Oklahoma Turnpike Authority

A Priority Response Evaluation

Report: 24-978-02

October 2025

LOFT
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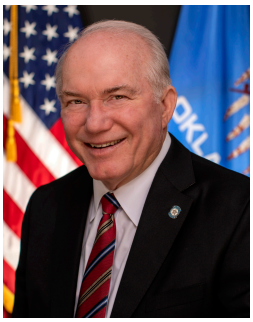
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Key Evaluation Objectives:

» Examine the cost of Oklahoma's system of toll roads and the revenues generated per tollway.

» Analyze the impact of cross-pledging and bond refunding on Oklahoma's turnpike system.

» Analyze the feasibility of transitioning toll-funded roads to taxpayer funded roads.

» Examine the decision-making process into expanding or authorizing new toll roads.

Executive Summary

In the late-1940s, Oklahoma began supplementing tax-funded roadways with user-supported roads. The Turner Turnpike, a high-speed roadway connecting Oklahoma City and Tulsa, was created as the State's first toll road in 1947. Today, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) oversees 13 turnpikes covering 630 miles of roadway. The construction, maintenance, and operation of these roads is funded exclusively from tolls charged to those driving on them. OTA estimates that nearly 50 percent of toll revenues are collected from out-of-state motorists.

While it was originally intended that the toll revenues generated by the Turner Turnpike would pay off the debt of constructing it and then become a tax-supported road, between 1955 and 1966, statute was amended to:

- Approve the construction of additional turnpikes
- Transition the Turnpike Authority from a regional entity to a Statewide one
- Allow the Turnpike Authority to combine two or more turnpike projects into one for the purpose of issuing bonds
- Allow for revenues collected from all turnpikes to be used to pay the obligations of any and all turnpikes, and
- Allow OTA to issue new bonds to both pay back the debt on existing turnpikes as well as fund new turnpikes

These changes instituted a funding mechanism referred to as "cross-pledging," which allows the revenue generated by each route to be combined to cover expenses across the entire system, including debt service and road maintenance. This funding model replaced any initial plans for individual roads to collect toll revenue for the purpose of repaying debt associated with its construction.

OTA is an instrumentality of the State of Oklahoma, rather than a traditional State agency, and does not receive any State appropriations. Statute prohibits debts of OTA from becoming debts of the State.

With this evaluation, LOFT sought to examine the cost of toll roads, evaluate bond refunding and its impact on bond retirement, and examine the feasibility of transitioning toll roads into State highways. The evaluation resulted in two key findings:

Finding 1: The Turnpike System Has Become the State's Primary Mechanism for Constructing New Major Roadways

Oklahoma's turnpikes will continue collecting tolls until the entire system's bonds are retired, and the bond agreements are based on the collective revenue streams. In 2024, OTA reported gross operating revenues of $412 million, over 90 percent of which were from tolls, with the remainder from concessions along the tollways. LOFT found that Oklahoma's toll rate per mile is below average for drivers enrolled with OTA's transponder payment option, and at the national average for drivers whose plates are electronically scanned for payment (Plate Pay). The practice of cross-pledging enables the construction of roads that would not be feasible if they were to be financed solely through toll collections. As demonstrated in the table below, five of thirteen turnpikes generated 80 percent of all toll revenue.

Turnpike	Revenue	% of Total	Centerline Miles	Revenue Per Mile
Turner Turnpike	$97,543,000	23.81%	86	$1,134,221
Will Rogers Turnpike	$89,007,000	21.73%	88.5	$1,005,729
John Kilpatrick Turnpike	$59,812,000	14.60%	30.3	$1,973,993
Creek Turnpike	$39,040,000	9.53%	34.4	$1,134,884
H.E. Bailey Turnpike	$37,109,000	9.06%	94.6	$392,273
Muskogee Turnpike	$23,827,000	5.82%	53.1	$448,719
Indian Nation Turnpike	$19,729,000	4.82%	105.2	$187,538
Cimarron Turnpike	$13,520,000	3.30%	67.7	$199,705
Cherokee Turnpike	$11,289,000	2.76%	32.8	$344,177
Gilcrease Turnpike	$6,649,000	1.62%	5.7	$1,166,491
Kickapoo Turnpike	$6,072,000	1.48%	18.5	$328,216
SW John Kilpatrick Turnpike	$4,989,000	1.22%	5	$997,800
Chickasaw Turnpike	$1,054,000	0.26%	13.3	$79,248
Total Revenues	**$409,640,000**			

Between 1947 and 2010, a total of 35 routes have been authorized in Statute, and OTA is authorized to build any of these routes when it determines the route is economically feasible. OTA's latest project, known as ACCESS, includes widening some of the most heavily traveled turnpikes, improving interchanges, and building two new revenue generating roads, at a projected pre-interest cost of $8.2 billion. **The two new routes – the South Extension Turnpike and completing the Outer Loop – were statutorily authorized between 1987 and 1993.** OTA states that $4.3 billion will be used to construct the two new revenue generating turnpikes while the remaining $3.9 billion will fund other improvements. Additionally, an extension of the Gilcrease turnpike is planned, but the source of funding has not been determined. Due to a unique funding arrangement, Gilcrease is separate from the rest of the turnpike system.

Extrapolating from the 50-year revenue estimates made by CDM Smith, the contractor OTA uses to conduct its traffic and revenue studies, it would take 207 years to pay off the bonds issued for ACCESS projects if OTA were to use only the revenue generated by the new turnpikes. Thus, the revenue sharing model allows the ACCESS project to be feasible where it would otherwise be too costly. As of June 2025, $1.6 billion in bonds have been issued for the ACCESS program, and in October 2025 a refunding bond of $148.6 million is expected to be issued.

ACCESS Oklahoma			
Corridor	**Project Length**	**Estimated Budget**	**Year Authorized**
Interchange Improvements	Various	$330 Million	Various
Turner Turnpike Widening	68 Miles	$2.5 Billion	1947
South Extension Turnpike	19 Miles	$1.025 Billion	1993
Outer Loop: East-West Connector	28 Miles	$3 Billion	1987
Outer Loop: Tri-City Connector	8 Miles	$360 Million	1987
John Kilpatrick Widening	15 Miles	$375 Million	1987
Will Rogers Widening	12 Miles	$610 Million	1953
Gilcrease Expressway Expansion*	5 Miles	$495 Million	2010
Total		**$8.695 Billion**	

LOFT compared OTA's role in providing transportation infrastructure to that of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and found that as ODOT's resources increasingly became focused on maintenance of the State's roadways and bridges, the Turnpike Authority grew to fulfill the State's needs for new highway infrastructure. ODOT has significantly more infrastructure under its management than OTA. Currently, ODOT estimates its backlog of maintenance projects to be $26.9 billion. OTA's ability to use its existing tollways to fund new bonds provides the State with significant flexibility in constructing new roads, which would not be feasible with just ODOT's resources.

Finding 2: Changing Oklahoma's Turnpike Model is Possible, but Would Take Decades to Fully Realize

As of June 2025, the payoff amount for OTA's bonds is just over $3 billion. If the Legislature sought to immediately make the State's turnpikes toll-free, it would have to satisfy this bond debt plus absorb the annual $260 million in asset preservation and maintenance costs for the roads. However, the $3 billion represents only the current amount of debt held by OTA. OTA's ACCESS project will add another $6.6 billion in principal bond debt over the next 13 years, effectively *tripling* the amount the State would be paying back. If the ACCESS projects are continued as planned, paying down the current $3 billion of bonds would do little to transfer the turnpike system to the Oklahoma Highway Commission.

What's more, paying the debt off all at once would put the entire burden on Oklahomans. Under the current system, approximately 50 percent of the tolls collected by OTA are paid by out-of-state drivers. Additionally, federal law requires states to supply a certain percentage of their highway spending in order to remain eligible for federal highway funds. Toll revenues spent on building or maintaining highways can be credited towards the state's obligation. If tolls are eliminated, federal funding would not be allowed to supplant that revenue; instead, another state funding source would be needed.

Due to the impracticability of the State paying off OTA's existing bond debt, LOFT focused on three possible scenarios for the State to change the way turnpikes work in Oklahoma:

Scenario 1: The State takes ownership of the turnpikes once they are paid in full.

Under this scenario, the Legislature would repeal authorization for projects that have not already been bonded, which would have the effect of capping OTA's bond indebtedness at $8.2 billion. The Legislature would not, in this hypothetical scenario, appropriate additional money to accelerate bond repayment. This would lead to the last bond being repaid in 2055, or a few years later if all ACCESS programs were allowed to continue. Although this avoids the need for billions of dollars in immediate expenditures, it still requires policymakers to find a new way of funding the maintenance of these roads after they are no longer collecting tolls. Last, dissolving OTA would also impact the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, as OTA currently covers the cost of 117 State Troopers assigned to the turnpikes as well as funding the trooper cadet school and some equipment costs.

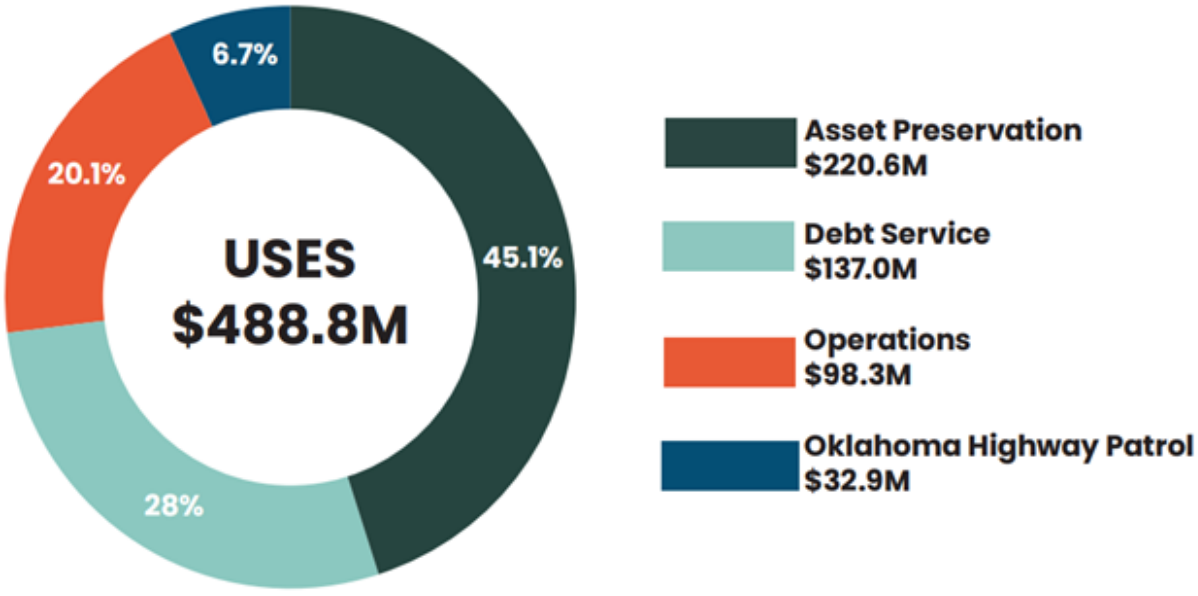
Scenario 2: Periodically Transfer one Turnpike at a Time to ODOT Until All Are Free of Tolls

The Legislature could also require OTA to steadily progress toward making turnpikes toll free. This would require issuing new bonds with payoff triggers and enforcing a moratorium on new turnpike projects. Assuming the revenue is still in place to continue needed maintenance and debt service on the remaining system, one turnpike at a time could be made toll free. This approach might increase the cost of the current repayment schedule, and the most-traveled and highest-income-generating turnpikes would likely have to be the last ones to be paid off, but this would allow the State to gradually reduce the total number of tolled roads. However, this scenario does not address the need for additional revenue to fund ongoing maintenance of the roads moved out of the turnpike system.

Scenario 3: OTA Retains Ownership of Turnpikes and Continues to Collect Tolls, Repurposing the Portion of Revenues Currently Dedicated to Debt Service Payments

Because toll revenues provide a stable mechanism for funding roads, the State may be best served by keeping this funding structure in place. Under current statute, OTA will dissolve upon the retirement of the last bond, and the roads will be transferred to ODOT, provided they are in good condition. However, the Legislature could change this through ordinary statute to allow OTA to continue its administration of turnpikes beyond bond repayment, with OTA charging tolls to fund ongoing maintenance costs.

For FY25, OTA is expected to spend $137 million on debt service. If OTA were prohibited from issuing any additional bonds and the current bonds were paid in full, the amount currently dedicated to debt service could be reallocated. For example, OTA could annually set aside the amount previously dedicated to debt service for a period of 10 years, and then use the funds to pay up front for system improvements instead of financing improvements with debt. LOFT estimates an annual transfer of $137 million over a ten-year period could, with earnings, reach a balance of $1.6 billion.



Additionally, the State could consider transferring some existing non-toll roads to the OTA system to offload maintenance costs while keeping the roads toll-free, or using OTA funds to add managed lanes to some of the State's highest-volume thoroughfares. This model, which is in place in other states, would use OTA funds to construct and manage a pay-to-drive dedicated lane, similar to how High Occupancy Lanes are managed within an existing highway. This option also mitigates legal concerns about tolls as user fees while providing drivers with a toll-free option for the same route.

Oklahoma's system of toll roads underwent significant change in the 1950s-1960s in response to emerging infrastructure needs, and it can change again. However, due to the long-range planning that is inherent in major infrastructure, any changes will likely take decades to be fully realized.

Summary of Policy Considerations and Agency Recommendations

The Legislature may consider the following policy changes:

- Determine whether the unbuilt turnpike routes approved in statute still match State priorities, and if not, consider repealing those provisions.
- Adding sunset provisions to statute for newly approved turnpikes.
- Require the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's non construction expenditures be subject to the provisions of the Central Purchasing Act.
- Require the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority track and report maintenance costs for each turnpike to assist in future decision making.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority should:

- Track and report maintenance and repair costs per route.
- Track and report the effect of rate increases on traffic counts per route.

