

**Tim J. Gatz**  
Executive Director  
Secretary of




**Governor J. Kevin Stitt**  
Member Ex-Officio

# OKLAHOMA

## Turnpike Authority

Date: April 10, 2023

To: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board

From: Tim J. Gatz, OTA Director 

Subject: Suspension of Work on the ACCESS Oklahoma Turnpike Long-Range Plan and Associated Project Development

For several months now, I, along with senior OTA staff and OTA legal counsel, have regularly communicated to the Board about how OTA was managing through the many issues that have prevented access to the bond market, with a primary goal of minimizing the interruptions to the ACCESS Oklahoma program. Previously, OTA stopped work on a number of challenged projects to try and deescalate litigation and minimize the impacts to Oklahomans while waiting for a validation decision from the Supreme Court. After much consideration, the OTA leadership team and I feel it is now necessary to stop all work on the entire comprehensive, long-range plan as of Friday, April 14. This stoppage includes all work on the Turner Turnpike as well as the other widening and interchange additions designed to improve safety and community access on other highly used turnpikes across the state – projects that are high priorities to the board and OTA as a whole.

While OTA remains in a strong financial position in large part due to our exceptional accounting practices and financial controls in place, it is no longer prudent to continue funding work without a clear timetable for access to the bond market.

As you are aware, we continue to await a bond validation decision from the Oklahoma Supreme Court, which is paramount to progressing the comprehensive ACCESS Oklahoma plan. I have mentioned several times, including during the recent board meeting, that our continued ACCESS Oklahoma project work would be impacted or even stopped due to our inability to enter the bond market. Other factors that are impacting our ability to enter the bond market include ongoing litigation initiated by those opposed to ACCESS Oklahoma's new routes, and an impending investigative audit by the State Auditor and Inspector. The unclear resolution dates to all of these factors led to this difficult decision.

The OTA will continue normal operations and maintenance of the existing turnpike system as well as our initiative to convert to cashless tolling. OTA will also continue to service existing debt. All of these activities are funded through toll receipts that are consistently meeting or exceeding financial projections while the ACCESS Oklahoma projects are fully funded through bond proceeds.

OTA remains committed to its statutory mission to relieve traffic congestion throughout the state through the construction of legislatively authorized turnpike projects which increase safety for the traveling public in a conservative and fiscally responsible manner. Despite the tremendous transportation needs across the state, I feel it is prudent to take this difficult step.

This is an unfortunate decision that the OTA does not take lightly due to the critical nature of the ACCESS Oklahoma plan and the effect it will have on all our consultants and their employees as well as many Oklahoma communities and businesses that rely on these necessary transportation improvements, but one that is unequivocally necessary at this time.

While these delays slow progress for the state, it doesn't eliminate the need for these critical transportation enhancements that will improve safety and the quality of life for all Oklahomans. Once these roadblocks are resolved and a path to the bond market is cleared, I am confident we will resume ACCESS Oklahoma and begin moving forward on behalf of the people of Oklahoma.