

**Officials hopeful on funding,  
pleased with bridge inspections**

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# Information Release



*Public Affairs Division, 200 N. E. 21st Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105 (405) 521-2554*

While road and bridge funding are being debated by the Oklahoma Legislature, newly completed inspections have revealed no surprises about the condition of Oklahoma's bridges, members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission were told at its November meeting.

Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley presented an overview on the possible lack of funding impacting the preparation of the agency's 8-year Construction Plan. With the passage of House Bill 1176 in 2006, the decades-long trend in underfunding for ODOT was reversed. New funding under the bill is expected to reach \$277 million when fully implemented. However, the increases in the bill are contingent on a 3 percent revenue growth.

This year, the State Board of Equalization certified the revenue growth estimates at below 3 percent, resulting in a shortfall of \$32.5 million of anticipated funds for transportation needs. The 8-year plan uses the best estimates available and therefore funding changes can affect the projects planned for construction.

"The uncertainty in receiving these funds for much-needed improvements across the state affects ODOT's ability to plan in a meaningful way," Ridley said. "Therefore, we have not completed the 8-year plan this year in anticipation of the best estimates available after February 2008."

The state Legislature is contemplating in the coming session the removal of the 3 percent requirement, allowing for consistent increases in the department's appropriation.

"Finalizing the 8-year construction plan after those decisions have been made makes the plan significantly more accurate," Ridley said. "We are not only hopeful more projects can be included in the document to address the many infrastructure needs but also concerned projects could be removed due to a lack of funding."

In an update about special reinspections of the state's 64 fracture critical bridges, ODOT Chief Engineer John Fuller said there were no surprises and inspections were completed on schedule late last week.

"These reinspections validated our on-going process and suggested repairs were noted on only two of the bridges," Fuller said. "Nothing requiring immediate action was discovered on these 64 bridges."

Inspections were scheduled after federal highway officials encouraged states to conduct inspections of deck truss bridges following the Minneapolis bridge collapse in August. Those inspections have already been completed and Oklahoma officials decided to inspect fracture critical bridges as well.

The term "fracture critical" refers to a bridge that could be compromised if a key piece were to fail. While many of the invoices are outstanding, a rough estimate of the cost of the reinspections is about \$700,000.

"The reinspections were precautionary," Fuller said. "We have committed to Oklahomans that we will immediately close any bridge if necessary for public safety and we plan to continue that commitment."

ODOT officials said they are pleased with the overall outcome. Reported conditions resulted in ODOT's scheduling of routine repairs on two bridges: US-281 over a canyon in Caddo County, 1.1 miles west of the Canadian County line, and US-62 over the Arkansas River in Muskogee County.

The 64 fracture critical bridges will continue to be inspected as previously scheduled. ODOT requires inspections for all 6,700 bridges on the state system to take place at least every two years.

ODOT's current plan calls for reconstructing 480 bridges, and improving 800 other bridges in its current 8-year plan. Passage of House Bill 1176 in 2006 by the state Legislature is giving a much-needed boost in state funding to assist with such project costs. When fully implemented, the measure is expected to provide up to \$277 million in new funds, given a 3 percent revenue growth is met each year.

A complete list of the 64 fracture critical bridges can be found at:

[www.okladot.state.ok.us/public-info/press/07-000\\_fracture\\_critical\\_bridges.pdf](http://www.okladot.state.ok.us/public-info/press/07-000_fracture_critical_bridges.pdf).

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