Introduction

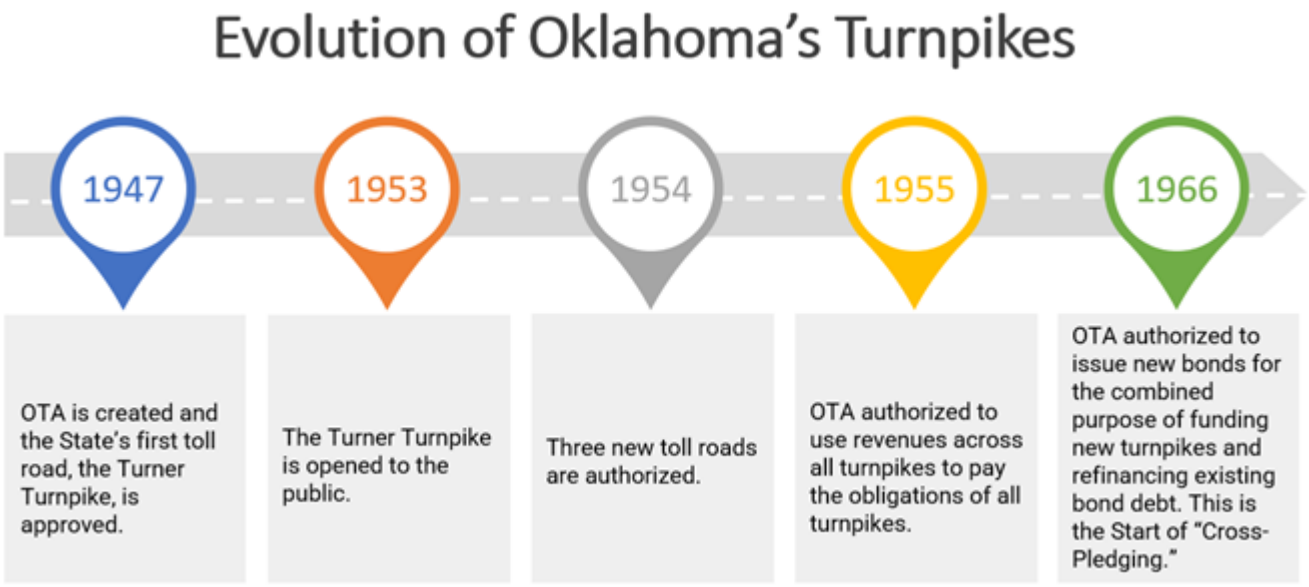
The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) is the sole entity tasked with overseeing the construction, maintenance, and operation of the State's Turnpike system. Oklahoma's 13 turnpikes cover 630.1 centerline miles of roadway across multiple regions of the State.[1] OTA does not receive appropriations from the Legislature; instead, its operations are funded by toll fees assessed directly to the users of those roads. To fund the construction of new turnpikes, the Authority issues bonds which are available to purchase by the public. The revenue from both the new and existing turnpikes is used to pay back the principal and interest on bonds, and fund turnpike operations and maintenance.

13 Turnpikes
administered by OTA across the State

630.1 Miles
of roadway that operate as toll roads

History

Exhibit 1: Historical Timeline of Oklahoma's Turnpike System. *(When it was first approved in 1947, the Turner Turnpike was intended to pay for itself and then be converted into a tax-supported road. Nineteen years later, and after three new turnpikes were authorized, cross-pledging was introduced and the Turnpike system as it exists today was started.)*



Source: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Oklahoma's Turnpike system began almost 80 years ago, when the Legislature voted to create the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and approved the State's first turnpike between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.[2] Along with the governor, the four original members of the Authority represented the four counties served by the Turner Turnpike: Oklahoma, Lincoln, Creek, and Tulsa. The bill also specified that once all the bonds had been paid back, the Turnpike would become a non-toll State highway. At the time, the Turner's bond debt was projected to be paid off by 1991 using revenues generated solely from users of the Turner route.[3] Six years later, in 1953, the Turner Turnpike was opened to the public.

[1] Centerline miles refer to the total length of a road measured along its centerline, regardless of the number of lanes. The Gilcrease Turnpike is included in the total number of turnpikes but is not part of the turnpike system or the cross-pledge trust.

[2] SB225 was enacted in 1947.

[3] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's projection based on the original terms of the bond.

Shortly after the opening of the Turner Turnpike in 1953, legislation was enacted that authorized three new turnpikes and fundamentally altered the Turnpike Authority's structure.[4] The new laws transitioned OTA from a regional entity to a Statewide entity in which the governor would now appoint members not just from four counties, but from every congressional district within the State.

OTA was further authorized to build three new toll roads:

1. Northeastern Turnpike from Tulsa to Joplin (Will Rogers Turnpike).
2. Southwestern Turnpike from OKC to Wichita Falls (H.E. Bailey Turnpike).
3. Northwestern Turnpike from OKC to Wichita (I-35 Corridor).

While initially signed into law, opponents of the new legislation successfully petitioned for a Statewide referendum during the 90 days before the laws would take effect. In that same year, the two ballot initiatives were sent to a vote of the people, with both being approved.[5] The governor then appointed the additional members of the Authority, who began acquiring feasibility studies for each of the newly approved turnpikes. The studies examined the requirements of constructing the new roads and made revenue projections based on traffic studies – all required for the Authority to issue bonds. Once the studies were completed, three separate trust indentures - along with three separate bonds - were issued for each of the new turnpikes. As with the Turner Turnpike, each of the new turnpike's revenues were originally intended to only be used to pay their own bond debt. Once the three bonds were issued, only one bond, the Northeastern Turnpike, received a bid. Citing an oversaturated bond market at the time, the Authority was unable to acquire bidders for the other two turnpikes.

In 1955, the Legislature approved the creation of another turnpike, which would later become known as the Indian Nation Turnpike. Along with the new turnpike, OTA was also empowered with new provisions on its ability to collect revenues and pay back bonds. The Authority was now permitted to combine two or more turnpike projects into one for the purpose of issuing revenue bonds. Additionally, a "paid-out" provision was added that allowed the revenues from all turnpikes to be used to pay the obligations of any and all turnpikes. Tolls would continue to be collected for as long as any bonds remained outstanding on any individual turnpikes.

The next major change came in 1966, when the Oklahoma Legislature amended statute again to allow OTA to issue bonds for the purpose of refunding existing bond debt – analogous to refinancing a mortgage. The Authority was now able to issue new bonds which would be used to pay back the debt on existing turnpikes as well as fund new ones. This new provision was upheld in the same year by the Oklahoma Supreme Court.[6]

Shortly after it went into effect, OTA used this new provision to refund the bonds on the Turner, H.E. Bailey, and the North section of the Indian Nation Turnpikes while simultaneously issuing $70 million in new bonds for the construction of the Muskogee Turnpike and to finish the southern portion of the Indian Nation Turnpike. This new bond issue totaled $186 million. While this bond issue did combine the existing State Turnpike into one interconnected financial system, the Will Rogers Turnpike was not included and remained outside of the Turnpike system. Once the Will Rogers Turnpike was paid off, it was to become part of OTA's Turnpike system, which it ultimately did in 1983. While other turnpikes have had their individual bonds paid off, they also remain in the turnpike system.[7] This funding mechanism is referred to as "cross-pledging," and has remained the basis for Oklahoma's turnpike system since.

[4] HB 933, 1953 restructured the Turnpike Authority and authorized what is now the Will Rogers Turnpike. SB 454 amended HB 933 to authorize two additional turnpikes, the H.E. Bailey and the I35 corridor.

[5] State Questions 359 and 360 were approved by voters in 1954, implementing contingent legislation.

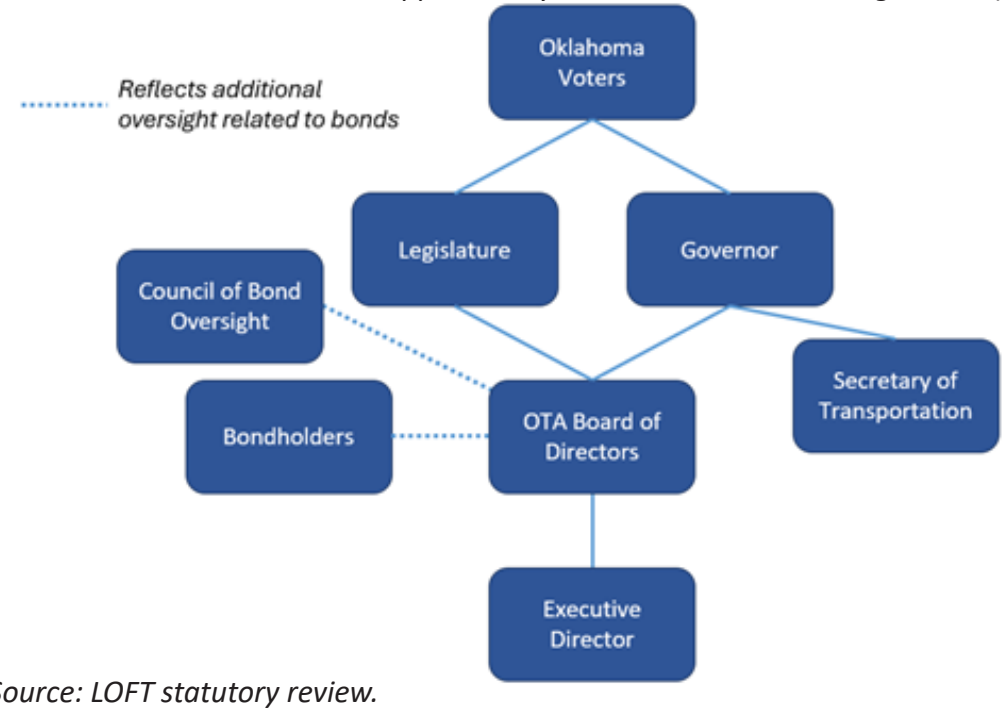
[6] *Application of Oklahoma Turnpike Authority*, 1966 OK 139.

[7] See Appendix C for Turnpike bonds that have been paid in full.

Governance

The Turnpike Authority is a board consisting of the Governor (ex officio) and six appointed members. The Governor, Speaker of the House, and President Pro Tempore of the Senate each appoint two members.[8] The state is divided into six geographic districts, and each district must be represented by one member.

Exhibit 2: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Governance. *(The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority reports directly to its board, whose members are appointed by the Governor and the Legislature.)*



Source: LOFT statutory review.

This Board is served by an agency, also called the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority. For the sake of clarity, this report will refer to the agency being evaluated as the Turnpike Authority or OTA, and the seven-member board as the Board, though it should be noted that statute assigns powers and duties to the Board, some of which are then delegated to the agency for day-to-day functions. This structure is similar to numerous other Oklahoma boards and commissions. LOFT reviewed the minutes of all meetings from 2020 through 2024 and found that all 704 votes taken by the board were approved, with all but four approved unanimously.[9]

OTA is an instrumentality of the State of Oklahoma, rather than a traditional State Agency. The distinctions are small in practice; however, this designation is often applied to an authority which does not receive state appropriations for its general operations. OTA does not receive any State appropriations, instead relying on revenue collected from toll roads. Additionally, the State is not liable for debts owed by OTA. OTA has 499 employees across all its divisions.[10]

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority does not utilize the statewide accounting system to input their financials or purchases. Consequently, OMES does not review OTA's non-IT purchasing as it does with other State agencies. A recent Attorney General's Opinion concluded that Instrumentalities of the State are not generally required to follow the Central Purchasing Act.[11] While the opinion primarily addressed the Oklahoma Housing Finance Authority, it also withdrew a 1984 AG opinion holding that Instrumentalities

[8] Prior to 2023, the Governor appointed all members of the Board. In 2024 OK AG Opinion 4, the Attorney General reviewed the new arrangement and found it constitutional. Currently a suit is pending in Oklahoma County District Court which will determine the constitutionality of the board's composition. *In Re: HB2263*, CV-2024-72.

[9] See Appendix B for full tally of votes.

[10] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, Data Fulfillment August 2025.

[11] 2023 OK AG 13

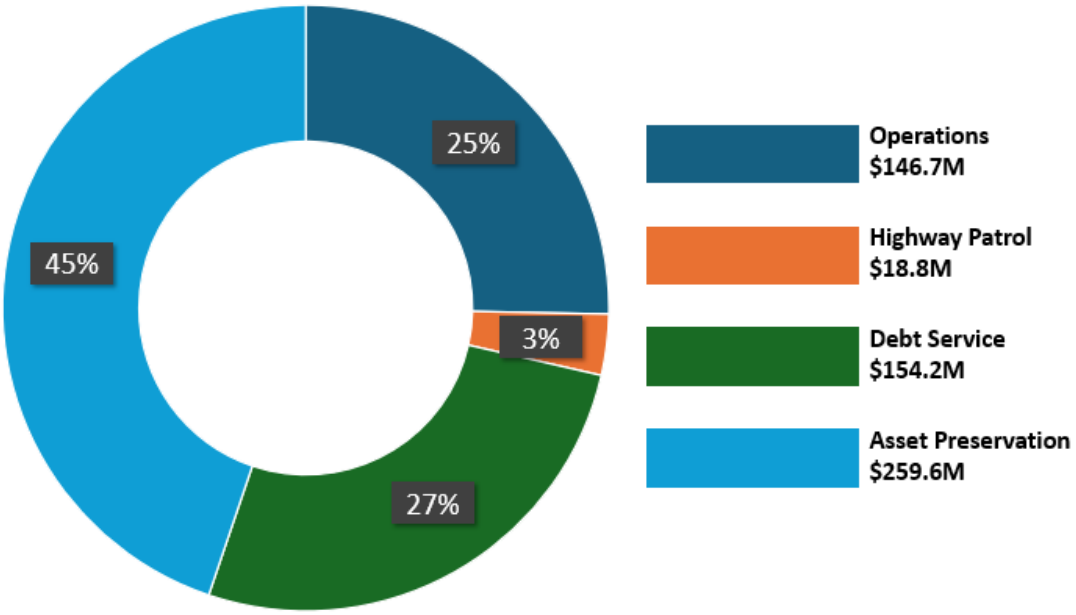
of the State must generally comply with the Central Purchasing Act. LOFT did not discover any statutory language that would require OTA to follow the Central Purchasing Act while excluding OHFA, so it is likely that the AG opinion also applies to OTA, freeing it from the strictures of the Central Purchasing Act. While OTA does not submit its purchases through the Central Purchasing Division, it does have six Certified Procurement Officers who oversee its purchasing.

