



PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, May 7, 2026

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release #009-26

OTA advances Indian Nation investments, assists Enid tornado recovery, expands access for oversize loads

McALESTER — The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board approved three construction contracts totaling about \$20.2 million during its May meeting held in McAlester — advancing infrastructure improvements on the Indian Nation and Cimarron turnpikes while continuing a decade-long reinvestment effort in Southeastern Oklahoma. This was the first remote Board meeting since 2020 and is something communities along turnpikes can expect in future years to provide more opportunities for OTA to better connect with the communities it serves.

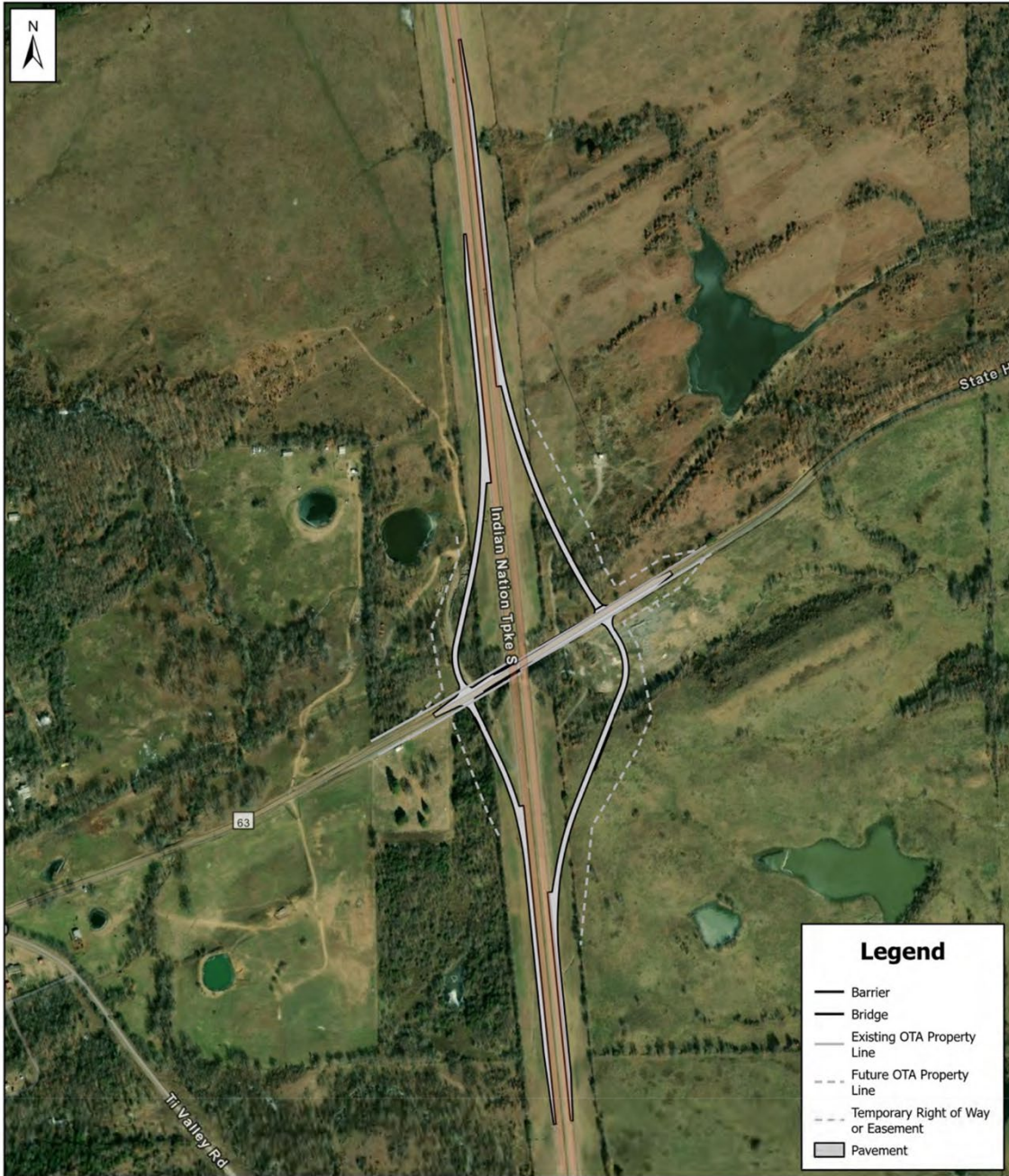
OTA awards new interchange at Blanco on the Indian Nation Turnpike

The Board approved a \$9 million contract to Manhattan Road and Bridge for construction of a full diamond interchange at SH-63 near Blanco on the SH-375/Indian Nation Turnpike, roughly at milepost 55 in Pittsburg County. The project is part of the ACCESS Oklahoma bond program and marks the first new interchange at that location. Work includes grading, drainage, surfacing, tolling, signing, lighting on the Indian Nation Turnpike and resurfacing of SH-63 within the interchange limits. Seven contractors submitted bids, with the low bid coming in about 14 percent below the engineer's estimate. Construction is slated to begin in late summer and is expected to take about a year to complete.

