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*Editor's note: This is one of a regular series of monthly columns titled "Oklahoma Now" by Governor Mary Fallin. The column will be delivered on the first Monday of each month.*

## **Governor Mary Fallin's "Oklahoma Now" Column**

Headline: "New Transportation Plan is Vital for Economic Success and Job Growth in Oklahoma"

By Governor Mary Fallin

I have said many times before that my first priority as governor is to bring more and better jobs to the state of Oklahoma. To that end, I've worked with other lawmakers to develop and implement a series of job creating initiatives that will help to deliver the kind of business-friendly environment that leads to private sector job growth.

This week, I am announcing the next step in that pro-jobs agenda: the "Bridge Improvement and Turnpike Modernization Plan."

Having safe, modern and easily traveled roads and bridges is important for commuters, for commerce and for job creation. As my secretary of transportation once told me, businesses don't want to locate on a dirt road. They want a modern transportation infrastructure servicing their needs.

Unfortunately, the state of Oklahoma's bridges have long been an impediment to economic growth. For years, Oklahoma has topped the national "bad bridges" lists. Currently, we have 706 bridges on the state highway system that are identified as structurally deficient.

Under the Bridge Improvement and Modernization Plan, we'll bring that number down to zero by 2019. We got started this week when I asked the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) to add another 126 projects to its 8-year work plan, bringing the total number of structurally deficient bridges set to be repaired up to 539. To repair the remaining bridges, I'm asking our Legislature to make a financial commitment to fixing our bridges. By passing legislation to add an additional \$15 million to the annual increases in the Rebuilding Oklahoma Access and Driver Safety (ROADS) fund, ODOT will have the resources it needs to virtually eliminate structurally deficient bridges on the state highway system.

The plan doesn't stop there though. We're also going to inject extra resources and energy into the county-level efforts to improve locally maintained bridges. For starters, ODOT predicts that the disassembling of the current I-40 Crosstown bridge in Oklahoma City will leave us with 1,500 to 1,800 50-foot steel beams in good condition that can be safely reused at the county level. ODOT predicts these beams can aid in the construction of around 300 new county bridges.

To make sure that counties have the resources they need to continue these improvements, I'm again asking the Legislature to make a financial commitment to transportation infrastructure improvement in the next legislative session by increasing the funding for the County Improvement for Roads and Bridges (CIRB) fund. By shifting the percentage of revenue from motor vehicle taxes and fees that fund CIRB from 15 percent to 20 percent, we can generate an additional \$20 million a year for local road and bridge improvement, an investment that is sorely needed.

Finally, the last component of our new transportation plan addresses the increased congestion on two of our most widely traveled roads: the Kilpatrick Turnpike in Oklahoma City and the Creek Turnpike in Tulsa. At the current rate of traffic increases, both of these roads will be extremely congested by 2016, meaning longer commutes, less commerce and serious problems for two of our largest cities. That's why I'm asking the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority to pursue significant plans for capacity and safety improvements to these two roads.

The Bridge Improvement and Turnpike Modernization Plan lays out an aggressive and effective course of action to deal with our road and bridge problems. It will move Oklahoma from one of the worst states in the nation for bad highway bridges to one of the top 5. And it will provide the safe, modern and efficient transportation infrastructure that our citizens deserve and that businesses demand. It does all of this without raising taxes, tolls or fees. It's a true win-win situation for Oklahoma. I hope you agree: it's time to get to work!

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