



## State leaders praise Ridley's long career in state transportation

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After 44 years with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, including 12 years as its director, Gary Ridley is hanging up his hard hat and safety vest. Though he is retiring as director of both ODOT and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority at the end of March, Ridley will remain Transportation Secretary, a position for which he was first appointed by Gov. Brad Henry in 2009 and reappointed by Gov. Mary Fallin after her election in 2010.

Governor Fallin praised Ridley's commitment to improving the safety and quality of Oklahoma's infrastructure and his work to implement the Bridge Improvement and Turnpike Modernization Plan that will repair or replace the state's remaining structurally deficient highway bridges by 2019.

"Throughout his 44 years in public service, Gary has been a champion for transportation and has dedicated himself to improving the transportation system for all Oklahomans," said Fallin. "As ODOT director, he has proven his leadership by overseeing the reconstruction of the I-40 bridge at Webbers Falls in record time, creating a long-term plan to properly maintain our highways and implementing the Bridge Improvement Plan to finally address all of the state's structurally deficient bridges. I want to congratulate Gary on his outstanding career with ODOT. He will be sorely missed at the department, but I look forward to his continued service and expertise as Transportation Secretary."

Transportation Commission Chairman Greg Love pointed to ODOT's reputation as an effective and well-managed state agency during Ridley's tenure.

"ODOT is highly-regarded as one of the best departments of transportation in the nation, thanks in large part to Gary Ridley's leadership and expertise," Love said. "My fellow commissioners and I appreciate his years of service and lifelong commitment to a safe and modern transportation system."

Ridley was grateful for the chance to work with state leaders and the public in making transportation a top priority for the state.

"I would like to thank the governor, the commissioners and the good people of this state for the opportunity to serve the department in working to move Oklahoma forward," Ridley said. "All in all, it's been a great ride."

Ridley's journey up through the ranks provided him with first-hand insights into the operations of the state's transportation system. His ODOT service dates back to 1965, when he joined the department as an equipment operator. He moved up to maintenance superintendent at Kingfisher in 1970 and then to traffic superintendent at Perry in 1979 before becoming field maintenance manager in 1983.

In 1986, Ridley moved to Clinton to become Division Five Maintenance Engineer and, in 1995, was promoted to Division Engineer over all construction and maintenance operations in Division Five. He joined ODOT's senior staff as Assistant Director for Operations in January 2001. The Oklahoma Transportation Commission appointed Ridley director in August 2001.

Less than a year after Ridley became director, ODOT was faced with one of the worst tragedies in its history when a barge collision brought down a section of the I-40 bridge over the Arkansas River near Webbers Falls in eastern Oklahoma. Fourteen travelers died when their cars fell into the river. Interstate traffic was detoured onto rural highways for weeks as construction crews worked around the clock to rebuild the bridge in record time. To prove the safety of the new bridge, Ridley rode in the first truck across.

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The Webbers Falls disaster was a major turning point for ODOT. The two-month detour of more than one million cars on to rural highways and bridges brought the public's attention to the state's crumbling infrastructure. Ridley worked with the state legislature and governor when they passed several landmark pieces of legislation to greatly improve transportation funding. He also helped reform the agency's planning process to ensure that transportation projects are programmed in a sound, businesslike fashion absent political influence.

Combined with funding increases, Ridley also improved the process of preparing the department's Eight-year Construction Work Plan, which allowed ODOT to address the backlog of much-needed improvements and adequately plan for future projects. Ridley also created ODOT's four-year Asset Preservation Plan to maximize the life of transportation infrastructure and better protect Oklahoma's investment in its system.

During Ridley's tenure, ODOT implemented important new safety features, such as life-saving cable median barriers. The department was the first state agency to make a large purchase of compressed natural gas cars and trucks as part of Gov. Fallin's bipartisan, multistate initiative to use CNG vehicles in state fleets.

Ridley has been asked to testify to Congress on several occasions about the challenges faced by state transportation officials. He also chaired the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials committee that organized the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the interstate highway system in 2006.

Along with his work at ODOT, Ridley assumed additional duties as Transportation Secretary and Director of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority in 2009.

Deputy Director and Chief Financial Officer Mike Patterson was appointed by the Oklahoma Transportation Commission to succeed Ridley as director, effective April 1.

Ridley is a native of Chicago and a registered Professional Engineer. He and his wife, Eula, live in Yukon and have two grown children, Daphne and Joe, and four grandchildren.

