



October Commission Wrap-Up:

Federal funding issues discussed; nearly \$53 million in projects awarded

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Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's October 5 meeting include an update on the economic stimulus transportation enhancements program and grant applications, discussion of construction delays due to concerns over federal funding. Highlights also include approval of construction contracts of nearly \$53 million.

Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley updated commissioners on activities related to the federal economic stimulus program.

Under one of the stimulus earmarks, sidewalks along highways in selected small towns will be updated to conform to the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Highway improvement projects in those towns are hampered by the unfunded federal mandate for wheelchair ramps. About two dozen towns across the state are being considered for the first phase of the program.

The agency made grant applications for four projects under two stimulus-related earmarks. A \$2 billion application would fund high speed rail between Oklahoma City and Tulsa as well as improvements along the Heartland Flyer route from Oklahoma City south to the Texas state line.

Three other applications under the stimulus-funded TIGER program would fund a new bridge to carry I-244 over the Arkansas River in Tulsa, elevate railroad tracks through downtown Claremore and improve rail lines between Oklahoma City and Shawnee, including a spur north from Shawnee.

Ridley told commissioners congressional action temporarily extending the federal transportation program will most likely delay nearly almost all of the Oklahoma bridge and highway projects scheduled for competitive bidding in November. The decision also hampers the flexibility in funding Oklahoma's construction program by rescinding about \$135 million over the next 12 to 18 months.

He said the agency will make scheduled bond payments. Projects funded entirely with state dollars and stimulus-funded projects are expected to remain on track for November. Nearly all stimulus-funded state highway projects have been awarded to contract.

In other items, commissioners approved a pair of projects totaling about \$21 million to improve the I-44 corridor in Tulsa. One would widen I-44 at Darlington Ave., which is just east of Yale Ave. The second would replace a bridge on I-44 over 163rd E. Ave.

They also agreed to a pair of proposals to install rumble strips on various highways in the northern and northeastern part of the state. The strips are a safety feature designed to alert drivers if they drive onto a highway's shoulder. Combined, the proposals will cost about \$700,000.

Commissioners approved a proposal to build 21 county road and bridge projects using county crews. The projects will be in Atoka, Cimarron, Creek, Garfield, Harper, Osage, Stephens, Texas and Woodward counties.

In all, commissioners awarded 31 contracts totaling nearly \$53 million to improve highways, interstates and roads in 19 counties. Projects include bridge and highway construction and reconstruction, resurfacing and safety improvements.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Atoka, Caddo, Carter, Cleveland, Comanche, Creek, Hughes, Kingfisher, LeFlore, Logan, Mayes, McClain, Muskogee, Oklahoma, Pushmataha, Rogers, Sequoyah, Tulsa and Washington 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 meeting is 11 a.m. Monday, Nov. 2, 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, which can be affected by weather.

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

--www.okladot.state.ok.us--

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

INFORMATION RELEASE

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On the fast track: Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director of Engineering David Streb explains a grant application for high-speed rail to members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission at their Monday, Oct. 5, meeting. The agency applied for a \$2 billion grant under the economic stimulus program for a high-speed rail system between Tulsa and Oklahoma City and for upgrades to the *Heartland Flyer* route from Oklahoma City south to the Texas state line.



Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley explains a stop-gap federal spending measure that will delay most of the Oklahoma bridge and highway projects scheduled for competitive bidding in November. The decision also hampers the flexibility in funding Oklahoma's construction program by rescinding about \$135 million over the next 12 to 18 months. Projects funded entirely with state dollars and stimulus-funded projects are expected to remain on track for November.



Where the expressway ends: Federal funding issues are expected to delay a City of Tulsa project to extend the Gilcrease Expressway from the L.L. Tisdale Parkway to 41st W. Ave. The project was scheduled for competitive bidding in November but has been postponed pending congressional action on transportation funding, meaning this sign will stay in place – for now.