Finances

Unlike most state entities, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority derives nearly all its funding directly from those it serves. In 2024, OTA reported gross operating revenues of $412 million, with over 90 percent generated from tolls paid by turnpike users. Notably, around 50 percent of this toll revenue came from out-of-state motorists.[12]

In addition to toll collections, OTA's other revenues include concessions fees for gas stations and restaurants located on turnpikes, and a portion of motor fuel taxes based on the number of miles driven on turnpikes each month.[13] However, OTA has remitted 100 percent of these receipts on to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) since 1992, when a statutory change allowed OTA to transfer the money to ODOT if the funds were not needed to service OTA's debt.[14]

Exhibit 3: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's 2024 Expenses by Category. *(OTA's largest expenditure category is for maintenance of toll roads, followed by repayment of bond obligations.)*



Source: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority ACFR, 2024.

OTA's expenses can be divided into four main categories: operations, asset preservation, debt service, and highway patrol. In 2024, OTA's operations were $146 million, which includes the cost for toll operations, IT, customer service, maintenance, and other expenses. $259 million was used for asset preservation to acquire and construct new capital assets as well as the cash outlays for road improvements. The Authority's total debt service on the existing turnpike system, including both principal and interest, was $154 million in 2024. Lastly, OTA spent nearly $19 million to compensate the Oklahoma Highway Patrol for servicing the turnpike system.

[12] OTA response to LOFT Request for Information, August 28, 2025. LOFT has not been able to independently verify this data.

[13] 69 O.S. § 1727.

[14] 69 O.S. § 1730.

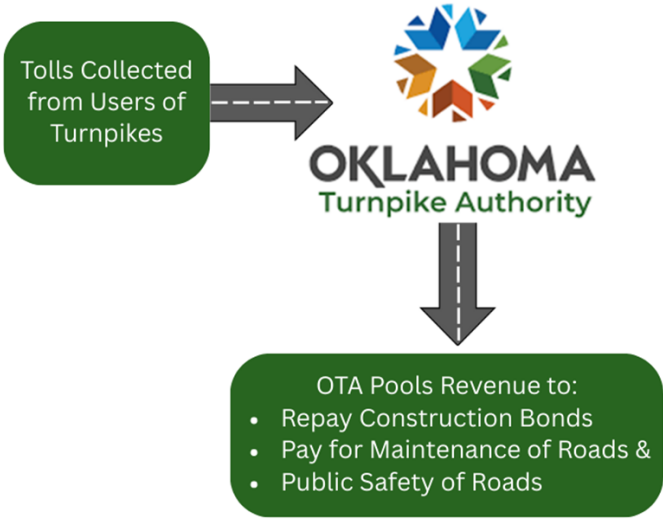
Once a new turnpike project has been authorized by State statute and the route is approved, OTA issues bonds to fund the new construction. These bonds are paid back over the course of several years from a portion of the revenue OTA generates from the existing tollways. Once the turnpike's construction is completed, the revenue generated from the new turnpike is also used to pay the interest on the bonds. OTA currently carries an outstanding balance of $3 billion but the total maturity amount (principal plus interest) is $5.8 billion. The final bond is set to be paid off in 2055.[15]

In 2022, OTA announced the plans for its largest project to date: ACCESS Oklahoma. This 15-year project will create new turnpikes, expand existing ones, and add connection points to other highways for an estimated cost of $8.2 billion. In 2023, OTA issued the first $500 million in bonds to fund the Turner Turnpike's expansion to six lanes. In 2025 OTA issued $1.1 billion in additional bonds for the ACCESS program.

[15] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Finding 1: The Turnpike System Has Become the State's Primary Mechanism for Constructing New Major Roadways

Oklahoma's turnpikes are part of a system of toll roads rather than a collection of roads operating independently. This system was established in the 1960s when the Legislature authorized OTA to issue new bonds that would both refund existing bonds and pay for future turnpikes enumerated in statute.[16] With the bonds for each turnpike now combined, the revenue generated by each route is used to pay down the obligations of the entire system and not individual routes. As a result, each turnpike is one piece of the larger turnpike system.[17] Revenues collected from each turnpike are combined, with expenses shared across the entire system. Due to the system-wide approach, it is not necessary to demonstrate that a new turnpike would be able to fund itself. Instead, when new turnpikes are proposed, projections consider whether the system as a whole can support the new costs, when combined with projected new revenue.



The Turner Turnpike, the first turnpike built in the State, was later combined into the current turnpike system. It is for this reason that the Turner Turnpike, which opened more than 71 years ago, still has not been "paid off" and become part of Oklahoma's taxpayer funded roads. Although the original plan was for the Turner to pay for itself through tolls and then become toll free, later changes to statute allowed OTA to create a "cross-funded" system of toll roads (discussed in more detail later in this finding). As part of the system, the Turner Turnpike's revenues are included any time OTA issues new bonds, resulting in a later payoff date for the system as a whole. With the exception of Gilcrease, all turnpikes will continue collecting tolls until the entire system's bonds are retired. Current bonds are scheduled to be paid in full in 2055, but OTA expects to issue new bonds for further sections of the ACCESS program, which will push that date out further.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is an instrumentality of the State, created in large part to insulate the State from OTA's debts.[18] As currently structured, the State is not liable to any bondholder for potential losses.[19] This structure is similar to that of other government entities, such the Grand River Dam Authority and the Oklahoma Housing Finance Authority. As OTA was created solely in statute, the Legislature has the ability to modify, amend, or abolish it through ordinary statute. However, due to the trust indentures signed and ratified each time OTA issues bonds for new turnpike routes, the State would be required to pay off all bonds prior to making wholesale changes to OTA.

[16] 69 O.S. § 1709.

[17] One of the 13 turnpikes, the Gilcrease, is not part of the Turnpike system.

[18] 69 O.S. § 1703.

[19] 69 O.S. § 1702 provides that "Turnpike revenue bonds issued under the provisions on this article shall not at any time be deemed to constitute a debt of the state..."

Route Selection

Today, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is comprised of 13 turnpike routes located throughout the State, as shown below in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4: Turnpike Route Map *(This map reflects the 13 current turnpike routes administered by the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.)*

Source: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, ACFR 2024. Turnpike names added by LOFT.

OTA can only build toll roads authorized in statute; once a route is provided for in statute, OTA is authorized to build it any time it deems the addition prudent. Legislation modifying the approved routes has been relatively sparse since the early 1990's. Of the 35 routes approved in statute, only five have been added since 1993. The table on the next page lists all authorized routes, the year enacted, which turnpike, if any, was built along that route, and the year it was first opened. A number of unbuilt routes have been approved in statute for several decades, including four that date back to 1973. The routes that make up the ACCESS Oklahoma program date back to 1993. Whether these routes reflect the State's current needs is a policy question best left to policymakers. However, the fact that several routes have not been built after so many decades suggests that it may be worthwhile to reassess whether the unbuilt approved routes are still in the State's best interest.

Exhibit 5: Turnpike Route Authorization. *(This table tracks the history of statutory authorization for turnpike routes and when they were built. Full route descriptions are available at 69 O.S. § 1705.)*

Statutory Language	Date Added	Turnpike	Year First Opened
(1) The Turner Turnpike between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.	1947	Turner	1953
(2) The Southwestern (H.E. Bailey) Turnpike between Oklahoma City and Wichita Falls, Texas.	1953	H.E. Bailey	1964
(3) The Northeastern (Will Rogers) Turnpike between Tulsa and Joplin, Missouri.	1953	Will Rogers	1957
(4) The Eastern (Indian Nation) Turnpike between Tulsa and Paris, Texas...	1955	Indian Nation	1966
(5) The Cimarron Turnpike between Tulsa and Interstate... 35 north of Perry, including a connection to Stillwater.	1965	Cimarron	1975
(6) The Muskogee Turnpike between Broken Arrow and Interstate Highway 40 west of Webbers Falls.	1965	Muskogee	1969
(7) An extension of the Muskogee Turnpike, beginning at a point on Interstate Highway 40...to... Arkansas ...	1973	Not Built	--
(8) A tollgate on the Turner Turnpike in the vicinity of Luther...	1973	Turner	1990-2014
(9) Add on the Will Rogers Turnpike a northbound automatic tollgate onto State Highway 28 and a southbound on-ramp from State Highway 28.	1973	Will Rogers	1984
(10) A turnpike… beginning in the vicinity of Duncan extending east... to the vicinity of Woodward.	1968	Chickasaw	1991
(11) A turnpike or any part or parts thereof beginning at a point in the vicinity of Ponca City...to a connection with the Tulsa Urban Expressway...	1968	Not Built	--
(12) All or any part of an Oklahoma City toll expressway system connecting ...the north part of Oklahoma City with the... Will Rogers World Airport...	1968	Various	1970-2019
(13) A turnpike (The Industrial Parkway)... beginning at a point on the Oklahoma-Kansas state boundary ...ending... in southeastern Oklahoma...	1968	Not Built	--
(14) A turnpike... beginning in the vicinity of Velma or County Line to a point intersecting with Interstate 35 in the area south of Davis.	1973	Not Built	--
(15) A turnpike... beginning in the vicinity of Watonga and extending south and/or east to the vicinity of north and/or west Oklahoma City.	1973	Not Built	--
(16) A tollgate on the Will Rogers Turnpike near the intersection of State Highway 137...	1992	Not Built	--
(17) [Tollgates in the vicinity of] Porter, Adair, Luther, [and] Elgin...	1978	Various	1971-2014
(18) A tollgate on the Turner Turnpike in the vicinity of Wellston...	1979	Turner	1997
(19) A tollgate on the Muskogee Turnpike [near] Brushy Mountain… and in the vicinity of Elm Grove...	1986	Not Built	--
(20) All or any part of an Oklahoma City Outer Loop expressway system… to complete the Outer Loop.	1987	Various	1991
(21) [T]he Tulsa south bypass expressway... near Sapulpa and extending... to… Broken Arrow.	1987	Creek	1992
(22) A new turnpike... from near the west gate of the Will Rogers Turnpike... to the west end of south Tulsa Turnpike...	1998	Creek	2002
(23) A new turnpike... From... State Highway 33 and U.S. 69 easterly to... Arkansas...	1987	Cherokee	1991
(24) A four-lane extension of the Muskogee Turnpike from [I-40] west of Webbers Falls to... Poteau...	1989	Not Built	--
(25) A new turnpike [from] Tulsa… to... US Highway No. 77 and the Kansas State Line.	1992	Not Built	--
(26) A full access interchange...in the vicinity of Henryetta,[near] the proposed theme park, museum or an industrial facility...	1992	Not Built	--
(27) A new turnpike… creating a southern route through Oklahoma.	1992	Not Built	--
(28) A new turnpike... from a point in the vicinity of the city of Mustang…to a point in the vicinity of the city of Norman.	1993	H.E. Bailey/ Access	2001/ Anticipated
(29) A new turnpike… beginning at a point [near] Altus and extending… to... Sayre.	1993	Not Built	--
(30) A new turnpike… beginning at a point in the vicinity of the city of Enid and extending… to a point in the vicinity of the city of Woodward.	1993	Not Built	--
(31) An on- and off-ramp or any parts thereof at Fletcher.. [near] the Interstate 44 and State Highway 277 intersection...	2000	Access	Anticipated
(32) A new bridge crossing the Arkansas River... in Tulsa County. This project shall commence upon a determination by the Oklahoma Transportation Authority that such bridge shall be self-sufficient at some point over a thirty-year time period from the toll charges associated with the bridge project.	2004	Not Built	--
(33) An exit ramp… from the eastbound lane of the Turner Turnpike at 96th Street in Tulsa.	2006	Turner	2007
(34) An on- and off-ramp... on the Cimarron Turnpike in [near] the northside of Glencoe...	2006	Access	Anticipated
(35) A new turnpike... beginning at Interstate 44… continuing eastward to… Tisdale Expressway in Tulsa...	2010	Gilcrease/ Access	2022/ Anticipated

Source: 69 O.S. § 1705.

Each of the 13 existing turnpike routes generates revenue, however, the amounts vary greatly depending on the length, location, and traffic of the turnpike. For example, the Turner Turnpike generates nearly one-fourth of all revenue within the turnpike system. In contrast, the Chickasaw Turnpike is responsible for about one-fourth of one percent of all the revenue generated by turnpikes. Of the 13 turnpikes, just five – the Turner, the Will Rogers, the John Kilpatrick, the Creek, and the H.E. Bailey – make up approximately 80 percent of OTA's annual revenue.

