



U.S. Secretary of Transportation Foxx and U.S. Senator Inhofe visit Tulsa to discuss improvements, progress of Oklahoma transportation

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The nation's top transportation official makes a stop in Tulsa to see firsthand Oklahoma's progress in improving transportation corridors. United States Senator James Inhofe hosted a visit by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx Thursday, and joined state transportation officials to discuss the state's long-term transportation development and remaining infrastructure needs.

"The recent improvements Oklahoma has made to its roads and bridges and its efforts to address its aging infrastructure are examples of what can be done by focusing efforts on transportation investment," Foxx said, who made his second visit to Oklahoma today at Senator Inhofe's invitation. "I look forward to working with transportation leaders throughout the country to continue our progress in repairing our transportation system and making it more efficient and safer for future generations."

Secretary Foxx and Senator Inhofe also discussed Oklahoma's progress in transportation funding and the economic value of transportation to the state and the nation. Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley, Oklahoma Department of Transportation Executive Director Mike Patterson, Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett and other dignitaries were also in attendance.

"The recently completed I-44 Riverside to Yale improvements and I-244 bridge replacements over the Arkansas River in Tulsa are prime examples of Congress carrying out its Constitutional responsibility to maintain and modernize our nation's infrastructure. It serves as a lesson of what can be accomplished when dedicated funding is used to address the critical needs of our transportation system," Inhofe said. "Oklahoma contains portions of some of the most heavily traveled highways in the country which are vitally important for commerce. Making these critical improvements can prevent costly traffic delays and helps our transportation system operate more efficiently."

Thanks to the efforts of congressional and state leaders in recent years, Oklahoma has made great strides in improving its aging transportation system with additional federal and state funds. But as state funding has become more reliable, federal funding for transportation has been less secure as Congress continues short-term efforts to maintain the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund. While recent congressional action extends funding through May 2015 and ensures continued federal funding for ongoing and planned projects in Oklahoma, a permanent solution is needed to provide the certainty required for long-term transportation planning.

"Senator Inhofe has been a great advocate in the improvement of transportation infrastructure not just in Oklahoma, but nationwide," Ridley said. "We are excited to visit with Secretary Foxx and work closely with him and other national and state leaders to continue the progress, find more permanent funding solutions and address the critical infrastructure needs that remain."

INFORMATION RELEASE

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While there are nearly 2,000 projects scheduled in ODOT's current \$6.3 billion Eight Year Construction Work Plan, officials cited a roughly \$8 billion backlog remaining on critically needed highway and bridge projects statewide. These unfunded areas include a segment of I-44 west of the Arkansas River in Tulsa, which is an area in need of future widening, along with bridge and interchange improvements.

"This portion of I-44 between the Arkansas River and the I-244 western split was built in 1953 and is one of the oldest remaining sections of interstate on our system," Patterson said. "Preliminary estimates show it would take around \$350 million to bring it up to today's interstate standards. It is just one example of the challenges we face statewide with our aging infrastructure and funding needs."

Oklahoma remains steadfast in providing a safe highway system as it continues towards its goal of repairing or replacing all current structurally deficient bridges by the end of the decade if funding levels continue. In 2004, Oklahoma topped national lists for bad bridges, with 1,168 highway bridges considered structurally deficient. By the end of 2013, the number of structurally deficient state highway bridges had dropped to 468 thanks to targeted funding. In addition, ODOT has plans to improve and add shoulders to 743 miles of two-lane highways and perform major improvements on 725 miles of high-volume highways and interstates in Oklahoma over the next eight years.

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



Photo caption - Federal transportation officials make a stop in Tulsa to view recent improvements and discuss long-term funding and infrastructure needs. Standing from left are Oklahoma Department of Transportation Executive Director Mike Patterson, Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, U.S. Senator James Inhofe and Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Gary Ridley.