

**ODOT, partners celebrate approval
of Crosstown project**

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“This is a moment to rejoice and celebrate,” ODOT Director Gary Ridley said Monday. “The final FHWA approval of our Crosstown Expressway project shows that our work has been heading the right direction. Now we can seriously get down to designing the new route.”

Among honored guests expected at ODOT’s on-site celebration were Governor Frank Keating, Congressmen Frank Lucas and J. C. Watts, Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Herschal Crow, Oklahoma City Mayor Kirk Humphreys and a host of civic and transportation leaders.

The Federal Highway Administration’s Record of Decision has brought a new phase in the process of replacing the badly worn stretch of I-40 through Oklahoma City.

That approval means that design, right-of-way acquisition and, finally, construction can get under way on the multi-million-dollar relocation of the vital cross-country route.

“It’s been a detailed process,” Ridley said, “but with something this important for both Oklahoma and the nation, we had to be sure we covered every possible angle to come up with the best solution. We certainly appreciate the unflagging support we have received from the leadership at all levels of government. We would not be here today without the efforts of Congressman Lucas, whose district includes the project, and Congressman Watts, who was on the Transportation Committee during the TEA-21 authorization. The entire Congressional delegation has worked hard to secure these funds for Oklahoma.”

ODOT and FHWA have been working with the City of Oklahoma City, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and the general public since 1996 to come up with the best way to handle the ever-growing I-40 traffic load with the least impact on the affected area.

ODOT Planning & Research Engineer David Streb pointed out the significance of the project. “This is the largest single project in ODOT history,” he said. “There has never been a project that drew federal money so early, and the process itself has been the most extensive we have ever had. It’s really been an honor for me to be associated with it for the past six years and work with the numerous groups and partners.”

The new route will be along an existing transportation corridor. That will allow the large I-40 traffic volume to continue uninterrupted while the construction work is under way.

The Crosstown, a cutting-edge facility in the 1960s, was designed for about 70,000 vehicles a day. With the latest count showing more than 110,000 vehicles a day and the physical wear

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and aging of the route, action had to be taken to keep traffic flowing and safe.

All possible options were considered: not building a new facility at all, rebuilding along the same alignment or building a new highway along a multitude of different alignments.

Alternate D, the route that the new facility will follow, runs about five blocks south of the present Crosstown alignment. Additional enhancement features are planned for inclusion that will benefit the nearby communities including a park, pedestrian bridge and sound wall.

Although ODOT will begin immediately on the next steps, there will be little visible for some months. Design work and right-of-way acquisition will happen “off stage,” so heavy equipment and construction crews are still many months away.

A general estimate of the time required is at least two years for design and right-of-way acquisition and approximately six years for construction. The actual time line will depend on the availability of future funding. ODOT can now begin spending the \$103 million already earmarked for the project. It will be around 2010 before all construction is completed.

Meantime, the existing Crosstown will continue to be used while the new facility is being built. ODOT is committed to continue working with the City regarding the construction of a new boulevard and a bridge along the present route for use after the new Crosstown is finished.

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