Exhibit 6: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Revenue per Turnpike. *(Five of OTA's 13 turnpikes generate 80 percent of the agency's annual revenue.)*

Turnpike	Revenue	% of Total	Centerline Miles	Revenue Per Mile
Turner Turnpike	$97,543,000	23.81%	86	$1,134,221
Will Rogers Turnpike	$89,007,000	21.73%	88.5	$1,005,729
John Kilpatrick Turnpike	$59,812,000	14.60%	30.3	$1,973,993
Creek Turnpike	$39,040,000	9.53%	34.4	$1,134,884
H.E. Bailey Turnpike	$37,109,000	9.06%	94.6	$392,273
Muskogee Turnpike	$23,827,000	5.82%	53.1	$448,719
Indian Nation Turnpike	$19,729,000	4.82%	105.2	$187,538
Cimarron Turnpike	$13,520,000	3.30%	67.7	$199,705
Cherokee Turnpike	$11,289,000	2.76%	32.8	$344,177
Gilcrease Turnpike	$6,649,000	1.62%	5.7	$1,166,491
Kickapoo Turnpike	$6,072,000	1.48%	18.5	$328,216
SW John Kilpatrick Turnpike	$4,989,000	1.22%	5	$997,800
Chickasaw Turnpike	$1,054,000	0.26%	13.3	$79,248
Total Revenues	**$409,640,000**			

Source: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, ACFR 2024.

There is one toll road that is an exception to the turnpike system. The Gilcrease Turnpike – also called the Gilcrease Expressway West – is a 5.7-mile-long toll road in Tulsa County. Opened in 2022, it runs along the western edge of the Tulsa city limits, connecting I-44 near Oakhurst to U.S. Highway 64/U.S. 412 north of the Arkansas River. Before its construction, neither the City of Tulsa nor the Oklahoma Department of Transportation could find a way to pay for construction of the road. To solve this problem, a funding partnership was established between the City of Tulsa, ODOT, OTA, Indian Nations Council of Governments, Tulsa County and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Because of its unique funding model, the Gilcrease Expressway is not included in the main turnpike system and the revenue it generates is not used for the support of other turnpikes. The funds borrowed to construct the Gilcrease are scheduled to be paid off in 2057, at which time the roadway will be integrated into the existing turnpike system.[20]

OTA tracks the toll revenue received from each individual tollway within Oklahoma's turnpike system. Additionally, revenue is tracked by whether the driver is a state resident, enrolled in the agency's direct billing system (PikePass), and the number of axles of the vehicle using the toll road. This level of detail gives the Authority the ability to track where, when, and how they receive toll revenue, which is used to help make forecasts and projections in the budgeting process. This information is also used to forecast what revenue will be available when planning new turnpikes and if the projected amounts will be sufficient to cover the cost of the resulting bond obligations.

But while revenue is tracked in detail, OTA expends its funds system wide. The result is that costs such as operations and maintenance are not tracked per tollway, making it difficult to know the true cost of any one turnpike within the system. As a result, it is not currently possible to know which turnpikes result in

[20] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, "2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report."

a net gain of revenue and which may be operating at a loss. However, based on the revenue per mile, it is reasonable to conclude that the I-44 routes and Kilpatrick subsidize most of the other turnpikes.

LOFT's ability to estimate OTA's maintenance costs is also challenging, as turnpikes differ in size, construction style, and traffic volume, which significantly affects the amount of maintenance an individual turnpike needs.

ACCESS Program

OTA's newest turnpike expansion plan, ACCESS Oklahoma, will create additional interchanges, expand lanes for existing turnpikes, and create three additional turnpikes over the next 15 years. The new routes were authorized in statute beginning in 1993.[21] The plan's cost was originally estimated to be $5 billion, but this figure increased to $8.2 billion in November of 2024 to account for nationwide inflation in the costs of construction. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Producer Price Index for net inputs to construction industries, costs rose 40.4 percent from 2020 to 2025.[22] OTA states that $4.3 billion will be used to construct the two new revenue generating turnpikes while the remaining $3.9 billion is being used for lane widening and interchange improvements. $500 million will be used to extend the Gilcrease Expressway.

Exhibit 7: ACCESS Oklahoma Planned Projects. *(OTA's current – and largest - plan to expand the turnpike system consists of projects to widen and expand existing toll roads, add interchanges, and build two new toll roads: the South Extension Turnpike and complete the Outer Loop.)*

ACCESS Oklahoma			
Corridor	**Project Length**	**Estimated Budget**	**Year Authorized**
Interchange Improvements	Various	$330 Million	Various
Turner Turnpike Widening	68 Miles	$2.5 Billion	1947
South Extension Turnpike	19 Miles	$1.025 Billion	1993
Outer Loop: East-West Connector	28 Miles	$3 Billion	1987
Outer Loop: Tri-City Connector	8 Miles	$360 Million	1987
John Kilpatrick Widening	15 Miles	$375 Million	1987
Will Rogers Widening	12 Miles	$610 Million	1953
Gilcrease Expressway Expansion*	5 Miles	$495 Million	2010
Total		**$8.695 Billion**	

Source: ACCESS Oklahoma Website.
**The Gilcrease Expressway Expansion's funding source is yet to be determined.*

OTA's use of cross-pledging makes projects like ACCESS Oklahoma possible. This differs from the original purpose of the State's first turnpike, the Turner, which was to use the revenue from the toll road to pay off the entire principal and interest within the bond's timeframe. This would naturally require each turnpike to generate sufficient revenue to repay its own bonds. As previously noted, this legislative intent was changed in the 1960's with the practice of cross-pledging, which allowed the most-traveled routes to help subsidize lesser-traveled routes.

Alternatively, ACCESS Oklahoma was designed to use the revenue from existing toll roads to help fund the cost of the total project. This is, in part, because the new turnpikes would not be able to generate enough revenue on their own to cover the $8.2 billion in bond repayments required by the Authority and were never intended to. Extrapolating from the 50-year revenue estimates made by CDM Smith, the contractor OTA uses to conduct its traffic and revenue studies, it would take 207 years to pay off the bonds issued

[21] Source: 69 O.S. § 1705.

[22] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Producer Price Index for Net Inputs to Construction Industries (Series ID: WPUIP23100000).

for ACCESS projects, if OTA was only using revenue generated by the new turnpikes.[23] Thus, the revenue sharing model allows the ACCESS project to be feasible where it would otherwise be too costly. As of June 2025, $1.6 billion in bonds have been issued for the ACCESS program, and in October 2025 a refunding bond of $148.6 million is expected to be issued.

OTA states that its toll rates per mile are significantly lower than the national average. LOFT examined the toll rates for other states with a state-chartered toll authority, selecting key routes for direct comparison. As shown below, **LOFT found that Oklahoma's toll rate per mile is below average for drivers enrolled with the state's transponder payment option, and at the national average for drivers whose plates are electronically scanned for payment (PlatePay).** Oklahoma has eliminated its cash payment option at toll gates.

Exhibit 8: State Toll Rate Comparison. *(The table below presents cost per mile comparisons on representative toll roads operated by state tolling authorities.)*

Toll Comparisons of Representative Turnpikes					
			Cost per Mile		
State	Highway	Road Miles	Transponder	License Plate Pay	Pay at Toll Gate
DE	Delaware Turnpike	13.3	0.30		0.30
FL	Florida's Turnpike	309.0	0.06	0.08	
IL	Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway	96.6	0.05	0.11	0.11
IN	Indiana Toll Road	156.3	0.10		0.36
KS	Kansas Turnpike	236.0	0.05	0.10	
ME	Maine Turnpike	106.0	0.06	0.08	0.08
MD	John F Kennedy Memorial Highway	49.0	0.16	0.24	
MA	Massachusetts Turnpike	138.0	0.05	0.10	
NH	Blue Star Turnpike	16.0	0.09	0.13	0.13
NJ	Garden State Parkway	172.0	0.07	0.07	0.07
NY	New York State Thruway	496.0	0.05	0.08	0.08
OH	Ohio Turnpike	241.0	0.06	0.07	0.09
OK	Turner Turnpike	86.0	0.06	0.12	
PA	Pennsylvania Turnpike	360.0	0.17	0.34	
WV	West Virginia Turnpike	187.2	0.05	0.07	

Source: Data is generally from turnpikeinfo.com, except toll data for the Pennsylvania Turnpike is from www.paturnpike.com/toll-calculator.
Notes: Information on 2-axle private vehicles is presented -- the least expensive class of facility user. The table excludes states in which there are no toll roads connecting to a highway in another state.

Turnpikes' Role in Oklahoma's Transportation System

By the mid-1990s, Oklahoma had developed a large backlog of deferred road maintenance for its transportation infrastructure, much of which was built during the mid-20th century. Funding this backlog was challenging as the revenue the State received from the motor fuel tax was fairly flat between 1985 and 2005, at about $200 million per year. This was due to both fluctuating fuel prices and improvements made to vehicle fuel efficiency, which reduced the amount of motor fuel tax that was collected as the tax is assessed at the point of sale for gasoline.[24]

[23] See Appendix A for calculation methodology.

[24] The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, "State Funding History."

In response to the funding shortfalls, the Legislature created the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which provided $1.01 billion in new revenues for highway construction through a combination of legislative appropriations and the proceeds of bond sales. The program was divided into two phases: Phase I provided $410 million in direct appropriations and $300 million from bond sales, while Phase II called for $150 million in future appropriations and a similar amount from bond financing.[25] However, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation claims that "it did little for the existing infrastructure system."[26]

In 2005, Oklahomans were presented with a possible new source of funds for addressing the State's transportation infrastructure needs. State Question 723 proposed a constitutional amendment to establish a Bridges and Highway Trust Fund that would levy a new motor fuel tax on gasoline and diesel, capped at five cents per gallon and eight cents per gallon, respectively. The money would have been used only to fund the reconstruction and building of new roads within the State by ODOT. However, the proposal was defeated by voters with 87 percent voting against the measure.[27] ODOT's capacity to build new roads is limited as funds are mainly spent maintaining existing roads and addressing a backlog of repairs across the State. As shown in the table below, ODOT's backlog of maintenance projects is estimated to be $26.9 billion.[28]

Exhibit 9: ODOT's Estimate for Road Repair and Maintenance Backlog. *(ODOT estimates a total cost of $27 billion to bring all state highways and bridges to the federal standard of "good" condition.)*

Oklahoma Department of Transportation's Estimate of Current Road & Bridge Backlog			
Asset	**Quantity**		**Current Backlog Opinion of Cost ($)**
Two-Lane Highway	15,482.58	Lane Miles	$15,991,683,000.00
Multi-Lane Highway	6,309.00	Lane Miles	$7,986,000,000.00
Bridge	16,701,261.00	SF Bridge Deck	$2,975,712,325.00
TOTAL			**$26,952,395,325.00**

Source: Internal memo provided by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation: Current Opinion of Backlog Cost Estimate, October 1, 2024.
Notes: The backlog for highway repair and maintenance include bringing the pavement condition of all roads to the federal definition of good, as well as adding shoulders. Bridge maintenance includes also bringing structures to the same federal standard or replacing functionally obsolete bridges on the State highway system.

ODOT's most recent Long-Range Transportation Plan, a draft of which was published in July 2025 and details the agency's projected transportation needs through 2050, reflects the agency's priorities for preserving and reconstructing existing infrastructure. Expansion represents just 4.2 percent of the ODOT system's needs.[29]

[25] Oklahoma Senate Legislative Brief, "Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Status Report." Sept. 2001.

[26] The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, "State Funding History."

[27] State Question 723, 2005.

[28] The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, as of October 1, 2024.

[29] The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, "Draft 2025-2050 Oklahoma Long Range Transportation Plan" Jul. 2025.

Exhibit 10: Total Needs of the State Highway System, 2025 to 2050. *(The information below reflects the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's estimates of the State's transportation needs for the next 25 years. Combined, pavement maintenance and general maintenance across the State's transportation system represents 47.8 percent of the total ODOT system's projected needs over the next 25 years.)*

Total Needs of the State Highway System, 2025 - 2050 (millions of 2024 dollars)			
Category	**Average Annual Need**	**2025-2050 Need**	**% of Highway System Needs, 2025 to 2050**
Pavement	$600	$15,600.00	30.7%
Bridge	$235	$6,110.00	12.0%
Maintenance	$333.10	$8,662.40	17.1%
Expansion	$81.70	$2,125.30	4.2%
Interchanges	$293.80	$7,637.50	15.1%
Safety	$389.50	$10,125.80	20.0%
ITS	$8.80	$229.31	0.5%
Weigh Stations / POEs	$8.00	$208.50	0.4%
Rest Areas	$1.50	$38.70	0.1%
State Highway System Needs	**$1,951.40**	**$50,737.51**	**100.0%**

Source: ODOT Draft Long Range Transportation Plan, Table 6.1
Notes: Pavement maintenance includes repairs, rehabilitation, and preservation treatments to prevent pavement conditions deteriorating to the point where major reconstruction is required. The more generalized maintenance category encompasses other maintenance costs and activities required across the State's highway system and for State bridges. Safety needs include highway improvements designed to reduce fatalities and serious injuries, such as improving intersections and rural two-lane highways with deficient shoulders.

As ODOT's role in State transportation increasingly became focused on maintenance of the State's roads and bridges, OTA grew to fulfill the State's needs for new infrastructure. Because OTA has the ability to bond, and a revenue stream dedicated to building and maintaining limited access highways, it has significantly more ability to build new limited access highways than ODOT. Thus, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority has gradually become the primary entity responsible for major new road construction projects in the state. Since implementing cross-pledging, OTA has constructed 361 centerline miles of new roads. **The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority manages 630 centerline miles of tollway, making it the longest state-operated turnpike system in the country.**[30] These roads are primarily limited access roads, meaning they are designed for higher driving speeds with no stop lights or intersections. These roads are accessed via on and off ramps or interchanges. In contrast, ODOT has over 12,257 centerline miles of highway, with only 673 miles of "non-toll interstate highway," approximately five and a half percent of its total centerline highway miles.[31]

[30] Florida's Turnpike, "FY 2024 Traffic Engineer's Annual Letter Report." Other states, including Texas and Florida, may have more total turnpike miles, but a portion of those are operated by local or regional turnpike authorities.

[31] ODOT website, Highway System Conditions.

