



PRESS RELEASE

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OTA Public Relations

Contact: Lisa Shearer-Salim

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

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Oklahoma, federal officials celebrate new Turner Turnpike bridge, Rt. 66 artwork dedication in Wellston

Three new works of public art were dedicated Thursday in Wellston on the iconic U.S. Route 66 where it intersects with the I-44/Turner Turnpike. The pieces celebrate the community, the Mother Road, and Oklahoma's enduring role as a crossroads of culture and connection. The public event also marked the ribbon cutting of the newly reconstructed \$48 million Turner Turnpike bridge above Route 66.

"On behalf of the Trump Administration and U.S. Department of Transportation, I'm proud to be here in Oklahoma to celebrate historic Route 66. What started as a patchwork of roads became one of the most iconic transportation corridors in the world — and helped lay the groundwork for the Interstate Highway System," said Sean McMaster, Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration. "Projects like this bridge replacement and the new Route 66 landmark in Wellston show how we're honoring the past while delivering modern, safer infrastructure."

The celebration brought community members, artists, and municipal, state and federal leaders for the dedication and photo opportunity at the site. The event is part of the early Route 66 centennial festivities planned across Oklahoma this year and coincided with the second annual national Mother Road Summit in Oklahoma City, which welcomed Route 66 leaders from eight states.

“Route 66 is more than a highway, it’s a symbol of American freedom, innovation and opportunity. And nowhere is that spirit more alive than right here in Oklahoma,” said Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell. “As we kick off the centennial celebration, I am so proud to see leaders and Route 66 enthusiasts across the state stepping up to showcase our communities, culture and experiences that make Oklahoma the heart of the Mother Road. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to drive tourism, support local economies and tell our Route 66 story to the world.”

The new bridge construction replaced a 74-year-old structure and was built to accommodate the six lanes planned for the Turner Turnpike. SH-66 was repaved and a new scenic turnout with four parking spots allowing easy access to the new artwork and providing a safe location for motorists to stop and explore this iconic location.

“ODOT is proud to claim our State Highway Commissioner, Cyrus Avery, as the ‘Father of Route 66,’” said Transportation Secretary and ODOT Executive Director Tim Gatz. “This moment honors the Mother Road’s legacy and our commitment to connecting communities, preserving history and building a safe future for our state’s transportation system. It allows us to reflect on where we’ve been and where we’re going together.”

The largest artwork, *You Are Here*, marks the midpoint of Oklahoma’s nearly 400-mile stretch of Route 66. The 23-foot-tall sculpture of a map pin was unveiled as a bold new landmark visible both day and night. Its dynamic imagery celebrates Route 66, Wellston, and Oklahoma as both a pathway for movement and a place of gathering and connection. The sculpture is constructed of carbon steel pipe and square tubing and includes colorful, translucent polycarbonate artwork panels with scenes of the Mother Road. *You Are Here* was designed by Joseph O’Connell of Creative Machines.

Harvest and Highway, a wall-mounted artwork installed along the newly reconstructed Turner Turnpike bridge, was also recognized. Stretching the length of one bridge wall, the brightly colored, powder-coated metal panels honor Wellston’s agricultural heritage and land through five elemental themes central to the community’s identity: corn, wheat, roads, water, and earth. *Harvest and Highway* was designed by Cliff Garten Studio.

The artworks were commissioned through the Oklahoma Arts Council’s Art in Public Places program in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

A third installation, *Relics and Reed* by Helen and Will Arts, was underway at the time of the unveiling and will ultimately include 17 steel vignettes incorporating imagery of wheat, native plants, and automobile iconography in tribute to the surrounding landscape and the legacy of Route 66.

“The Oklahoma Arts Council is proud to leverage its public art expertise and resources to support these iconic, large-scale works, which will anchor the statewide Route 66 Public Art Trail,” Oklahoma Arts Council Executive Director Amber Sharples said. “Public art plays a vital role in distinguishing Oklahoma as a place defined by memorable experiences and a dynamic and evolving landscape. These installations will create lasting impressions for the many travelers journeying along the Mother Road during its centennial year and well into the future.”

With these additions, Oklahoma adds a new stop — and three pieces of public art — to the Oklahoma Route 66 Public Art Trail, which features more than 10 artworks in communities along the state’s drivable miles of Route 66 and helps ensure the historic highway’s appeal for the next century.

Motorists will be able to enjoy these new amenities both day and night thanks to the addition of dynamic LED lighting on the new Turner Turnpike bridge. The lighting will be visible from the Mother Road below the turnpike.

“We are so proud to highlight the partnerships that mark this intersection of the state’s original turnpike with historic Route 66 as a new must-see destination for those traveling the Mother Road for decades to come,” OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle said. “The care and planning by the partner agencies and the community to bring us to this day exemplifies the Oklahoma Standard.”



Federal, state and local dignitaries gathered Thursday morning in Wellston at the junction of Route 66 and the I-44/Turner Turnpike to dedicate the newly widened turnpike bridge, improvements made to SH-66 and three iconic new pieces of public art at the site.



Speakers for Thursday's Wellston Rt. 66 art and infrastructure dedication were, from left, OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle, Secretary of Transportation and ODOT Executive Director Tim Gatz, Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, FHWA Administrator Sean McMaster and Oklahoma Arts Council Executive Director Amber Sharples. They are holding commemorative pieces of the original Turner Turnpike bridge that was replaced with a \$48 million bridge reconstruction and widening project.