

## Construction begins on I-40 Crosstown Expressway

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
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With the ceremonial turn of a spade, state and federal officials, along with business and civic leaders Monday, Nov. 14, kicked off construction on the new Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway. The ceremony kicked off a project that will give commuters 10 lanes of smooth highway and a new boulevard into downtown.

The groundbreaking was the culmination of 10 years of preparation by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and partnership with city and community leaders, neighborhood groups, congressional leaders and federal transportation officials. The I-40 Crosstown is the state's largest transportation project and holds national significance as one of the nation's few all-weather, coast-to-coast routes.

The ceremony was held on the corridor's east end where the first construction is set to begin. Many dignitaries joined city leaders and state and federal transportation officials for the celebration including U.S. Senator James Inhofe, Congressmen Earnest Istook and Frank Lucas, Governor Brad Henry and Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett.

In his role as Master of Ceremonies, ODOT Director Gary Ridley described this day as monumental and a celebration of the work of many people in preparing for the future.

"Ten years of preparation went into today," Ridley said. "When you consider all the community meetings, all of the engineering and all of the work to secure funding, literally thousands of people have committed an incredible amount of time and effort already. Now, the real excitement begins as we watch the construction unfold."

Inhofe said that providing funding for I-40 project took a great deal of effort from the entire Oklahoma Congressional delegation.

"When we began putting together the highway bill, we knew we had certain specific projects that must be included. Needless to say, the I-40 Crosstown was one of those high priority items for Oklahoma," Inhofe said. "My support for this project dates back to 1997 when I brought Bud Schuster, then the Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, down to Oklahoma City to view the need for this project first hand. I want to commend everyone involved in this process on their hard work and I am pleased that we can now commence construction on this historic project for the citizens of Oklahoma City."

Istook said the project is necessary, particularly for the state's economic development efforts.

"Progress and jobs require a solid transportation system, and I-40 is at the heart of that system for Oklahoma," he said. "The Crosstown Expressway is the biggest bridge in the state, and it's needed this fix for an awfully long time. It's gratifying to play a key role in something that helps so many Oklahomans, and will help bring so many visitors here."

The new ten-lane expressway is designed to carry up to 173,000 vehicles per day, replacing the badly worn

stretch of I-40 through downtown Oklahoma City. The existing expressway between May Avenue and the Ft. Smith junction was originally designed to carry 72,000 vehicles per day, although it now carries nearly 120,000 per day.

Henry noted building the artery will generate economic benefits for the state and nation.

“This is a great day for Oklahoma. This historic initiative will vastly improve a vital link in the state’s and the nation’s highway system, generating both short-term and long-term economic benefits for Oklahoma.

“From its very beginning some 10 years ago, this project has been a partnership involving many different entities and people on the federal, state and local levels. While this critical national highway link is not yet fully funded, the state of Oklahoma is committed to finding the resources necessary to finish the project. Make no mistake; the Crosstown project will be completed in a timely manner, with the state of Oklahoma continuing to work closely with its local and federal partners to make sure the job is done right.”

The very first construction is a \$6.8 million contract to build three bridges over the Bricktown Canal. Muskogee Bridge Co. is the contractor. Construction of the bridges over the Bricktown Canal is expected take about a year and will allow the city to complete plans to connect the north and south ends of the canal. The next phase of the project, a temporary railroad bridge for the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe, is expected to go to contract in early 2006 for an estimated cost of \$7 million.

Cornett said the groundbreaking opens a new era in the development of downtown Oklahoma City. He said the highway is vital not only to Oklahoma but also to the nation.

“I am excited to see the dirt turning on this long awaited project. This groundbreaking helps mark the beginning of a new era in downtown planning and development,” Cornett said. “I-40 is a significant transportation corridor for, not only Oklahoma City, but for the United States. My thanks to the many, many people who have been involved in the engineering, land use planning and funding of this vital project.”

The four-mile stretch of new highway will be a combination of on-the-ground or semi-depressed roadway, rather than the elevated thoroughfare. In addition, the existing bridge will be replaced with a newly constructed downtown boulevard.

As currently planned, the new boulevard will give commuters 12 access points to the downtown area. It will be a tree lined strip that planners expect will provide a good first impression for visitors.

“The I-40 Crosstown Expressway project is crucial to business development in Oklahoma City,” said Fred Hall, Chairman of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber. “This highway is at the very heart of our city, at the crossroads of the nation. By strengthening that center, we make a commitment to supporting the growth of commerce for many years to come. This highway is a primary artery for our burgeoning downtown, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and our worldwide corporate headquarters.”

The I-40 Crosstown, estimated at \$360 million, is expected to be complete in 2008 with construction of the new boulevard taking an additional two years. The timetable could be affected by availability of funding.

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