***Exhibit 11: Comparison of the State's Two Transportation Agencies**. (The table below reflects key differences between the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.)*

Oklahoma's System of Transportation

	OTA	ODOT
Key Responsibilities	Construction and maintenance of toll roadways	Maintenance, repair, and replacement of State highways and bridges.
Primary source of Funding	Toll revenues and concession fees	State Appropriations, Motor Fuel Tax, the ROADS Fund, federal funds.
Limitations	Can only expand tollways with statutory authorization and successful bond issuance.	Must comply with federal regulations.
Roadway Miles Managed	630	12,257
Other Duties	Dedicated Highway Patrol Officers Commercial Retailers	Administers several state and federal transportation funding programs for freight and passenger rail, transit, and local government entities; permitting for oversize/overweight trucks; assists with port facilities.

Source: Agency annual reports.

These changing roles are exemplified by a decision made in the 1980's: the Department of Transportation had plans to expand Memorial Road into what is now the Kilpatrick Turnpike. After realizing the cost of construction would be equivalent to the agency's entire budget, it reached out to OTA. The tollway was eventually legislatively authorized and ODOT transferred the previously secured right of ways and the plans to the Turnpike Authority.[32]

OTA's ability to use its existing tollways to fund new bonds provides the State with significant flexibility in constructing new roads, which would not be feasible with only ODOT's resources. For instance, in 2016, OTA launched the "Driving Forward" program to create the Kickapoo Turnpike, add seven miles to the Kilpatrick Turnpike, and widen and reconstruct 20 miles on the Turner Turnpike. The total cost of the program was $1.2 billion, and like the ACCESS project, it is unlikely that such endeavors would have been funded without revenue from the existing turnpike system.[33] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's ability to issue bonds without indebting the State of Oklahoma further makes it a more appealing mechanism for the funding of new road construction. As the debt accumulated by the Authority does not constitute indebtedness to the State, Oklahoma taxpayers are not obligated to pay it back. Instead, the debt is held by OTA, who by law may only use revenues from the turnpike system to make payments on the bonds.[34]

[32] LOFT interview with former Secretary of Transportation, July 30, 2024.

[33] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, "October OTA Board Meeting Wrap-Up," Oct. 4, 2023.

[34] 69 O.S. § 1702.

Debt Oversight

While the Oklahoma Council on Bond Oversight (COBO) plays a formal role in reviewing OTA's bond issuances, it does not exercise meaningful oversight over the projects themselves. COBO's authority is to verify that proposed financings are legally compliant, structurally sound, and do not pose undue fiscal risk to the issuing agency.[35] The Council does not assess whether the project being funded is necessary, cost-effective, or aligned with the State's long-term transportation priorities.

In OTA's case, the Council's review does not include any evaluation of whether the turnpike route serves the public interest, whether it fits into a statewide economic development plan, or whether it duplicates existing road infrastructure. The review process is technical and procedural, amounting to a confirmation that the bond structure meets minimum legal and financial requirements. Since OTA bonds are backed by toll revenues and not the full faith and credit of the State of Oklahoma, they fall outside the State's constitutional debt cap and do not trigger the same level of scrutiny applied to general obligation bonds.[36]

In practice, bond packages brought before COBO by OTA are routinely approved without revision. The Council does not have the authority to alter trust indentures, reject routes, or pause projects based on public interest concerns. As such, the Council's function is better understood as a checkpoint for legal formality rather than as a gatekeeper for fiscal or strategic accountability. While the Council fulfills its statutory role, it is not empowered to ensure that OTA's long-term borrowing aligns with broader legislative intent or statewide infrastructure planning.[37] OTA is subject to SEC oversight and receives its own rating from the major credit rating agencies, separate from the State's credit rating.

Current and Future Debt Load

OTA holds several bonds which have been re-issued multiple times, with the oldest bonds being from 2017. Currently, OTA has a total outstanding principal balance of $3 billion with a total maturity amount of $5.8 billion.

The Will Rogers Turnpike stands out as the only turnpike to have its bond fully paid off with only the revenues it generated from tolls. For all other turnpikes, the Authority has refunded existing bonds and cross-pledged the revenues into the turnpike system, as authorized by the 1966 legislation. As recently as 1998, OTA was set to pay off all bonds by 2028. However, in 2011 the Authority issued $159 million in additional bonds to expand the Creek Turnpike and John Kilpatrick Turnpikes by two lanes along certain areas. These bonds pushed the payoff date back an additional three years to 2031.[38] Similarly in 2017, OTA issued $769 million in bonds for the Driving Forward initiative, which further expanded the Turnpike system. These new bonds pushed the payoff back 16 years, with a new systemwide payoff date of 2047.[39]

[35] 62 O.S. § 695.8.

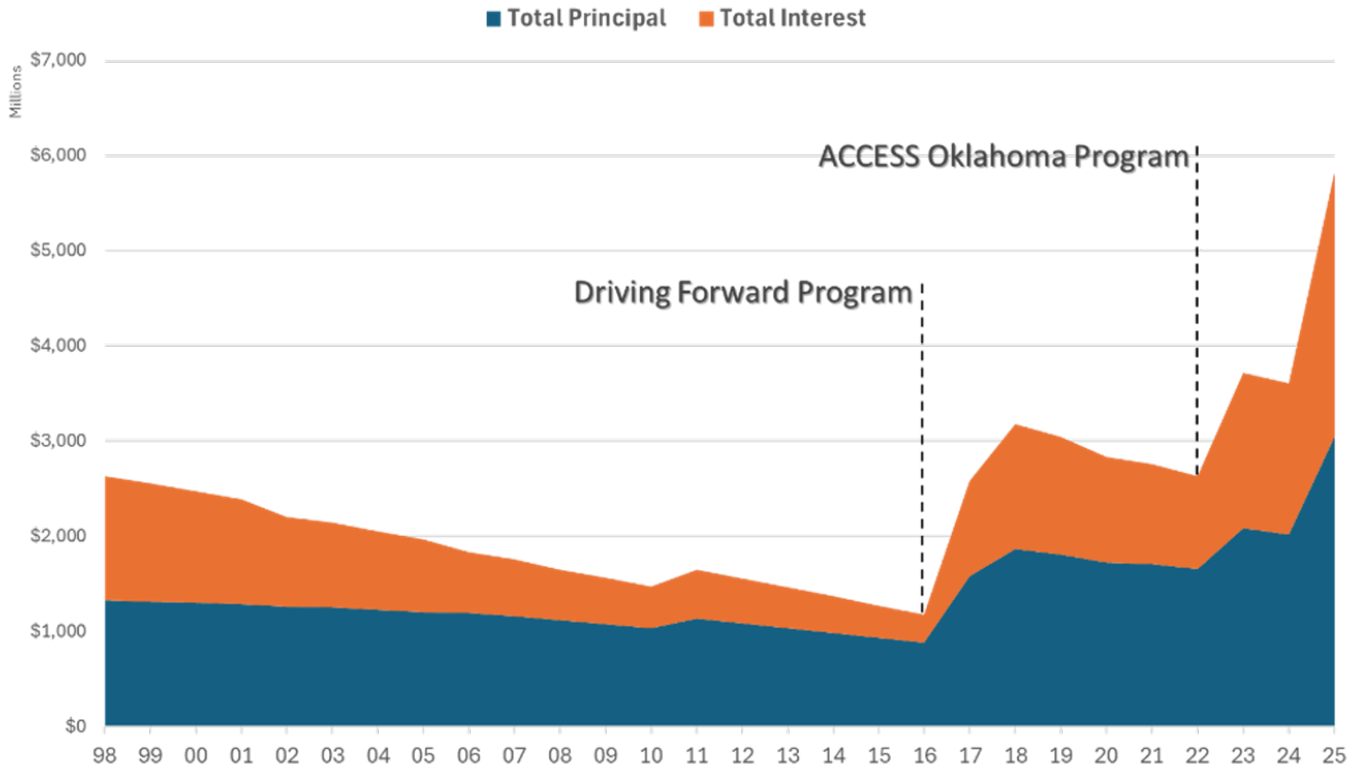
[36] 62 O.S. § 34.200.

[37] 62 O.S. § 695.8.

[38] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority "Comprehensive Annual Financial Report For The Year Ended December 31, 2011." Apr. 30, 2012.

[39] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority "Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Year Ended December 31, 2017 & 2016." Apr. 30, 2018.

Exhibit 12: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Bond Debt by Year. *(The graph below lists the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's total amount of outstanding principal and interest bond debt for a given year. The combined principal and interest debt represents the Authority's total amount of outstanding debt service. The increase in 2016 is attributed to OTA's "Driving Forward" program, which updated and added new turnpikes to the system. The increase starting in 2023 is due to the first bonds being purchased for the new "ACCESS Oklahoma" project.)*



Source: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's Annual Financial Reports from 1998-2024 and data provided to LOFT by OTA.

If no other bonding were to take place, all debts would be paid by 2055.[40] However, the new ACCESS Oklahoma project will add an additional $8.2 billion of debt to the Authority, with an estimated total maturity amount of over $13 billion dollars.[41] For perspective, **the amount of debt OTA will incur for ACCESS Oklahoma is four times more than its current debt on all turnpikes in the system and approximately one and a half times the State's entire annual budget.** Because the exact date and terms of the future bonds are unknown, it is not possible to provide an exact payoff date for the future bonds.

Whenever OTA borrows large sums of money through the issuance of bonds, the cost of servicing their debt also increases. To make up the difference, OTA has increased its user toll fees across the system. In 2015 the "Driving Forward" program was launched, a large-scale project to enhance, modernize, and improve safety for several existing turnpikes. The project also included the construction of the Kickapoo Turnpike and a 7-mile extension of the Kilpatrick Turnpike, both of which were new toll roads. Over the next few years, OTA issued $1.2 billion of bonds to fund the Driving Forward program. To help fund this program, OTA raised tolls system wide by 12 percent in 2017, marking the eighth time in their history to raise rates. One year later, in 2018, the Authority raised toll rates by another 2.5 percent.

[40] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

[41] See Appendix A for methodology for calculating the estimated maturity amount needed for the ACCESS Oklahoma bonds.

The Turnpike Authority's newest project, ACCESS Oklahoma, will also raise toll rates. Starting in 2025, OTA raised the toll rates either 10, 15, or 20 percent, depending on the turnpike. Additional rate increases of six percent are also scheduled to take place every other year starting in 2027, if approved by the Board. OTA could withhold implementing these rate increases if they receive enough revenue. The rate hikes will help fund the $8 billion project which, as previously mentioned, rose over $3 billion from the original estimate of $5 billion due to nationwide inflation of construction costs.[42] The 2025 rate increase marks the 11th time in the Authority's history to raise toll rates.[43]

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's role in meeting the State's transportation infrastructure has led to it operating under a model that prioritizes expansion and system updates over debt elimination. Toll revenue collected by OTA serves not only to maintain existing turnpikes but also, and perhaps more importantly, to fund the issuance of new bonds for construction or expansion of toll roads. This financial model results in a continuous cycle: increased revenue supports the issuance of more bonds, which in turn facilitates further expansion of the turnpike system. This expansion then generates additional revenue, perpetuating the cycle of bond issuance and infrastructure development until all feasible statutorily authorized routes are built. Even if no new turnpikes were authorized in statute, OTA has discretion to improve existing turnpike infrastructure. As demonstrated by the ACCESS program, nearly half of the bonds are for either widening or making improvements to the interchanges for existing turnpikes.

[42] The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, "Turnpike tolls increase an average of 1-cent per mile in 2025." Dec. 31, 2024.

[43] See Appendix D – History of OTA Toll Rate Increases.

Finding 2: Changing Oklahoma's Turnpike Model is Possible, but Would Take Decades to Fully Realize

Toll roads in Oklahoma were originally constructed with the intention for each to be paid off and transferred to the State as a non-toll road, however that intent was later legislatively modified, and led to the cross-pledged turnpike system of today. If the Legislature desired to change it back it could do so, however it would take either an extraordinary one-time capital outlay, or several decades for the changes to be felt.

There are options for Oklahoma to either reduce or eliminate its use of toll-funded roads, and there is precedent for states that have successfully accomplished this. LOFT identified nine states that have converted toll-funded roads to taxpayer-supported roads. For example, Connecticut eliminated its toll roads in 1988 and between 1951 and 2006, Kentucky removed 750 miles of toll roads from its system and currently does not maintain any toll roads.[44]

Exhibit 13: State Turnpike Conversions. *(Nine states have converted toll-funded roads to tax-supported roads. Only Kentucky has converted a system of turnpikes as large as Oklahoma's. Kentucky's toll roads did not operate under the cross-pledging model.)*

States that have Converted Toll Roads to Tax-Supported Roads			
State	Roads that were Formerly Tolled	Miles Converted	Year(s)
Colorado	1	17.3	1967
Connecticut	2	140.2	1985, 1988
Georgia	2	57.9	2003, 2013
Kentucky	10	750.0	1975 to 2006
Maryland (SB lanes)	1	48.0	1980's
New York	5	105.9	1950's to 2006
South Carolina	1	7.5	2021
Texas	2	52.5	1978, 2017
Virginia	2	46.7	1992, 1996
	26	**1,226.0**	

Source: LOFT compilation from AAroads.com (CO), Connecticut General Assembly (CT), WSB Radio (GA), GovTech.com (KY), Maryland Transportation Authority (MD), Town of Hilton Head Island (SC), Fort Worth Star-Telegram (TX), The Virginian-Pilot (VA).

[44] Connecticut General Assembly, "Understanding Tolls in Connecticut." February 18, 2009. Government Technology, "Kentucky Eliminates Parkway Tolls." July 27, 2010.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is regulated by two main sources: State statute and the Turnpike Authority's trust agreements with its bondholders. OTA bonds form a contract with bond holders.[45] As part of that contract, and as long as the bonds are outstanding, OTA must:

- Operate the turnpikes as toll roads
- Hold a certain amount of toll revenue in an emergency fund
- Maintain a certain level of quality on the toll roads, and
- Make regular debt service payments.

