



## **ODOT working to speed projects if stimulus approved**

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Oklahoma Department of Transportation officials are reviewing projects in the agency's eight-year construction program that could be expedited as part an economic stimulus package being considered in Washington, D.C.

Gary Ridley, ODOT director, told members of the Oklahoma Transportation Commission Monday that his agency's staff is looking to see which transportation projects included in the agency's \$3.8 billion Construction Work Plan, which commissioners approved last October, could be speeded up with an economic stimulus package.

Many key questions remain, such as if and when a stimulus package would be passed and how much will be set aside for infrastructure. However, ODOT officials said they would like to pull an initial set of projects from the agency's eight-year Construction Work Plan in order to ensure Oklahoma is well prepared should federal funding be made available.

Ridley said he has been in discussion with officials from the Governor's office in emphasizing infrastructure needs. Officials discussed projects on which construction could quickly begin in the event that Congress passes an economic stimulus package aimed at creating jobs.

"We really don't know how much money will be included in an economic stimulus package or when that package will be passed by Congress, but we want to be ready so we can hit the ground running," Ridley said. "Our staff is prepared to work long hours in upcoming months. This is a golden opportunity to restore Oklahoma highways and bridges to a better condition and put people to work. We need to take full advantage of the opportunity."

Officials estimate Oklahoma currently has a highway construction backlog of close to \$12 billion, so it will not be difficult to find needed projects. Taking projects from the agency's existing work plan allows officials to focus on those that are already deemed most critical and then speed construction of other projects or add new projects to the agency's eight-year plan.

The focus will be on those that would not require additional right of way or utility relocation. The plans could be developed quickly and therefore could be expedited.

Ridley said he believes the agency can expedite nearly 100 projects, totaling about \$850 million and include bridge and highway construction, rail and transit projects. Officials will review projects to make sure each is a candidate to be expedited as part of the stimulus package over the next several months.

As projects are expedited and moved out of the eight-year plan and into construction under the stimulus package, the department will identify projects to place in its Construction Work Plan at its next regular update.

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**INFORMATION RELEASE**

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