### **Additional Quotes**

Former Transportation Secretary and OTA Director Phil Tomlinson:

*"From installing life-saving cable barriers to tackling the state's worst bridges, Oklahoma's transportation system is certainly better off today thanks to Gary Ridley's work."*

Former Transportation Secretary and ODOT Director Neal McCaleb:

*"Gary's lifelong career in transportation has been important, but he has also left an imprint on the future as the most influential person in ODOT's history to define and implement comprehensive planning based on needs rather than politics."*

Former Transportation Secretary Herschel Crow:

*"As a member of the legislature and the governor's cabinet, I saw a lot of people do the job of ODOT Director and Gary Ridley has been one of the best, if not the best. I'm glad the state is still going to be able to keep his reservoir of knowledge and expertise for some more years as Transportation Secretary."*

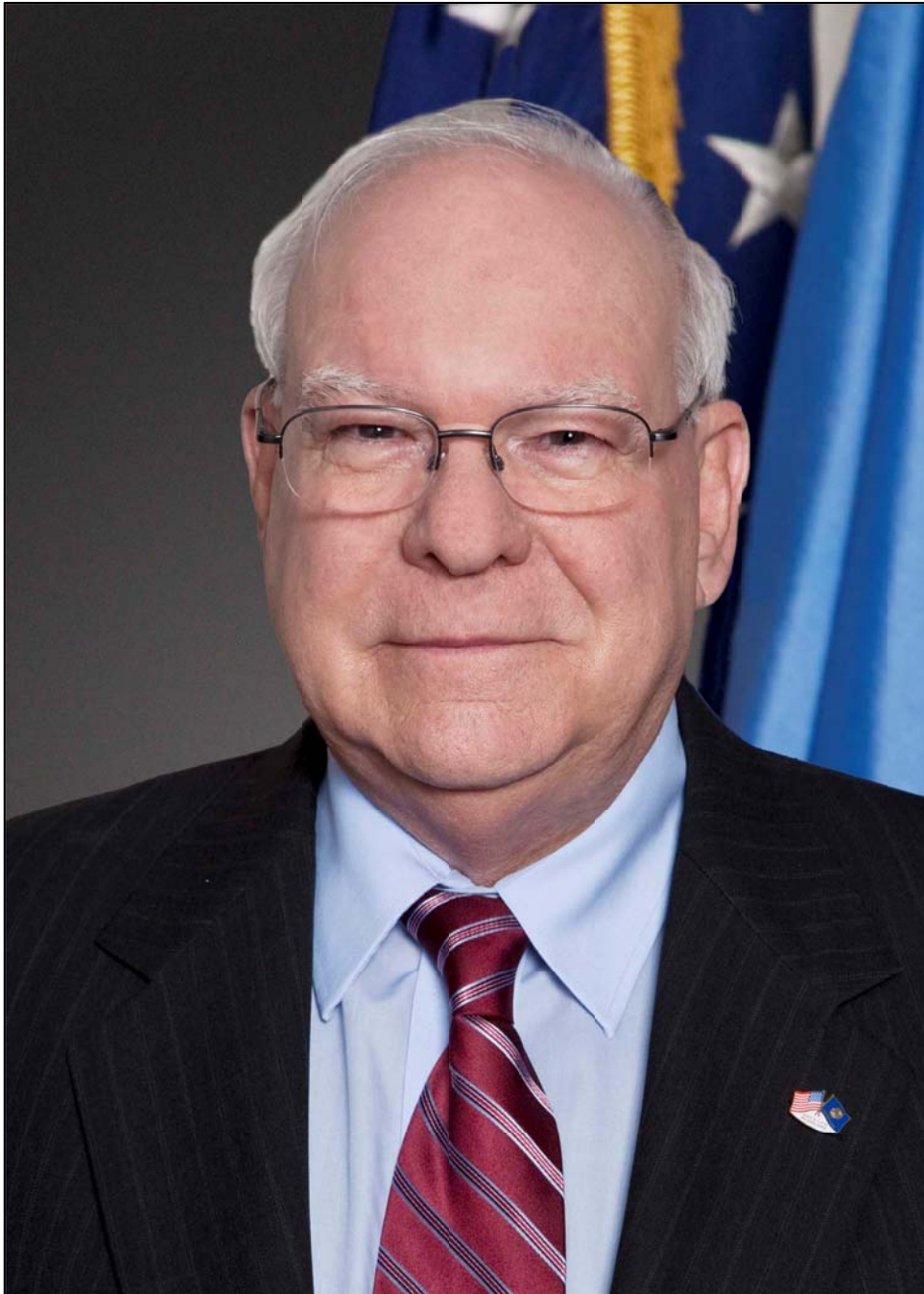
Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board of Directors Chairman Albert "Kell" Kelly, Jr.:

*"Gary Ridley is the most respected Director of Transportation in the entire country. He is legendary for his insight into transportation matters and is a resource called upon frequently by the United States Congress to testify on transportation and its future. Gary represents a national treasure located right here in Oklahoma."*

—[www.okladot.state.ok.us](http://www.okladot.state.ok.us)—

**(Editors and News Directors: For more information, call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)**





Longtime transportation executive Gary Ridley is retiring after a 44-year career with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, including 12 years as the agency's director. He will continue to serve on Gov. Mary Fallin's Cabinet as Transportation Secretary.



Retiring Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley (seated) receives a standing ovation following his farewell address to members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission and guests at the commission's March 4 meeting. He is retiring after 44 years at ODOT, including 12 years as its director.



Transportation Secretary Gary Ridley (left) speaks with newspaper reporters about upcoming Oklahoma Department of Transportation projects following a meeting of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission. He is retiring at the end of March after 44 years at ODOT, including the last 12 years as its director.