



March Commission Wrap-Up:

Funding, maintenance issues discussed; \$39 million in projects awarded

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Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's March 1 meeting include updates of federal stimulus activity and issues relating to the federal Highway Trust Fund, discussion of Oklahoma Department of Transportation maintenance plans and approval of construction contracts totaling about \$39 million.

ODOT Director Gary Ridley told commissioners that a recently awarded \$50 million grant will fund construction of a multi-modal bridge for I-244 over the Arkansas River in Tulsa. The bridge will carry interstate traffic as well as passenger rail and pedestrians.

The project was one of 50 approved nationwide under the \$1.5 billion Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program, also known as TIGER grants – part of the federal economic stimulus program. When built, the structure will be one of few bridges in the country carrying such varied types of traffic. The \$87 million project will replace the westbound bridge (heading south). The eastbound bridge will be built at a later date and is expected to cost \$45 million.

Ridley also noted that all of the state's initial transportation-related stimulus funds have been obligated to specific projects several days before the deadline required by legislation. The next step will be to competitively bid construction contracts on the projects.

At Monday's meeting, Ridley told commissioners that a stalemate over emergency spending in Congress could threaten much of Oklahoma's highway construction. However, late Tuesday a short-term fix for the nation's Highway Trust Fund was passed that should keep the state's highway construction on schedule through the month while a solution is debated.

He also provided commissioners with the agency's first-ever, four-year asset preservation plan. The plan will help the agency better care for existing highways and bridges, Ridley said, noting the timing of projects will be adjusted if roadways deteriorate quicker than expected.

"As time goes on, the department will be able to do more in preserving our assets rather than being reactive with our maintenance funds," he said.

Ridley also told commissioners that Oklahomans will continue to feel the effects of recent blizzards for the next six to eight months as potholes related to the storms continue to appear.

Commissioners awarded 39 contracts totaling just under \$39 million to improve highways, interstates and roads in 29 counties. Projects include bridge and highway construction and reconstruction, resurfacing and safety improvements.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Adair, Beaver, Bryan, Caddo, Canadian, Cleveland, Comanche, Delaware, Ellis, Grady, Harper, Hughes, Johnston, Kay, Lincoln, Logan, Major, McClain, McIntosh, Murray, Muskogee, Nowata, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Ottawa, Rogers, Seminole, Sequoyah and Tulsa 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, April 5, 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. 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.

--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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A standing room only crowd was on hand to learn about recent problems with long-term federal funding as well as successes under the stimulus program when the Oklahoma Transportation Commission met March 1. The commission approved nearly \$39 million in contracts for construction throughout the state.



The people of Oklahoma recently received a \$50 million stimulus grant to replace the westbound I-244 bridge over the Arkansas River in Tulsa with a multi-functional structure carrying highway, rail and pedestrian traffic. The current bridge, pictured in the foreground, is both obsolete and structurally deficient. It was built in 1967 and is one of the worst-rated interstate bridges in the Oklahoma. Transportation Secretary Gary Ridley told the Oklahoma Transportation Commission at its March 1 meeting that the new bridge will be one of few structures in the nation to carry such varied traffic.