



September Commission Wrap-Up: Federal funds approved; state projects awarded

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 22, 2008

PR# 08-055

Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's Friday, Sept. 19, special meeting included discussion of federal funding as well as approval of construction projects throughout the state.

At its last regular meeting, the Oklahoma Transportation Commission was forced to take the unprecedented move of delaying action on all projects awaiting approvals at the time after federal officials announced they would limit reimbursements from the Highway Trust Fund to only partial payments in order to keep the account solvent.

After the President signed legislation repaying the \$8 billion to the Highway Trust Fund that had been taken in the late 1998, commission members were able to conduct a special meeting to award contracts that had previously been bid in August.

"We certainly thank Senator (Jim) Inhofe and our entire Oklahoma Congressional delegation for their support in this endeavor," Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley said.

Funding problems were caused, in part, by the increase in the price of gasoline and a reduction in the amount of fuel purchased by drivers. Ridley noted Congress will debate a new transportation bill next year.

"This should be a wake-up call, for all of us, especially for the U.S. Congress, and the administration, that this issue will manifest again," Ridley said. "We all need to be conscious of the fact that we may have to take steps during the year to insure that the crisis won't have the impact that it did this time."

During the meeting, commissioners approved an engineering contract related to the Safe Routes to Schools Program, which is aimed at encouraging children to walk to school safely. They also approved a contract to help develop the 2010-2035 Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan. The SITP is a long-range planning document that considers highways, air transportation, waterways, rural transit, bicycles and pedestrians and rail transport.

Commissioners also approved construction contracts to replace four load posted bridges on highways in Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Pontotoc and Seminole counties.

The commission also approved construction on the next phase of the I-40 Crosstown in Oklahoma City. The \$41 million project, located between Pennsylvania and Shartel avenues, is the largest single construction contract in the agency's history. Also approved were cable barrier projects on US-69 near Eufaula in McIntosh County and on US-75 in Okmulgee County.

In all, commissioners awarded 29 contracts totaling nearly \$70 million to improve highways, interstates and county roads in 23 counties. Projects include bridge and highway construction and reconstruction, resurfacing and safety improvements.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Atoka, Beckham, Cleveland, Comanche, Cotton, Creek, Garfield, Jefferson, Kingfisher, Latimer, McIntosh, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Osage, Payne, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Pushmataha, Seminole, Tulsa, Washington and Woodward counties.

The commission – an eight-member panel appointed by the governor to oversee the state's transportation development – awards project contracts for road and bridge construction every month. The panel's next meeting is 11 a.m. Monday, October 6, 2008, in the R.A. Ward Transportation Building in Oklahoma City.

Before a project is awarded, ODOT researches, plans and designs work to be done. Contracts are bid competitively, with the OTC selecting the winning firm. Contractors have a grace period to begin work, typically several weeks or months after a contract is awarded. Weather or other factors can affect when construction on a project begins.

Contracts, bid information, the commission's monthly agenda and project details can be accessed at <http://www.okladot.state.ok.us>.

– www.okladot.state.ok.us –

(Editors and News Directors: For details about projects in your area and to download accompanying pictures, please visit the Web site www.okladot.state.ok.us/public-info. For more information, call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Office at 405-521-6000.)

INFORMATION RELEASE

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Ernestine Mbroh, with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, explains Oklahoma's Safe Routes to School Program to members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission at a special meeting Friday, Sept. 19. Action on the an engineering contract for the program, which is aimed at encouraging children to walk to school safely, was delayed after federal officials announced the Highway Trust Fund would limit reimbursements to states. After a cash infusion to the fund, commissioners were able to award the contract.



A load-posted bridge replacement on SH-16 over Tiger Creek in Okmulgee County was among projects the Oklahoma Transportation Commission approved at its Friday, Sept. 19, special meeting. The action followed an \$8 billion infusion to the Highway Trust Fund by federal officials. Most highway construction in Oklahoma is funded with federal dollars.