



## **November Commission Wrap-Up:**

### **Federal, state funding issues discussed; \$197.5 million in projects awarded**

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Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's November 2 meeting include updates on federal and state funding issues and the economic stimulus, recognition of recent honors for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and approval of construction contracts of \$197.5 million.

ODOT Director Gary Ridley also discussed steps the department has taken to reduce expenses during the economic downturn impacting Oklahoma. He said the department has reduced hiring, halted vehicle purchases and trimmed overtime and out-of-state travel.

"We are going to maintain the system as best we can with the funds we have; that's paramount to our mission," he said. "Times will be difficult, there's no doubt about that, but how we manage it is how we'll be judged."

He also said continued deliberations of federal transportation funding have affected highway construction schedules in Oklahoma. Because Congressional funding extensions have been limited, several projects scheduled for competitive bidding later this month have been delayed.

The commission was also updated on transportation projects funded through the economic stimulus package. Such projects have pumped \$171 million into the state's economy, with work underway on 131 contracts. Almost 90 percent of the \$465 million in transportation funds has been committed.

Two honors recently received by ODOT staff were highlighted as well.

Joe Kyle, division manager of the agency's Rail Programs Division, recently received a prestigious national award from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials for work to improve railroad crossing inventories. Officials hope the system will be copied by other states.

Ridley accepted an award on behalf of the department for inclusion of aesthetic elements into construction projects and participation in the Oklahoma Art in Public Places Program.

Suzanne Tate, executive director of the Oklahoma Arts Council, said the features make art more accessible to Oklahomans and enhance economic development efforts.

In other items, commissioners approved a pair of contracts as part of two of the state's largest corridor improvement programs, the I-44 Riverside to Yale corridor in Tulsa and the I-40 Crosstown in Oklahoma City. The Tulsa contract funds a 1.5-mile stretch of I-44 from 51<sup>st</sup> St. to Harvard Ave. The Oklahoma City project is the final dirt work and railroad project for the interstate corridor.

Commissioners also approved a contract to widen more than three miles of US-54 north of Hooker in Texas County. The project is part of US-54 widening through the Panhandle county.

In all, commissioners awarded 36 contracts totaling \$197.5 million to improve highways, interstates and roads in 21 counties. Projects include bridge and highway construction and reconstruction, resurfacing and safety improvements.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Adair, Alfalfa, Blaine, Bryan, Carter, Cleveland, Coal, Comanche, Garfield, Grady, Grant, Harmon, Hughes, Kay, Leflore, Oklahoma, Roger Mills, Rogers, Texas, Tulsa and Wagoner 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, Dec. 7, 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 viewed at [www.okladot.state.ok.us](http://www.okladot.state.ok.us).

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(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](http://www.okladot.state.ok.us). For more information, call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)

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**It was standing room only when members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission were told at their November 2 meeting how the Oklahoma Department of Transportation plans to cut expenses during the state's economic downturn. The department has reduced hiring, halted vehicle purchases and trimmed overtime and out-of-state travel. Maintaining the existing highway system is paramount, said ODOT Director Gary Ridley.**



**An unlikely artist: Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley was honored at the November 2 meeting of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission for the aesthetic elements in high profile highway construction projects. Ridley was the first head of a state agency to win the George Nigh Public Service in the Arts Award. From left are: Dan Overland, OTC chair; Debbly Williams, Director of the Art in Public Places program; Ridley, and Suzanne Tate, executive director of the Oklahoma Arts Council.**