

**Without funding change,  
transportation projects  
could be cancelled**

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## Information Release



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Members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission on Monday, April 7, warned they could be forced to remove hundreds of already-scheduled bridge and highway projects from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's eight-year Construction Work Plan.

Two years ago, the State Legislature approved long-term funding increases in HB 1176 (2006), some of which were contingent on 3 percent revenue growth for the state. Although HB 1176 was an amazing step forward for transportation funding, the trigger mechanism could cost Oklahomans dearly in terms of much needed infrastructure.

"Each of us, as members of the Transportation Commission, has been appointed by the Governor to be stewards of our state's roads and bridges," said Chairman Dan Overland, Earlsboro. "As such, it is incumbent upon us to speak up and offer input when decisions are made that could have dramatic, lasting consequences for the safety of Oklahoma families as they drive our roads and for the future of our state's prosperity."

Because of the cumulative effect of HB 1176 provisions, the 3 percent trigger mechanism will cause ODOT to have to remove \$127 million worth of projects. Additionally, it may cause as much as \$260 million in projects to be removed from the remainder of the state's eight-year highway construction plan if the trend continues.

"If we are going to have a growing economy in Oklahoma, we must have a safe and efficient transportation that will allow people and products to move," said Commissioner Guy Berry, Sapulpa. "A quality transportation system provides the economic vitality for the state and country."

"For example, Kansas invests three times as much as Oklahoma on its highways and bridges," Berry said. "If we want to keep up with the states around us, we need to make the same kinds of investments to stay competitive."

Because of past underfunding, ODOT's construction backlog is officially \$9 billion but because of recent construction cost increases, it actually could be as much as \$12 billion. Bridges alone account for about half of the backlog. For example, the current eight-year plan includes 480 bridge replacements, but there is no identified funding for an additional 626 bridges that need to be addressed.

In the past several years, road users have made transportation a priority by expressing a desire for a better system both for the safety of their families and for efficiency of travel.

ODOT Director Gary Ridley said the agency has not yet developed a list of projects affected by the potential shortfall because of the uncertainty of the size of any loss of funding.

"We're optimistic the Legislature will eliminate the need to remove projects out of the eight-year plan by doing away with the trigger mechanism in HB 1176," he said.

Other commissioners speaking were: Carlisle Mabrey III, Okmulgee; James H. Dunegan, Calera; Dan Overland, Earlsboro; Loyd Benson, Frederick; Bruce Benbrook, Woodward and Bradley W. Burgess, Lawton.

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