Under current law, once the bonds are paid in full and certain other conditions are met, the turnpikes will become part of the state highway system and all tolls will end.[46] Additionally, the Legislature can, by concurrent resolution, vote to make a turnpike part of the state highway system.[47] However, this cannot be done in such a way as to impair the contractual obligations of outstanding bonds.

LOFT examined three scenarios for the future of toll roads: two scenarios looked to transition the roads from toll-based to taxpayer supported. The third looked at eliminating OTA's debt over time, while continuing tolls as a way to fund ongoing maintenance and possibly future road projects. LOFT also looked at the possibility of privatizing toll roads, but rejected it, as it does not seem to further the interests of eliminating tolls or creating revenue for funding roads. Additionally, LOFT examined the cost to pay off all current bonds, which would allow the Legislature to transfer the turnpikes to ODOT and remove the tolls. The upfront cost of such a payout, at minimum, would be over $3 billion, and the State budget would have to accommodate additional funding for ongoing maintenance and repair costs, which are currently covered by toll collections.

Direct Repayment of OTA's Bonds

As of June 2025, OTA has over $3 billion in outstanding principal debt on the State's turnpike bonds, an amount equivalent to one-fourth of the State's budget.[48] While OTA maintains some reserve funds, they would not meaningfully contribute to paying down bond debt, with a balance of $184 million in their unrestricted general fund.[49] These funds are often set aside by the Authority to fund any project aligned with OTA's mission.

If the State were to pay off OTA's existing bonds, it would require the depletion of essentially all the State's reserves for this singular purpose. These funds were created to address potential revenue failures or guard against reduction in services and emptying them would leave the State in a vulnerable position.

Although the State can use a process known as defeasance, where the repayment funds are set aside in escrow, to free itself of the structural obligations, including any liens or securities against the turnpikes, most of the issued bonds have an early redemption date that obligates the State to make interest payments up through that date. That is, unlike prepaying a personal loan to avoid accruing additional interest, OTA's bond agreements guarantee that bondholders will receive interest accrued through at least the early redemption date, even if the principal is paid early. The trust agreements specify that bond holders are entitled to a minimum period for each bond.

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[45] OTA 1989 Trust Indenture, and Gilcrease Non-system Trust Agreement.

[46] 69 O.S. § 1717. "When all bonds issued under the provisions of this article and the interest thereon shall have been paid or a sufficient amount for the payment of all such bonds and the interest thereon to the maturity thereof shall have been set aside in trust for the benefit of the bondholders, such projects, if then in good condition and repair to the satisfaction of the Commission, shall become part of the state highway system and shall thereafter be maintained by the Commission free of tolls. Provided, that when all bonds for any turnpike project and the interest thereon shall have been paid or such provision for payment made, prior to payment of the bonds and interest on any other project or projects, such project shall continue to be operated as a toll facility at toll rates not less than the lowest rate being charged on any project, until all bonds issued by the Authority and the interest thereon shall have been paid or such provisions for payment made."

[47] 69 O.S. § 1717.1.

[48] The State budget in FY25 was $12.7 billion. This figure represents the total State budget (all funds), not just appropriated General Revenue funds.

[49] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

However, the calculations above only represent the current amount of debt held by OTA. As mentioned previously, OTA's ACCESS Oklahoma project will add another $6.6 billion in principal bond debt over the next 13 years, effectively *tripling* the amount the State would be paying back. If the ACCESS projects are continued as planned, paying down the current $3 billion of bonds would do little to transfer the turnpike system to the Oklahoma Highway Commission.

What's more, paying the debt off all at once would put the entire burden on Oklahomans. Under the current system, approximately 50 percent of the tolls collected by OTA are paid by out-of-state drivers.[50] Additionally, federal law requires states to supply a certain percentage of their highway spending in order to remain eligible for federal highway funds. Toll revenues spent on building or maintaining highways can be credited towards the state's obligation. [51] If tolls are eliminated, federal funding would not be allowed to supplant that revenue; instead, another state funding source would be needed.

Due to the impracticability of the State paying off OTA's existing bond debt, LOFT focused on three scenarios for the State transitioning away from Oklahoma's current toll road system.

Scenario 1: The State takes ownership of the turnpikes once they are paid in full.

Given the substantial capital needed to pay off all the bonds simultaneously, using toll revenues to pay down the bonds would offer a more realistic solution. OTA would continue to collect the revenue from tolls and use that revenue to pay down the bond debt, as they have been doing. At the conclusion of the payments, the State would assume control of the turnpikes. In this scenario, State revenues would not be used to pay off the bond debt, but the interest on the bonds would be paid in full.

As shown in the chart below, the last of OTA's current revenue bonds is set to be paid in full on January 1st, 2055, but the additional bonds scheduled to be issued for the ACCESS project within the next ten years will likely push this out even further.

Exhibit 14: OTA's Current Outstanding Debt. *(The chart below shows OTA's total outstanding debts. The issuance amount reflects the funds received by OTA for use on turnpike spending. The debt service is the total amount, including interest, that OTA owes on the bond. Par Outstanding reflects the total amount of principal remaining on the bond to be repaid.)*

Oklahoma Turnpike Authority System Outstanding Debt
(As of June 1, 2025)

Bond Series	Date of Issuance	Amount of Issuance	Debt Service	Range of Maturities	Par Outstanding
Series 2017A*	2/8/17	$456,070,000	$492,609,850	1/1/32 to 1/1/47	$296,125,000
Series 2017C	12/21/17	$312,840,000	$365,224,295	1/1/34 to 1/1/47	$209,920,000
Series 2017D	12/21/17	$275,680,000	$132,158,750	1/1/18 to 1/1/28	$119,975,000
Series 2017E	12/21/17	$95,835,000	$89,618,705	1/1/18 to 1/1/31	$76,075,000
Series 2018A	10/31/18	$344,310,000	$600,036,063	1/1/32 to 1/1/48	$344,310,000
Series 2020A	10/29/20	$187,195,000	$165,431,250	1/1/22 to 1/1/33	$138,365,000
Series 2020B	10/29/20	$179,165,000	$108,712,995	1/1/22 to 1/1/33	$100,745,000
Series 2023	10/26/23	$500,000,000	$1,192,870,463	1/1/35 to 1/1/43	$500,000,000
Series 2025A	2/4/25	$1,110,575,000	$2,423,029,189	1/1/35 to 1/1/55	$1,110,575,000
Series 2025B**	10/7/25	$148,605,000	$245,922,745	1/1/32 to 1/1/42	$148,605,000
Total		**$3,610,275,000**	**$5,815,614,303**		**$3,044,695,000**

Source: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.
**Series 2017A Bonds were partially refunded by Series 2025B Bonds.*
***Series 2025B Bonds were sold on a forward delivery basis.*

[50] OTA response to LOFT Request for Information, August 28, 2025. LOFT has not been able to independently verify the agency's data.

[51] U.S. Department of Transportation Center for Innovative Finance Support, *Federal-aid Matching Strategies*.

However, there are challenges the State would face in transitioning existing toll roads to taxpayer supported highways:

First, the State would absorb the cost of both ongoing and long-term road maintenance of the newly acquired roads. The maintenance costs would be recurring while the long term, end-of-life road repair would be added to ODOT's existing $27 billion deferred maintenance backlog. This ongoing cost can be divided into two categories; routine maintenance, and long term, end-of-life repairs. Currently, OTA funds the former with the money it receives from collecting tolls. In 2024, OTA spent $31.1 million on turnpike maintenance; up from $22.7 million spent in 2021.[52]

Second, by eliminating tolls, the State would lose its primary source of funding for large, new road construction projects. As noted in Finding 1, ODOT already has a substantial backlog of projects, primarily focused on maintenance.

However, the "end-of-life" maintenance costs would be a more challenging, long-term issue if assumed by ODOT. OTA states that without major rehabilitation, pavement can last about 30 years. Oklahoma's turnpike system has approximately 2,500 lane miles and of that, 1,700 were built prior to 1975. As a result, OTA invests additional funds every year– beyond regular maintenance – from their general and reserve maintenance fund to rehabilitate the older pavement. These special maintenance costs can vary depending on the needs at the time. For Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029, OTA expects to spend an average of $116 million per year on special maintenance projects, though the Authority says these costs could go up as the pavement continues to age.[53]

Lastly, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is required by statute to partner with the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety (DPS) to enforce the State's laws on turnpikes. The jurisdiction is exclusive to DPS and OTA is required to pay from its own funds for the use of State Troopers on the turnpikes.[54] There are currently 117 State Trooper staff assigned to Oklahoma's 630 centerline miles of Turnpikes.[55] In 2024, OTA spent $18.8 million to fund OHP's use of State Troopers on the turnpikes. OTA's 2025 capital plan also calls for an additional $8.5 million to fund a cadet school to increase recruitment and another $1.7 million to fund patrol cars and equipment. OTA expects that the Highway Patrol Academy will add an additional 40 troopers.

Operational Impacts

In 2024, OTA's total operating costs (excluding Highway Patrol) were $146.7 million. In the event OTA were to be dissolved after retirement of outstanding bonds, and the agency's assets and duties were to be transferred to ODOT, not all of OTA's operating costs would need to be absorbed by ODOT, as much of the Authority's staff manages toll collections or is duplicative to ODOT's administrative support.

Excluding operations, the total estimated annual cost to the State to keep and maintain the turnpikes is $135 million. This cost assumes that the turnpikes would be maintained at their current levels, which given ODOT's existing backlog, would give them a significant priority over existing highways.

This figure also assumes that the State would continue to fund the Oklahoma Highway Patrol at its current levels. Because the Oklahoma Highway Patrol has sole jurisdiction of the State's turnpikes, there are 110 State Troopers dedicated to just these 630 miles of turnpike. For comparison, in 2022 Oklahoma's total 753 State Troopers covered over 12,000 miles of State highway.[56] If the turnpikes were transferred over to ODOT, they would no longer be subject to the statutory restrictions, and the State may not need as many troopers since the highways would now fall under the same jurisdictions as all other State highways.

[52] 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, Mar 28, 2025.

[53] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Proposed Five-year Capital Plan Detail, 2025-2029.

[54] 47 O.S. §, 11-1402.

[55] This total is comprised of enforcement Troopers (91), Lieutenants (14), Captains (4), Major (1), Transportation shop (1), Civilians (6). Civilians include administrative assistants and dispatchers.

[56] Oklahoma Highway Patrol, OHP 5-Year Workforce Enhancement Plan, 2022.

If OTA's toll system were dismantled and all maintenance responsibilities transferred to ODOT, the cost burden – now shared between in-state and out-of-state drivers - would shift entirely to State funds, primarily the Rebuilding Oklahoma Access and Driver Safety (ROADS) fund and the Oklahoma Motor Fuel Tax.[57] Concerns about the future reliability of the motor fuel taxes include the impact of more fuel-efficient vehicles on tax collections. Additionally, transportation funds have lost significant buying power with inflation.

For FY26, ODOT received $610 million in appropriations from the ROADS fund, up $35 million from FY22.[58] Created by the Legislature in 2005, the ROADS fund was designed to supplement ODOT's construction and maintenance programs in addition to direct annual appropriations. The fund's primary revenue stream is a dedicated portion of the State's personal income tax receipts. Additional transfers are made from motor vehicle collections and other general revenue apportionments, making it structurally different from the Motor Fuel Tax and other constitutionally limited sources.[59]

Importantly, the ROADS Fund may be used on both new road construction and the maintenance of existing assets, assuming those uses are in alignment with the Department's capital and preservation priorities. There is no prohibition on using the fund for non-capital purposes, as long as the expenditures are consistent with the mission of the Department of Transportation and meet the fund's statutory criteria.[60]

Scenario 2: Periodically Transfer one Turnpike at a Time to ODOT Until All Are Free of Tolls

An alternative that would begin transitioning some turnpikes to taxpayer funded roads sooner is to take roads out of the turnpike system one at a time. This plan would be neither inexpensive nor simple, but if the Legislature determines that moving roads out of the turnpike system is a priority, this is one plausible path. However, it would require refunding all toll roads at the outset. The new bonds would have built-in payoff triggers so that every few years one of the turnpikes would be transferred out of the system, assuming revenue on the other turnpikes is sufficient to continue meeting revenue needs. For example, the new bond could be structured so that every five years the turnpike that generates the lowest revenue becomes free of tolls. Additionally, the Legislature would need to put a moratorium on new turnpike projects.

There are two considerable downsides to this scenario: first, the bonds, backed by reduced revenue streams, would likely be less appealing to potential bondholders.[61] As a result, the interest rates needed to induce purchases might be higher than the rate on current bonds. In the short term, OTA might spend more of its revenue on debt service. Second, the toll roads Oklahomans would most like to see become free of tolls would likely need to be the last ones to roll off. The most-traveled toll roads would likely not be made free of tolls any sooner, and may in fact be retained as toll roads even longer than the life of current bonds. However, this plan would begin the process of making all highways in the state free of tolls, with visible progress every few years, and give taxpayers the certainty of a specified end date.

The cost of this plan is dependent on the interest rates OTA can obtain for the new bond schedule. While it is likely to be more than the current payoff amount of all bonds, it would give a definite timetable to the final payoff, assuming future Legislatures continue to enforce a moratorium on new turnpike projects. In order to consider this scenario, the Legislature would need additional information such as the costs associated with maintaining individual turnpikes.

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[57] Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, FY25 Budget Document, Table 6; LOFT analysis of recurring capital and maintenance items excluding one-time costs.

[58] Oklahoma HB 600 – (2022), Oklahoma HB 2766 – (2025).

[59] 69 O.S. § 1521 et seq.

