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OTA announces commencement of the agency's first ongoing long-range plan

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority announced Tuesday the creation of an ongoing long-range plan that will allow the agency to further engage community and economic stakeholders in future expansion and development of the turnpike system.

The plan will be similar to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's long-range plan, updating the visions, goals and objectives of the turnpike system.

"This is an exciting time for Oklahoma's infrastructure that puts us on our way to being a top 10 state in overall transportation," Gov. Kevin Stitt said. "The additional turnpike improvements and added connections will benefit Oklahomans in many ways such as increased travel reliability, quality of life and continued economic growth throughout the state."

Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Tim Gatz shared the vision with the OTA Board of Directors during Tuesday's meeting. This included:

- I-44/Turner Turnpike and Will Rogers Turnpike widening, enhancements and additional interchanges with state highways;
- Kilpatrick Turnpike enhancements;
- Gilcrease Expressway completion; and
- Improvements to help alleviate traffic on I-35 and I-44 in south Oklahoma City; amongst many other turnpike improvements across the state.

"The creation of the long-range plan will become the blueprint for the future of OTA projects and the continued economic growth and development of the state. This is the first time OTA has embarked on a comprehensive long-range plan such as this," Gatz said. "We've received tremendous feedback regarding the future of the turnpike system after the successful completion of some recent projects. In the past several years, I have spoken with many communities along these corridors about their future needs. This plan allows us to address that future in a systematic and transparent manner."

The agency is finishing the final projects of the 2016 Driving Forward initiative, with the five-mile Gilcrease Expressway extension set to open west of Tulsa in summer 2022 and the eastern I-44/Turner Turnpike widening and interchange reconstruction at SH-66 near Tulsa to be completed by summer 2023. The Driving Forward initiative improved travel safety, allowed additional access for communities and boosted economic development.

“I’m very pleased to see the process begin for this critical development,” OTA Chairman Gene Love said. “The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority has always exemplified a successful business model. We, as the board, will make sure this plan and the projects that emerge from it will be done in a professional and fiscally responsible manner.”

OTA continues to work with all community stakeholders and legislators to develop details for the new plan. The plan will be in line with legislative approvals already in place. The Legislature will be apprised regularly of the plan’s progress for their information and to share with citizens.

The new turnpike developments also will assist state-administered roads and allow public funds to be prioritized for already identified needs, including many rural highways. Turnpike extensions and enhancements build out long-range ODOT corridors that lack funding, such as the Kickapoo Turnpike. When OTA builds new connections, it allows ODOT to focus on other state highway needs.

Oklahoma has one of the lowest toll rates per mile in the country, and the implementation of any future projects that emerge from the long-range plan will proceed with the goal of keeping Oklahoma turnpikes as one of the best-valued toll networks in the country. Out-of-state traffic pays about 40 percent of Oklahoma tolls.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority uses cross-pledging, which was voted upon by Oklahoma citizens in 1954 and placed into Oklahoma statute the following year - Title 69-1705. Cross-pledging allows tolls from one turnpike to be used to build, expand or maintain other turnpikes as needed. Turnpikes are always built where an alternate, non-tolled road exists. OTA builds roads in areas where ODOT has often identified a need and/or vetted the project but lacks funding for construction in ODOT’s long-range plan.

OTA plans to hire consultants and additional professional services to vet the details and start conceptual design plans during the upcoming year. The public can access these details as they become available via the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority website www.pikepass.com.

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A sample of communities statewide are expressing support for the comprehensive long-range plan:

“I have often said the future of Bristow is planes, trains and automobiles. We’ve been meeting with the Turnpike Authority for just more than two years to discuss future growth and the redesign of interchanges. Partnerships on projects like the turnpike widening, updating interchanges and access roads are not only essential, but critical for Bristow’s accessibility and long-term economic growth. We’re excited to learn more about the new long-range plan, and we hope the Turnpike Authority and ODOT continue to consider Bristow’s economic development as they make strategic planning decisions,” — Jake Manus, Bristow economic development director

“I support this plan because I hope some of the investment will roll down into the Indian Nation Turnpike. There are several ramps and access points needed that are essential for growth in southeast Oklahoma. We want better access to rural Oklahoma, and there’s already a highway right there. The improvements in the long-range plan are very necessary to assist us with needed access due to increased tourism and economic development in this area,” — Rep. Jim Grego, R-Wilburton

“Newcastle has grown slower than we probably would have due to the South Canadian River serving as a barrier between us and the larger metro area. We only have a couple of points to cross the river, but in the past nearly 10 years, growth has accelerated significantly leading to traffic issues, especially on I-44 and I-35. We’re so excited to hear the thoughts and plans of Sec. Gatz and OTA. We know that the proposals will open up the community even more to residential and economic growth, and we are excited for the opportunities and challenges that this will create. And it won’t just impact Newcastle, but the entire state. We’re excited to be a part of it.” — Newcastle Mayor Karl Nail

“We are fully in support of expanding the turnpike system, especially in areas such as Cleveland and McClain counties, which need additional connections and access. We’re looking at new and innovative ways to build partnerships that will further facilitate burgeoning growth and economic development in the area,” — Cleveland County Commissioner Rod Cleveland