

February Commission Wrap-Up

Commission receives updates on state-owned rail, bridge closure; \$103 million in contracts awarded

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Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's Monday, Feb. 3 meeting include a report on state-owned railroad, an update on the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's emergency closure of the bridge between Purcell and Lexington, introduction of the agency's new head roadway design engineer and approval of contracts for several major bridge and highway resurfacing projects.

In his address to the commission, Executive Director Mike Patterson gave a presentation on Oklahoma's system of state-owned railroad. Since acquisition of rail lines from bankrupt rail companies in the 1980s and 1990s, more than 580 miles of state-owned rail have been successfully returned to private ownership. Recently, the department received four proposals from companies interested in purchasing the Sooner Sub rail line, which runs between Del City and Sapulpa. By law, the proposals will go before a committee of five Cabinet members, who will make a recommendation to the transportation commission.

"As good stewards of the taxpayers' investment, ODOT and the transportation commission have a clear responsibility to consider all options for the future of this rail line," Patterson said. "We're very pleased with the fair and thorough evaluation process instituted by the legislature."

Chief Engineer Casey Shell outlined the department's plan of action to repair and reopen the US-77/SH-39 bridge over the South Canadian River between Purcell and Lexington. The bridge was load posted, and then closed last week due to safety reasons following the discovery of several cracks in the truss beams. Following recommendations from ODOT's structural engineers and bridge consultants, it was determined that the bridge must remain closed until repairs are completed, which could take several months. The design of this bridge is similar to the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis that collapsed in 2007.

"We never want to close any bridge, but it is absolutely the right thing to do if public safety is in jeopardy," Shell said. "ODOT is working with national bridge experts on a plan to fix this bridge and we're hoping to bring a repair contract to an emergency commission meeting as quickly as possible."

While ODOT continues to make progress in addressing the state's bridge needs, a backlog of crucial bridge projects remains due to decades of underfunding and a rapidly aging highway bridge system.

Director of Engineering Tim Tegeler introduced ODOT's new Roadway Design Division Engineer, Caleb Austin, of Okarche. Austin has more than a decade of experience with the department and will now oversee the design of highway projects, ensuring that they meet engineering standards and safety requirements.

A major Green Country bridge project at Fort Gibson Lake is moving forward, thanks to commission approval of a nearly \$17 million contract to replace the SH-51 bridge across the Grand River east of Wagoner. The existing Richard D. Newkirk Bridge has been in service since 1949 and is structurally deficient. In 2012, ODOT began working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to widen the existing SH-51 causeway in preparation for construction of the new bridge, which connects Cherokee and Wagoner counties.

Two projects in northwestern Tulsa County will be underway soon. Commissioners awarded a \$4 million contract to resurface nearly four miles of US-64/US-412 near Keystone Lake and a \$3.8 million contract to rehabilitate the SH-51 bridge over the Arkansas River.

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They also awarded contracts for two highway projects in the Oklahoma City metro area, including a \$1.2 million contract to resurface six miles of SH-9 east of South 72nd Ave. near Lake Thunderbird in Norman and a more than \$1 million contract to resurface more than four miles of SH-4 near Mustang.

The commission also approved a \$5.5 million contract to resurface nearly 20 miles of US-60 between Vici and Seiling in Dewey County.

In all, commissioners awarded 65 contracts totaling more than \$103 million to improve bridges, highways, interstates and roads in 42 counties.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Adair, Atoka, Beaver, Bryan, Canadian, Carter, Choctaw, Cleveland, Comanche, Craig, Custer, Delaware, Dewey, Ellis, Garvin, Grady, Grant, Hughes, Kay, Kiowa, Le Flore, Lincoln, Logan, Major, Mayes, Murray, Noble, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Osage, Ottawa, Pawnee, Payne, Pontotoc, Pushmataha, Seminole, Sequoyah, Stephens, Tulsa, Wagoner and Woods counties.

The 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 regular meeting is scheduled for **Monday, March 3 at 11 a.m.** in the R.A. Ward Transportation Building in Oklahoma City.

Before a project is awarded, ODOT researches, plans and designs the work to be done. Contracts are bid competitively, with the commission selecting the winning firm. Typically, work begins several weeks or months after contracts are awarded.

Contracts, bid information, the commission's monthly agenda and project details can be viewed at www.okladot.state.ok.us.

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



At their Monday, Feb. 3 meeting, the Oklahoma Transportation Commission approved a nearly \$17 million contract to replace the SH-51 bridge across the Grand River between Cherokee and Wagoner counties. The existing bridge was built in 1949 and is structurally deficient. Construction of the new bridge will follow an ongoing effort by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to widen the SH-51 causeway across the waterway.



At their Monday, Feb. 3 meeting, members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission heard details about the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's recent closure of the US-77/SH-39 bridge over the South Canadian River between Purcell and Lexington. Cracks discovered in several truss beams during an inspection put the bridge in danger of collapsing. The agency is working with national bridge experts on a plan for emergency repairs.