[60] Oklahoma Department of Transportation, *Budget Book FY 2025*, pp. 22–25.

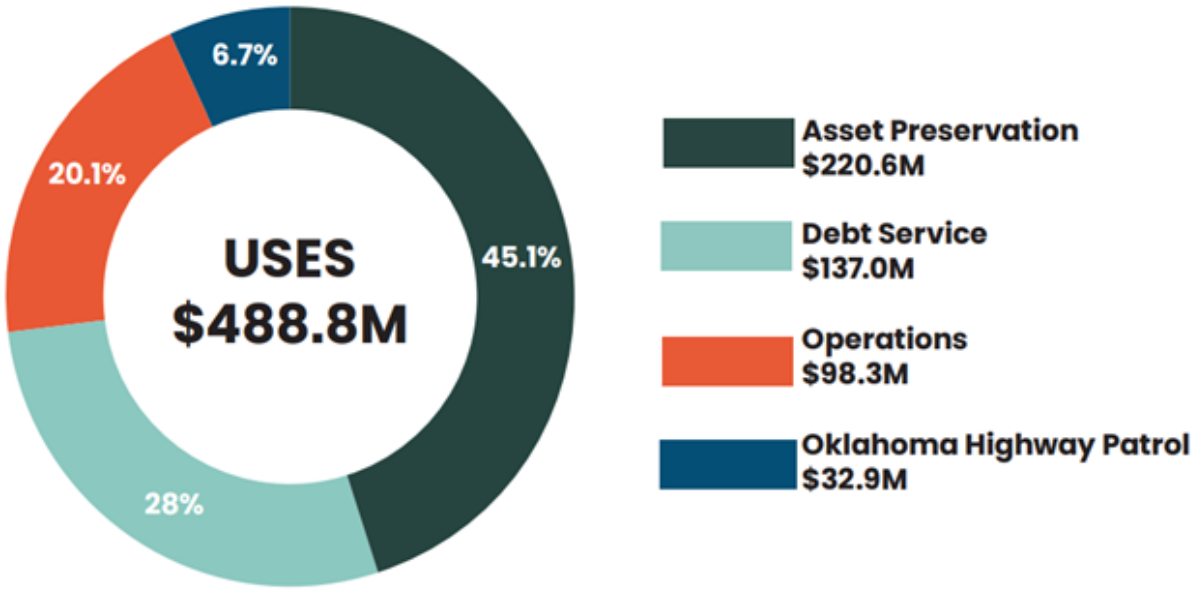
[61] There may also be complications with refunding some of the bonds with tax-free status, further increasing the expense.

Scenario 3: OTA Retains Ownership of Turnpikes and Continues to Collect Tolls, Repurposing the Portion of Revenues Currently Dedicated to Debt Service Payments

Because toll rates provide a stable mechanism for funding roads, the State may be best served by keeping this funding structure in place. Under current statute, OTA will dissolve upon the retirement of the last bond, subject to certain conditions, such as the roads being in good condition. However, the Legislature could change this through ordinary statute to allow OTA to continue administering the turnpikes and charging tolls to continue funding ongoing maintenance costs.

As shown in Exhibit 15 below, approximately 30 percent of OTA's revenues are used for the purpose of paying down their debt. Once OTA's bond debt is fully paid off, OTA could lower the cost of tolls by roughly that much. As mentioned previously, OTA recently raised the price of tolls to cover the increased costs associated with paying the bonds on the ACCESS Oklahoma project. Without such expenses, the Authority could proportionally reduce toll prices once the bonds have been paid off.

Exhibit 15: OTA 2025 Proposed Spending by Category. *(OTA's planned expenses include $137 million to service its debt. After the bonds have been paid, this revenue could be repurposed for other uses.)*



Source: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Alternatively, OTA could maintain the toll rates at their current level once the debt has been paid but repurpose these funds. Currently, OTA spends approximately $137 million to service its debt each year.

Without bonds to pay off, this money could be set aside in an interest-bearing account to use for projects that the Authority would otherwise purchase bonds to complete. An annual transfer of $137 million to this fund for ten years could reach a balance of $1.6 billion.[62] For perspective, this amount would be enough to fund the ACCESS program's interchange improvements, Tri-City Connector, John Kilpatrick widening, and the Gilcrease Expressway widening and expansion in its entirety. When compared to a bond issuance of the same amount, the total savings on interest payments would be over $1 billion.[63]

While this scenario does maintain toll rates, it has the added benefit of maintaining OTA's core functions of building and maintaining turnpikes for the State. However, OTA would be positioned to build new roads not just without using any State funds, but without paying large amounts of bond debt over time. The money saved from this approach could go toward saving for more turnpikes in perpetuity, ultimately creating a new turnpike system.

[62] Assumes an annual growth rate of 4.00 percent.

[63] Based on OTA's average interest rates from the last two bond issues.

Under this scenario, it might be worth exploring whether the Legislature could authorize ODOT to transfer some roads to the OTA system, on the condition the routes would not collect tolls. If allowable, OTA could effectively subsidize other State roads. In 2021, the Executive Director of ODOT noted to the Oklahoma Road User Charge Task Force that ODOT's current revenue sources, especially motor fuel tax, is "at the breaking point now."[64] Allowing continued tolls on current turnpike routes to help fund highways throughout the State may help alleviate these pressures.

There are two potential impediments to a system that combines toll roads and taxpayer-funded roads. First, there may be federal funding restrictions that prohibit toll dollars from being used to fund roads built with federal funds. LOFT's initial legal analysis does not indicate that federal law would be a barrier to such a system, but that research was not exhaustive nor conclusive. Secondly, current tolls are treated as a user fee, where users of the roads are charged for costs associated with that service. Current case law does not speak directly to whether user fees on one part of the system could be expended to support other portions of the system that do not collect user fees, or if that would change the nature of the revenue from a fee to a tax. If the courts determine that such revenues constituted a tax, it would implicate Article 5 Section 33 of the Oklahoma Constitution, which requires either a legislative supermajority or a vote of the people to increase taxes. Additionally, the State could consider adding managed lanes to roads added to the system, where a dedicated lane of a highway is pay-to-drive, and the remaining lanes are free of tolls. This option might further insulate OTA from claims that its tolls are not truly user fees.

Conclusion

Infrastructure in general - and roads in particular - represent unusually long-range planning. Barring an extraordinary capital outlay, any changes made to the turnpike system and its funding structure will take decades to be fully realized.

[64] Oklahoma Road User Charge Task Force Initial Meeting Minutes, Tuesday, November 16, 2021, Page 4.

Summary of Policy Considerations and Agency Recommendations

The Legislature may consider the following policy changes:

- Determine whether the unbuilt turnpike routes approved in statute still match State priorities, and if not, consider repealing those provisions.
- Adding sunset provisions to statute for newly approved turnpikes.
- Require the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's non construction expenditures be subject to the provisions of the Central Purchasing Act.
- Require the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority track and report maintenance costs for each turnpike to assist in future decision making.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority should:

- Track and report maintenance and repair costs per route.
- Track and report the effect of rate increases on traffic counts per route.

About the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency

Mission

To assist the Oklahoma Legislature in making informed, data-driven decisions that will serve the citizens of Oklahoma by ensuring accountability in state government, efficient use of resources, and effective programs and services. LOFT provides timely, objective, factual, non-partisan, and easily understood information to facilitate informed decision-making and to ensure government spending is efficient and transparent, adds value and delivers intended outcomes.

Authority

With the passage of SB 1 during the 2019 legislative session, LOFT has statutory authority to examine and evaluate the finances and operations of all departments, agencies, and institutions of Oklahoma and all of its political subdivisions. Created to assist the Legislature in performing its duties, LOFT's operations are overseen by a legislative committee. The 14-member Legislative Oversight Committee (LOC) is appointed by the Speaker of the House and Senate Pro Tempore, and receives LOFT's reports of findings. The LOC may identify specific agency programs, activities, or functions for LOFT to evaluate. LOFT may further submit recommendations for statutory changes identified as having the ability to improve government effectiveness and efficiency.

Appendix Table of Contents

Appendix A. Methodology

Stakeholders Engaged

- The Office of Management and Enterprise Services
- The Oklahoma Department of Transportation
- The Oklahoma State Treasurer's Office
- The Association of General Contractors of Oklahoma
- Oklahomans for Responsible Transportation
- Former Oklahoma Transportation Secretary

Methodology

ACCESS Payoff

To calculate the time to pay off the ACCESS project using only the three new revenue-generating turnpikes, LOFT used a combination of data from the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Traffic and Revenue Reports from CDM Smith. The CDM Smith Traffic and Revenue study, issued in August of 2023, forecasted the amount of revenue these new turnpikes would generate from 2027 (representing the estimated date the first one will open) to 2052. This data was selected by LOFT as it was used by OTA to issue the bonds for the ACCESS project.

First, to estimate the total debt service the ACCESS project will incur, LOFT took the total bond issuance amount as of June 1, 2025 ($3,610,275,000) and the total interest owed ($2,205,339,303) as the basis to estimate the projected interest. Taking the total $8.2 billion anticipated bond issuance for ACCESS (excluding the Gilcrease improvement, as this turnpike is not part of the system) and adding the additional interest amount totals $13,208,976,403.87.

To forecast the predicted revenue of the three new revenue generating turnpikes that will be created by the ACCESS project, (the East-West Connector, the Tri-City Connector, and the South Extension), LOFT utilized the existing revenue projections performed by CDM Smith. Each of the three turnpikes had their revenue forecasted from 2027 to 2052. To continue the forecast, the percentage increase in revenue was calculated. However, each turnpike's revenue was only stable after a certain number of years. For the East-West Connector, the increase in revenue became stable in 2038, the Tri-City Connector became stable in 2038 as well, and the South Extension became stable starting in 2042.

From each turnpike's stabilization year, an excel chart was created that forecasted the annual, exponential percentage increase in revenue for the next 100 years. The results of those percentage increases for each are as follows:

The East-West Connector – y=0.022e^-0.042x

Tri-City Connector – y=0.0177e^-0.057x

South Extension – y=0.0251e^-0.047x

Using these equations for the percentage increase, LOFT projected the expected revenues from each turnpike by year until there was enough revenue to pay the estimated $13,208,976,403.87. A total of $13,264,967,297 would be paid in 2234.

LOFT recognizes that a loan would never have a maturity of this length, and the calculation was only performed for demonstration purposes.

Appendix B: OTA Board Votes 2020-2024

	2024		2023		2022		2021		2020				
	Unanimous	Contested	Unanimous	Contested	Unanimous	Contested	Unanimous	Contested	Unanimous	Contested	Total Unanimous	Total Contested	Total
Jan	11	0	16	0	19	0	13	0	12	2	71	2	**73**
Feb	9	1	13	0	20	0	11	0	11	0	64	1	**65**
Mar	14	0	11	0	14	0	12	0	10	0	61	0	**61**
Apr	11	0	16	0	10	0	10	0	11	0	58	0	**58**
May			9	0	16	0	10	0	11	0	46	0	**46**
Jun	13	0	16	0	21	0	10	0	14	0	74	0	**74**
Jul	10	0	13	0	13	0	14	0	7	1	57	1	**58**
Aug	11	0	9	0	15	0	12	0	9	0	56	0	**56**
Sep	7	0	11	0	11	0	11	0	9	0	49	0	**49**
Oct	14	0	9	0	11	0	17	0	12	0	63	0	**63**
Nov	13	0	16	0							29	0	**29**
Dec			14	0	17	0	24	0	17	0	72	0	**72**
Total	**113**	**1**	**153**	**0**	**167**	**0**	**144**	**0**	**123**	**3**	**700**	**4**	**704**
	*November 2023 one mistaken "no" vote - electronic voting recorded the wrong vote, was meant to be a yes.												

Source: LOFT review of OTA board minutes.

Appendix C: OTA Turnpike Bonds Paid in Full

Turnpike Bonds Paid in Full	
Turnpike	**Original Issue Date**
Turner	1950/1952
Will Rogers	1954
H.E. Bailey	1961
Indian Nation "A"	1963
Indian Nation "B"	1966
Muskogee	1966
Cimarron	1971
Kilpatrick from I-35 to Hefner Parkway	1989
Cherokee Turnpike	1989
Chickasaw Turnpike	1989
Creek Turnpike from US 75 to US 64	1989

Source: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Appendix D: History of OTA Toll Rate Increases

Effective Date	Description	Increase (%)
Dec. 1, 1968	Toll increase on the Oklahoma Turnpike System.	14.3 %
Jan. 15, 1975	Toll increase on the Oklahoma Turnpike System.	12.5 %
Jun. 1, 1979	Toll increase on the Oklahoma Turnpike System.	11.1 %
Jan. 1, 1991	Cash tolls increase on the Oklahoma Turnpike System.	30 %
Jul. 7, 1993	Toll increase for both cash and PIKEPASS customers.	10.1 %
Feb. 7, 1995	CPI-based toll increase over the prior 18 months for cash and PIKEPASS customers. The automatic biennial CPI escalation provision was later repealed (Feb. 16, 1995).	4.10 %
Jan. 1, 2001	Toll increase for cash and PIKEPASS customers under a new axle-based classification (2-6 axles), per the 1998 Bond Financing Plan.	15 %
Aug. 1, 2009	Toll increase due to the great recession.	16 %
Jan. 1, 2017	Toll increase of **12 %,** the 8th toll adjustment in OTA history.	12 %
Jan. 1, 2018	Toll increase of **2.5 %,** the 9th toll adjustment in OTA history.	2.5 %
Jan. 1, 2025	Toll increase of **15 %** implemented to fund the ACCESS Oklahoma program.	15 %
Twice a year starting 1/1/27	A potential 6% toll increase may be implemented to account for inflation, subject to approval by the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Board.	6 % (Biannual)

Sources: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority History & Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's 2025 Informational Pamphlet.

