The awards reflect the daily commitment of OTA's frontline maintenance employees, who work alongside high-speed traffic in demanding conditions.

Oklahoma Highway Patrol Lt. Kerry Massie was recognized as Trooper of the Month for his actions on Jan. 1, 2026, at a restaurant along the I-44/H.E. Bailey Turnpike. Lt. Massie, a trained medic, noticed an elderly woman choking and immediately intervened, performing the Heimlich maneuver. When the woman became unresponsive, Lt. Massie continued life-saving efforts until the obstruction was cleared and she was breathing on her own, awaiting the arrival of emergency medical services. The award was presented by OHP Major Jeremy Allread.



The OTA Board, back row, joins, front row, Executive Director Joe Echelle, Deputy Director Joni Seymour, Krystal Keith, Tricia Covell, Stelen Covell, Shelley Covell, Rep. Jason Blair, Sen. Lisa Standridge, Sen. Darcy Jech and Sen. George Burns after the approval of the resolution to name the East-West Connector as the Toby Keith Expressway.



The OTA Board and Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz, back row, joined, front row from left, OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle, Assistant Maintenance Director Cooper

Hill, Maintenance Director Jeremy Smith, Safety Manager Cooper Duke, turnpike superintendents Jery Jenkins, Rickey Kinzie, Jeremy Smart, Cody Burton and Kevin Wallace, Assistant Maintenance Director Jay Gilbreath and Chief Engineer Trent January.



The OTA Board, back row, joins OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle, front left, and OHP Maj. Jeremy Allread, front right, in congratulating OHP Lt. Kerry Massie, center front, for his heroic lifesaving efforts to help a woman who was choking at a restaurant along the I-44/H.E. Bailey Turnpike.