



PRESS RELEASE

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OTA advances statewide construction and interoperability milestone

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board approved a construction contract award and multiple right-of-way and ACCESS program agreements during its April meeting, as active work continues at the South Canadian River Bridge for the Toby Keith Expressway — set to become the longest bridge in Oklahoma.

Construction began March 9 on the South Canadian River Bridge, the first major bridge project for the Toby Keith Expressway connecting I-44 to I-35 south of Oklahoma City. The \$97 million project consists of twin parallel bridges spanning the Canadian River between Portland and Pennsylvania avenues, crossing over an area that will reduce the travel distance between I-44 and SH-37 in Newcastle to downtown Norman from 16 miles to just 12 miles. Drill shafts are now visible at the site as crews work to complete pier foundations and move away from the river channel ahead of spring rains. The bridge is designed with piers constructed outside the river channel to protect water quality and the habitat of threatened species, and OTA will monitor construction closely throughout. The project is expected to be completed in late 2027.

“That bridge is going to be a landmark for this state,” said OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle. “We designed it to be as light on the river as possible — the length of it is intentional, to keep our footprint out of the channel and protect what’s there.”

The Board approved one construction contract during the April meeting: a \$6.9 million capital plan project for replacement of asphalt shoulders and guardrails on the

Muskogee Turnpike, also known as SH-351, from mm 37 to mm 56 in Muskogee County. Three contractors submitted bids, with low bidder APAC Central coming in about 28 percent under the engineer's estimate.

Wellston ribbon cutting set for April 23 on Route 66

As part of the ACCESS Oklahoma program's widening of the Turner Turnpike to six lanes, OTA will cut a ribbon to dedicate a new bridge over Route 66 in Wellston at 10 a.m. April 23 — replacing a 74-year-old structure and marking one of the program's most visible milestones to date.

Wellston sits at the center point of Route 66 in Oklahoma, and the new \$48 million bridge reflects that significance. The structure features relief art along its sides and dynamic LED lighting, both visible from the Mother Road below. The ribbon cutting also will include the dedication of three pieces of public art developed in partnership with the Oklahoma Arts Council and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, including a sculpture marking the center point of Route 66 in Oklahoma.

The event coincides with the second annual national Mother Road Summit hosted in Oklahoma City, and the Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration is expected to attend both events. The public is invited to come out and celebrate on the Mother Road.

“What the Turnpike Authority has completed there is a generational investment in Oklahoma's long-term viability,” said Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz, who sits on the U.S. Route 66 Centennial Commission. “There's no more appropriate way to mark that than cutting the ribbon in Wellston.”

State audit finds no wrongdoing at OTA

A state investigative audit of OTA, originally requested by the attorney general and conducted over about two years, found no wrongdoing. The audit verified OTA's bond issuance process, cross-pledging practices, land acquisition and surplus procedures, relationships with ODOT and other state agencies, and the funding structure of the Gilcrease Expressway in west Tulsa. The auditor found OTA compliant with state law across all major areas reviewed.

The audit included process improvements related to consultant selection documentation and conflict-of-interest procedures. Since the audit was released in early March, OTA has provided additional information to the auditor's office and implemented procedural changes. A revised audit is expected in the near term.

“The audit is good news,” Echelle said. “We worked with the state auditor for more than two years, answered every question, and they found nothing wrong. We've taken the recommendations seriously and already started making changes.”

OTA reaches national interoperability milestone with E-ZPass

The Board approved an agreement authorizing OTA to join the E-ZPass interoperability group, a milestone years in the making. OTA helped form the first interoperability hub in the nation when it joined the Central U.S. Interoperability Hub in 2016. The Central and Southeast Hubs connected in 2023 — the first hub-to-hub connection in the country. Testing with the Northeast hub began the day of the April board meeting, with a go-live target for this summer.