Appendix E: Oklahoma Turnpike Authority Bonds

Oklahoma Turnpike Authority System Outstanding Debt
As of June 1, 2025

Bond Series	Date of Issuance	Amount of Issuance	Debt Service (as of 6/1/2025)	Range of Maturities	Range of Interest Rates	Par Outstanding (as of 6/1/2025)
Bonds Series 2017A*	2/8/17	$456,070,000.00	$492,609,850.08	1/1/32 to 1/1/47	3.50% to 5.00%	$296,125,000.00
Bonds Series 2017C	12/21/17	$312,840,000.00	$365,224,295.00	1/1/34 to 1/1/47	3.00% to 5.00%	$209,920,000.00
Bonds Series 2017D	12/21/17	$275,680,000.00	$132,158,750.00	1/1/18 to 1/1/28	4.00% to 5.00%	$119,975,000.00
Bonds Series 2017E	12/21/17	$95,835,000.00	$89,618,705.00	1/1/18 to 1/1/31	2.85% to 5.00%	$76,075,000.00
Bonds Series 2018A	10/31/18	$344,310,000.00	$600,036,062.50	1/1/32 to 1/1/48	3.625% to 5.00%	$344,310,000.00
Bonds Series 2020A	10/29/20	$187,195,000.00	$165,431,250.00	1/1/22 to 1/1/33	5.00%	$138,365,000.00
Bonds Series 2020B (Federally Taxable)	10/29/20	$179,165,000.00	$108,712,994.50	1/1/22 to 1/1/33	0.491% to 2.072%	$100,745,000.00
Bonds Series 2023	10/26/23	$500,000,000.00	$1,192,870,462.50	1/1/35 to 1/1/43	5.00%	$500,000,000.00
Bonds Series 2025A	2/4/25	$1,110,575,000.00	$2,423,029,188.65	1/1/35 to 1/1/55	4.25% to 5.50%	$1,110,575,000.00
Revenue Bonds Series 2025B**	10/7/25	$148,605,000.00	$245,922,745.00	1/1/32 to 1/1/42	5.00%	$148,605,000.00
Totals		**$3,610,275,000.00**	**$5,815,614,303.23**			**$3,044,695,000.00**

Source: The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Appendix F: ODOT's Estimated Costs for Highway Expansion, 2025-2050

Functional Classification	Urban	Rural	Annual Average Need	2025-2050 Needs
Interstate	$1,281.4	$11.6	$49.7	$1,293.0
Principal Arterial - Other Freeways or Expressways	$265.6	$4.2	$10.4	$269.7
Principal Arterial - Other	$348.3	$73.8	$16.2	$422.1
Minor Arterial	$68.7	$16.3	$3.3	$84.9
Major Collector	$28.5	$27.2	$2.1	$55.7
Total	**$1,992.4**	**$133.0**	**$81.7**	**$2,125.4**

Source: 2025-2050 Oklahoma Long-Range Transportation Plan, page 76. ODOT website.
Note: Figures reflect millions. The table reflects ODOT's estimated costs of meeting 100 percent of the highway expansion needs from 2025-2050.

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) appreciates LOFT Director Bircham and her staff for their efforts in reviewing and evaluating the OTA's history, operations, mission, and turnpike financing methodology during the course of the past 16 months. OTA welcomed this evaluation as Oklahoma has a great story to tell about its sustainable, user-fee-based approach to construct and maintain highway infrastructure, and the observations and findings included in the LOFT Report help independently tell that story.

For more than 70 years, the OTA has carried out its statutory mission to build and maintain tolled transportation infrastructure that has been specifically authorized by the Oklahoma Legislature. Over this time, the Oklahoma Supreme Court has reviewed and validated OTA's financings to construct turnpike projects on 13 separate occasions, most recently in 2023. OTA's debt is not a debt of the State, and the cost to build, maintain, and operate the turnpike network, and service the debt, is not an Oklahoma taxpayer obligation like other state and local transportation infrastructure. Rather, turnpike projects are fully funded by toll revenues paid only by those who choose to travel on them, and today about 50 percent of the OTA's toll revenue is generated from out-of-state travelers. In other words, the OTA is leveraging out-of-state dollars to build and maintain Oklahoma transportation infrastructure assets. OTA has been highly successful in carrying out its mission, as evidenced by the high credit ratings assigned to OTA bond debt by independent credit rating agencies, while also maintaining some of the lowest toll rates of any tolling authority in the nation.

OTA works in close coordination with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) so that the turnpike network and the taxpayer-supported state highway system connect seamlessly to ensure the Oklahoma traveling public can safely and efficiently reach their destination. In carrying out their respective statutory missions to build, maintain, and improve Oklahoma's transportation infrastructure, one thing is clear – there are no free roads. Whether the cost to build, operate, and maintain the turnpike network should be transitioned to the state highway system paid for by Oklahoma taxpayers, or maintained as originally envisioned, presents the Legislature with important policy decisions, and OTA believes LOFT's findings will help inform such decisions.

Again, OTA thanks and appreciates LOFT's hard work and thoughtful questions to understand the Authority's operations, financing methodology, and history. OTA also appreciates LOFT's professionalism in seeking and stating facts. The Authority largely agrees with LOFT's findings and recommendations, as further detailed below.

LOFT finding 1: The Turnpike System Has Become the State's Primary Mechanism for Constructing New Major Roadways

The OTA agrees with the facts demonstrating LOFT's understanding that OTA's sustainable cross pledged fee-based turnpike system has enabled not only the maintenance of existing turnpikes but also the construction of new roads critical to safe and efficient travel in our state. Based on taxpayer-supported funding available to ODOT and the inability to adequately maintain the existing taxpayer-supported highway network, OTA is the primary entity to build new roads. As of October 2024, ODOT estimated it needed about $27 billion to bring all its highways and bridges to "good" condition. This backlog requires ODOT to focus its efforts on maintaining the existing state highway system. OTA's ability to issue revenue bonds enables the construction and enhancement of legislatively authorized turnpike projects while also keeping toll rates low by leveraging revenues generated from existing toll roads.

While Oklahoma's toll revenue is projected to be $488 million for calendar year 2025, $244 million is anticipated to be paid by out-of-state drivers. These revenues are then used to pay for turnpike operations, maintenance, and to service OTA's bond debt over time, making it a sustainable and cost-efficient method to finance new roadway construction that leverages out-of-state dollars.

It is also important to note that OTA has long maintained fiscally responsible policies and approaches to its bond financings, which have allowed it to achieve high bond ratings of Aa3/AA-/AA- by Moody's, S&P, and Fitch, respectively. Before any bonds are sold, the legislatively authorized projects undergo scrutiny by the Governor, the OTA Board, the Oklahoma Transportation Commission, and new program bonds are validated by the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Additionally, the sale of bonds is reviewed by the Council of Bond Oversight. Finally, after all statutory approvals are obtained, the marketing and sale of the bonds is subjected to additional scrutiny by the public market and must comply with all rules and regulations of the U.S. Treasury Department and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

LOFT finding 2: Changing Oklahoma's Turnpike Model is Possible, but Would Take Decades to Fully Realize

The OTA agrees that a paydown of bonds would take decades with the current limited revenue sources available to the Legislature.

This would require the following:

- All bond-funded improvement/expansion work must stop.
- All existing bond debt must be repaid.
- The Oklahoma Transportation Commission would need to approve the transfer of the turnpike maintenance responsibilities. 69 O.S. §1717.
- Legislature would need to approve the transfer of turnpikes to the state highway system through concurrent resolution. 69 O.S. §1717.1.

Once accomplished, this would transfer the entire burden of funding the infrastructure to the state's legislative budget. A major commitment of the ACCESS program is to provide funding for significant reinvestment in many older turnpikes. As Oklahoma grows and traffic volumes increase, additional lanes will be needed on some of the heaviest used turnpikes, particularly routes that make up the I-44 corridor. This corridor carries some of the highest out-of-state traffic across the Turnpike System.

The OTA must generate sufficient revenue to operate and maintain its roads at a high-quality level and provide debt service payments to its bondholders. These bonds are payable solely from the tolls and other OTA revenues and do not constitute the State's indebtedness.

While tolling cannot address all infrastructure needs, it serves Oklahoma and the rest of the country well as an investment revenue stream to implement certain, well-defined, and critically needed transportation system improvements. This concept is further evidenced in the fact that 37 states have tolling entities today, and that number continues to grow.

OTA has completed all payments on all bonds issued prior to 1998 and, more recently, refinanced bonds to capitalize on lower interest rates. It is important to note that when issuing refunding bonds, the OTA does not extend the bond's term past its original maturity date. Over the years, the OTA has issued several refunding bonds and saved millions of dollars.

OTA's user fee system is sustainable, and the Legislature may follow other states' examples and convert more roads to a user fee-based system.

Agency comment on policy considerations for the Legislature

- During the 2025 legislative session, the OTA Executive Director and key staff members worked closely with the authors of two bills to support amending OTA's enabling legislation to:
    - Remove legislatively authorized turnpike projects redundant to roadway improvements constructed by ODOT.
    - Remove turnpike projects not feasible to construct by OTA.
    - Add sunset provisions on any newly authorized turnpike projects.
- Concerning the requirement that OTA's non-construction expenditures be subjected to the provisions of the Central Purchasing Act:
    - OTA works closely with OMES on non-construction procurement matters.
    - OTA's purchasing policies are reviewed and approved by OMES, most recently by letter dated Sept. 27, 2024.
    - OTA also works closely with OMES in the development of Requests for Proposals and Invitations to Bid.
    - OTA employs six OMES-certified procurement officers.
- OTA construction projects are advertised and let to bid in compliance with the Public Competitive Bidding Act. 61 O.S. §§101 et seq.

Recommendations to the Agency

- *Track and report maintenance and repair costs per route.*
    - OTA tracks and reports certain direct maintenance and repair costs by turnpike. All other costs are reported system-wide.
    - Toll revenues generated on the Turnpike System are cross pledged to maintain the entirety of all the turnpike system's projects and the repayment of all bond indebtedness.
    - Cost accounting methodology used for a separate reporting purpose would only be applicable for the specific assumptions disclosed for that report.
    - Such a defined reporting purpose would not be appropriate for financial statement reporting purposes, which then creates a potential risk of inconsistent reporting.

- *Track and report the effect of rate increases on traffic counts per route.*
    - This recommendation is already implemented. Specifically, traffic counts on all turnpike routes are continually tracked and reported on OTA's website at Oklahoma.gov/ota.html .
    - OTA's independent traffic and revenue consultant, engaged as a requirement of OTA's Trust Agreements with bondholders, also continually monitors these traffic counts as well as other economic factors when OTA considers implementing a toll increase.
    - The OTA's Trust Agreements require the traffic and revenue consultant to provide toll rate setting analysis.
    - Tracked and reported traffic counts both before and after a toll rate increase are on OTA's website.
    - The primary goal in setting toll rates for a turnpike is to ensure that sufficient revenue is generated to meet the system's financial needs, and a toll sensitivity analysis is considered.

Sincerely,

Joe Echelle
Executive Director
Oklahoma Turnpike Authority

September 23, 2025

LOFT
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE OF FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

LOFT's comments on the response from the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority

As part of LOFT's protocol, agencies are granted the opportunity to respond to the evaluation report and findings. For this evaluation, LOFT examined the cost of toll roads, evaluated the use of bonds to fund toll roads, and assessed the feasibility of transitioning toll roads into State highways.

Portions of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's response warrant further clarification and correction, which will be addressed. With this response, LOFT seeks to address questions of fact and not differences of opinion.

LOFT's response to inaccurate or misleading statements:

Finding 2: Changing Oklahoma's Turnpike Model is Possible, but Would Take Decades to Fully Realize

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority's (OTA) response to this finding provides a list of required actions if the State chose to let OTA's bond debt be retired and cease operation of turnpikes. Two of those items require clarification:

- While OTA correctly points out that 69 O.S. §1717 and 69 O.S. §1717.1 both address the transfer of roads from OTA to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT), statute is clear that a legislative concurrent resolution is an *alternative* to the process outlined in §1717, wherein the Transportation Commission approves transfers after final payoff of all associated bonds.
- Additionally, OTA incorrectly states that all bond-funded improvements and expansion work must be stopped. Per the bond agreements, any work authorized through current bonds would continue. Under current statute, transfer of toll roads would take place after all bond debt is paid off, contingent upon the condition of the roads.

Clarifications Pertaining Policy Considerations and Agency Recommendations

- In response to LOFT's proposed policy consideration to require OTA's non-construction expenditures be subject to the provisions of the Central Purchasing Act, OTA describes its coordination with the agency that oversees purchasing. While OTA is complying with the spirit of the Central Purchasing Act, LOFT contends the additional accountability that comes with external review of routine purchases made with public funds provides an important benefit to the State.
- OTA also provides a comment stating that OTA construction funds are handled in compliance with the Public Competitive Bidding Act. LOFT's report did not make a recommendation concerning the bidding of construction projects.
- OTA states that tracking and reporting financial data for the maintenance and repair costs per route would conflict with financial statement reporting. LOFT is not suggesting the per-route financial data replace existing financial reporting; instead, LOFT contends that internal tracking of maintenance costs by turnpike route would assist in policy decisions about potential routes that could be transitioned to the State highway system. This data was previously maintained by OTA, and LOFT recommends this practice be resumed.
- OTA states it already tracks and reports the effect of rates increases on traffic counts per route, and that this data is available on the agency's website. While OTA's website provides annualized average daily traffic counts for each turnpike, this information does not allow for analysis of the behavior changes of drivers in response to the rate change. Monthly data – paired with the date of a rate change – would allow for better analysis. OTA's traffic and revenue consultant assesses the expected impact of tolls *before* implementing a toll increase. LOFT recommends also analyzing changes in turnpike usage *after* changes in toll rates to test the accuracy of the analysis.