



I-44 Riverside Dr. to Yale Ave. corridor improvements near final completion in Tulsa

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One of the most ambitious interstate reconstruction projects in Oklahoma's history is winding down, and drivers in Tulsa will soon see the I-44 Riverside Dr. to Yale Ave. corridor free of orange cones and detours for the first time since 2009.

On Thursday state and local leaders stood on the new Lewis Ave. bridge over I-44 to see the progress on this final construction phase. Traffic below on east and westbound I-44 has already shifted to the newly built six lanes. The Lewis Ave. bridge is expected to open to traffic in June with final project completion this summer.

"Standing here today, it is inspiring to see how all the hard work done by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and its industry partners has transformed this vital interstate corridor," Governor Mary Fallin said. "We now have a safer, more modern and less congested road which will benefit travelers, businesses and commuters in Tulsa for years to come."

Originally built as the Skelly Bypass prior to the creation of the interstate system, this corridor was incorporated as an interstate in 1958. Before the reconstruction the area between Riverside Dr. and Yale Ave. was one of the oldest sections of interstate on the highway system and also had one of the highest accident rates of any interstate in Oklahoma. United States Senator James Inhofe worked closely with former ODOT Director and current Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Gary Ridley to navigate the regulatory issues, planning development and funding concerns to get a widening and safety improvement project of this magnitude underway.

"The project has combined imperative safety improvements with important infrastructure enhancements from Riverside Drive to Yale Avenue that will fulfill the area's highway transportation needs into the future," U.S. Sen. James Inhofe said. "The highway will help move a projected 60 million tons of freight each year throughout Oklahoma and across the nation by the end of the next decade. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the steady collaboration between federal, state and local governments. I want to congratulate Secretary Ridley and the men and women at ODOT who have worked tirelessly to see the completion of this much needed project."

Right-of-way and utility clearances began in 2007 and the first construction began in 2009 with the Perryman Ditch project. Improvements to Harvard Ave. began in 2010 and at Riverside Dr./Peoria Ave. in 2011. Work on the final phase at Lewis Ave. began in late 2012. Additional I-44 widening work at Darlington Ave. and 41st St. was also underway during these times, and although not part of the Riverside Dr. to Yale project, those improvements helped continue the widening work east of Yale Avenue to the Broken Arrow Expressway junction.

"The construction has impacted travelers and businesses for many years, and with the end of this work in sight they can now fully see how the improvements will benefit their daily lives," Oklahoma Transportation Commissioner Peter J. Regan said. "We appreciate the input, support and especially the patience from the public throughout this process."

INFORMATION RELEASE

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The nearly \$400 million project from Riverside Dr. to Yale Ave. makes numerous traffic and safety improvements in this corridor including:

- Highway lanes reconstructed and widened from four lanes to six
- Reconstructed intersections, ramps and frontage roads at Riverside Drive, Peoria Avenue, Lewis Avenue and Harvard Avenues
- Deficient bridges replaced at Peoria Avenue, Lewis Avenue and Harvard Avenues
- I-44 lanes shifted up to 150 feet to the south at Lewis Avenue to straighten the alignment
- Additional spans added to the I-44 bridge at Riverside Drive
- Construction of a 1.25 mile underground drainage structure to the Arkansas River, which helps drain water for nearly two square miles surrounding the interstate
- Art Deco theme incorporated throughout the corridor in the sound walls, lighting and highway signs

“It has been a long journey to see the improvements in this corridor move from blueprints to reality,” ODOT Executive Director Mike Patterson said. “Thanks to the public input during our planning process we were inspired to incorporate Tulsa’s Art Deco history into our designs. The colors and styles in areas like the bridges, lighting and walls are something unique for Tulsa and a showcase for the travelling public.”

This project has been in the local and national spotlight over the years, especially from state and federal transportation leaders. In 2003, former U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta and then Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters got a firsthand look at the critical needs of the corridor. In 2010 during her tenure as a U.S. Representative, Gov. Fallin hosted former House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman and U.S. Rep. James Oberstar to visit this and other projects in the Tulsa area. Also in 2010, Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez viewed the progress of the corridor improvements in Tulsa. In 2011, Gov. Fallin welcomed former House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman U.S. Rep. John Mica to Oklahoma where he made a stop in Tulsa to learn more about this and other projects. Most recently, Sen. Inhofe joined other local and state leaders to launch the final construction phase at Lewis Avenue in 2012.

“We are very thankful our past and present congressional delegations recognized the critical needs in this corridor and helped secure the federal funding for this massive widening project,” Secretary Ridley said. “The support of great transportation advocates like Senator Inhofe and Governor Fallin throughout the years has been invaluable to us and the corridor improvements would not have been possible without their hard work. I, along with Tulsa and the state of Oklahoma, applaud them for these efforts.”

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation also worked closely with the City of Tulsa and local neighborhood associations throughout the entire process. Additionally, more than 50 companies were part of the clearance, design and construction work and some were involved with multiple phases of the overall project. The financial impact of the project spread far beyond the interstate lanes.

“The investment in transportation immediately benefits the local economy and provides a solid base for future growth,” Tulsa Regional Chamber President and CEO Mike Neal said. “We hope to see a strong trend of businesses developing and expanding throughout the corridor as this construction along I44 ends.”

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(Editors and News Directors: For more information call the ODOT Media & Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)