



April Commission Wrap-Up:

Safety, funding issues discussed; \$61 million in projects awarded

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Highlights of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission's April 12 meeting include the presentation of safety awards to Oklahoma Department of Transportation work crews, discussion of work zone safety issues, updates on funding issues and approval of construction contracts totaling about \$61 million.

Lt. Gov. Jari Askins was on hand to recognize ODOT work crews and units that have a track record of safety. Twelve awards honored crews throughout the state.

In addition, each year ODOT participates in a nationwide campaign to encourage motorists to use extra caution when driving in work zones. Askins read a proclamation by Gov. Brad Henry declaring April 19 through 23 as Work Zone Awareness Week.

ODOT Director Gary Ridley noted crews depend on motorists to drive safely in work zones.

"The fact is that our people work in harm's way," Ridley said. "A lot of time, the only thing they have between them and a 90,000-pound rig is the vest they are wearing."

In addition, the director noted reductions in the current fiscal year's budget coupled with projected cuts of as much as 10 to 12 percent could reduce state funding to the agency by as much as \$35 million.

He pointed out the department's construction work plan includes funding from \$150 million in bonds planned to be sold this fall, but a significant budget cut could affect the agency's ability to pay \$14 million per year in debt service.

"If ODOT has any more reductions, then we're going to have to take a serious look at whether to sell the bonds and at our eight-year construction program," he said. "I'm certain there are projects that will have to be eliminated as well as many projects that will have to slide to later years."

On the federal funding front, Ridley told commissioners that legislation recently signed by President Obama relieves some concerns on the federal funding front. However, because funds had not yet been placed into the agency's account, action was delayed on nearly 40 projects totaling \$50 million until the commission's May meeting.

Commissioners awarded 41 contracts totaling just under \$61 million to improve highways, interstates and roads in 28 counties. Projects include bridge and highway construction and reconstruction, resurfacing and safety improvements.

Contracts were awarded for projects in Alfalfa, Atoka, Beaver, Beckham, Blaine, Bryan, Carter, Cherokee, Cimarron, Coal, Custer, Garfield, Greer, Harmon, Hughes, Kay, Leflore, Lincoln, Logan, Major, McCurtain, McIntosh, Noble, Oklahoma, Pottawatomie, Sequoyah, Stephens 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 scheduled for 11 a.m. Monday, May 3, 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: A press release and photograph of safety award winners in your area was issued Tuesday, April 13, and is available on the ODOT Web site at www.okladot.state.ok.us under News & Media.

The Web site also has details about projects in your area as well as pictures from Monday's meeting. For more information, call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.

INFORMATION RELEASE

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION
200 N.E. 21ST ST. OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105-3204 PHONE 405-521-6000



Sometimes, the only protection workers have from disaster is an orange cone and a yellow vest. At their Monday, April 12 meeting, members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission were updated on a special campaign to remind drivers to give their undivided attention in work zones – and especially to avoid distractions such as texting, speaking on the phone or changing radio stations.



Lt. Gov. Jari Askins presents a proclamation to James Dunegan, Durant, vice chair of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission at its Monday, April 12, meeting. In an effort to bring attention to highway work zone accidents, the proclamation by Gov. Brad Henry declares April 19 through 23 to be Work Zone Awareness Week in Oklahoma.