The new interchange will dramatically cut drive times for residents in the Blanco area — and improve emergency response times for an area currently served primarily by rural roads. “If you were in Blanco and you tried to get to McAlester right now, it’s probably a

35- or 40-minute drive,” said OTA Executive Director Joe Echelle. “This should shorten that down to 10 or 15 minutes. It’s a direct straight shot — a major improvement.”

Pittsburg County District 2 Commissioner Mike Haynes, who attended the meeting, welcomed the project. “I appreciate what you guys are fixing to do down in Blanco,” Haynes said. “That’s going to be a lifesaver for a bunch of folks.”



ACCESS Projects

Interchange - SH-63 at Blanco



The Board also approved a \$5.7 million contract to Frontier Bridge Inc. for rehabilitation of two Indian Nation Turnpike bridges — one over 10 Mile Creek at milepost 28 and one over Dumping Creek at milepost 11, both in Pushmataha County. Work includes replacement of concrete decks, parapets, beams, and bearing assemblies, along with

substructure repairs. Five contractors submitted bids, with the low bid coming in about 4 percent below the engineer's estimate.

Since 2018, OTA has completed 24 projects at more than \$160 million reinvestment into the Indian Nation Turnpike. An additional \$80 million in capital reinvestment is planned through 2030. These improvements have resulted in improved pavement conditions and ride quality along the corridor, said Jimmy Sparks with Olsson during his monthly construction engineering report to the Board.

OTA awards shoulder and guardrail contract on Cimarron Turnpike

The Board also approved a \$5.4 million contract to TJ Campbell Construction for shoulder and guardrail reconstruction on the US-412/Cimarron Turnpike spur from milepost 19 to milepost 28 in Payne County. Six contractors submitted bids, with the low bid coming in about 13 percent below the engineer's estimate.

OTA crews assist Enid tornado recovery

OTA deployed equipment and crews to assist the City of Enid following an EF-3 tornado that directly struck a neighborhood with such force it caused what emergency managers described as EF-4 level damage. With limited contractor presence and uncertain federal reimbursement for a storm that hit one neighborhood particularly hard, the city and Oklahoma Emergency Management reached out to OTA and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation for help clearing debris from streets and county roads.

As of the May Board meeting, 12 OTA employees had worked about 581 hours and hauled roughly 230 loads of debris — work that continues through this week. OTA crews worked alongside ODOT crews in the area and the City of Enid publicly thanked both agencies for the response.

"We have the equipment and we have the manpower," Echelle said. "When we can help, we try. And it's something we've been proud to do for a long time."

Oversize load expansion keeping heavy trucks on safer roads

Since OTA raised its oversize load width limit to 16 feet to match the standard used on Oklahoma interstate highways, 374 permitted loads have traveled the turnpike system that previously would have been routed onto narrow rural two-lane roadways. Keeping oversize loads on controlled-access highways reduces wear on county and state infrastructure and lowers the accident risk for both the load operators and other drivers sharing the road. The expansion covers the Creek, Will Rogers, Turner, and other turnpikes where crews have removed bollards, opened narrow points at on- and off-ramps, and cleared toll plaza infrastructure made obsolete by OTA's transition to

cashless tolling. OTA continues to coordinate with ODOT's Size and Weight permitting office on oversized and super-load movements across the state.

Wellston ribbon cutting draws federal recognition

On April 23, OTA marked the completion of the Wellston bridge project on the I-44/Turner Turnpike — the last fracture-critical bridge on the interstate system — with a ribbon cutting attended by the Federal Highway Administration Administrator Sean McMaster and Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell. The event coincided with the national Mother Road Summit in Oklahoma City. The new \$48 million structure features relief art and LED lighting visible from Route 66 below, along with three pieces of public art developed by the Oklahoma Arts Council and ODOT, including a sculpture marking the mid-point of Route 66 in Oklahoma. For a look at the event and the public art, check out this recap video: <https://youtu.be/bLGP0YNayIE?si=oOqjcWU1QoFK9Aqm>