The agreement means OTA's toll transponder readers will be able to process tags from E-ZPass states, significantly reducing the share of transactions handled through license plate tolling. Currently about 10 percent of OTA transactions are plate-based; the E-ZPass connection is expected to be cut to about 5 percent, reducing costs associated with mailing and plate-based billing.

ACCESS program advances partnerships across the state

The Board approved separate project agreements with multiple partners to advance ACCESS Oklahoma construction on the Will Rogers and Toby Keith Expressway corridors. On the Will Rogers Turnpike, OTA authorized agreements with ODOT, Rogers County, the cities of Catoosa and Claremore, Mayes County, and the Town of Verdigris to outline funding, design, construction, maintenance, right-of-way, and utility responsibilities for ACCESS bond program projects in that corridor.

Along the Toby Keith Expressway, OTA authorized a separate agreement with the City of Norman for a joint venture project at 36th Avenue N.W. near Indian Hills. OTA will be adding a partial interchange at that location, and the city already had planned improvements to the same corridor. The partnership allows for more efficient drainage design, roadway widening, cost savings through economy of scale, and a single construction impact to the traveling public rather than two separate projects. The Norman City Council approved the partnership in March 2026.

“Working with the City of Norman at this location just made sense,” said ACCESS Program Manager Ladan Nelson. “When two agencies have projects that overlap, combining them is better for drivers and better for the communities we serve.”

Revenues outpaced projections; OTA reports strong financial results

Year-to-date net total revenues through February 2026 are up 4.3 percent compared with the same period last year, and toll revenues continue to outpace budgeted

projections by 10 percent. February transactions were up 9.9 percent over February 2025, a particularly strong result given that last February included significant winter weather during President's Day week. Truck traffic continues to hold steady. OTA continues to achieve or exceed its trust-required senior and total debt service ratios.

OTA, state partners mark Work Zone Awareness Week

Governor Kevin Stitt issued a proclamation designating April 20-24 as Oklahoma Work Zone Awareness Week. OTA and ODOT are marking the occasion with a statewide Safe Action, Save Lives awareness campaign, including PSAs on social media, participation in the Safe Oklahoma Summit on April 20, and a moment of silence event at the ODOT central offices on April 30 in honor of fallen workers.

Throughout its history, ODOT and OTA have lost 74 employees in the line of duty — more than any other state agency except the military. Speeding, distracted driving, and following too closely remain the top causes of work zone crashes.

Tom Robbins of Work Zone Safe also presented at the meeting, highlighting Oklahoma's status as the first state in the nation to require all new teen drivers to complete work zone and move-over safety training to obtain a driver's license. In 2026, more than a quarter of a million new teen drivers nationwide are expected to complete the Work Zone Safe program online — a model that originated in Oklahoma and has since been adopted by states including Wisconsin, Nevada, Kansas and Missouri.



OTA recognized for financial reporting excellence, community giving, and environmental stewardship

OTA's finance team received the Government Finance Officers Association Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 35th consecutive year — the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting. Comptroller Micah Gardner, Assistant Comptrollers Bridget Patterson and Mitzi Groves, and Chief Financial Officer Julie Porter were honored for the achievement, which this year included implementing a new accounting system alongside the annual audit process.



OTA also received a Keep America Beautiful award through its partnership with Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, marking the 16th consecutive year of that recognition. In March alone, OTA maintenance crews collected more than 2,800 bags of trash, disposed of more than 1,100 cubic yards of debris, and collected more than 1,000 tires statewide. OTA headquarters volunteers collected 45 bags of trash in under two hours during the annual cleanup. There's still time for others to join the Great American Clean-up in communities across Oklahoma through May. More information may be found online at www.keepoklahomabeautiful.com.



OTA employees also raised more than \$8,600 through the 2025 State Employee Charitable Campaign — more than double their 2024 total. Campaign coordinators Melissa Atkinson, Tracy Ross, and Kelly Ford received the 2025 Outstanding Employee Campaign Coordinator of the Year Award out of all state agencies.

