



OKLAHOMA
Transportation



Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project

Project Description

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FY24 RAISE Grant Application

RAISE Grant Request: \$20M

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project (Project) is a critical 6.25-mile-long infrastructure investment that will improve safety, quality of life, and economic opportunity for Hochatown and the surrounding communities in rural McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The Project entails reconstructing U.S. Route 259 (US 259) to accommodate two lanes in each direction, complemented by a center turn lane. Additionally, it involves the installation of over 1 mile of new sidewalk, 2 miles of new street lighting, and a 1.8-mile shared-use trail. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) requests \$20 million in Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant funding to support the construction of a new shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail and the reconstruction of US 259 to improve vehicular operations and enhance safety for all roadway users.

Detailed Statement of Work

The Project comprises a comprehensive set of initiatives aimed at transforming the transportation landscape. Key elements include modifying intersections, expanding traffic capacity, implementing infrastructure enhancements, updating signage for increased safety, addressing drainage concerns, optimizing access management, and introducing pedestrian-friendly features such as sidewalks and a shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail. This multifaceted approach is designed to alleviate congestion, enhance safety, and create a more inclusive and sustainable transportation network in Hochatown.

The six-mile Project has been divided into two phases—Phase 1 spans two miles, and Phase 2 extends over four miles. Completion of the Project design is projected for July 2024. Construction bid letting for Phase 1 is slated for September 2024, with construction commencing in January 2025. Phase 1 of the Project is expected to be operational by September 2026. The Project will advance specific scope elements, including the following:

- Modify the intersection at Stevens Gap Road, State Highway (SH) 259A North and South
- Provide adequate capacity to handle traffic demands
- Install new curb and gutter and retaining walls to minimize Project impacts
- Update advanced warning signage for speed reductions
- Improve drainage structures, including headwalls and end treatments
- Improve access management and reduce conflict points
- Install sidewalks and minimum shoulder widths
- Construct a shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail

Transportation Challenges

US 259 is a vital transportation link that provides access for recreational opportunities, commercial traffic, logging trucks, tourists, and local and regional commuters. The Project area is located along US 259, approximately 6.25 miles north of SH-3 junction and extending north 6 miles into Hochatown. ODOT has been cognizant of the distinctive transportation hurdles posed by the US 259 corridor for the past decade. Given the recreational allure of this stretch, located near Broken Bow Lake and Hochatown, travel patterns deviate significantly from typical commuter zones, as it is heavily influenced by seasonality and holiday weekends, such as Memorial Day weekend. In 2018, ODOT commissioned a [traffic study](#) to assess the corridor's performance and pinpoint future strategies aimed at enhancing safety and traffic flow.

Tourism has emerged as the primary economic driver in the region, drawn by the scenic beauty and recreational offerings of Broken Bow Lake, the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, Beavers Bend State

Park, and the surrounding Ouachita National Forest. In the last 4 years, the area has undergone significant growth driven by land investments for cabin rentals and popular tourist destinations. Hochatown, with around 250 residents, hosts over 30,000 people on weekends and holidays. In 2021, Beavers Bend State Park, located in the area, reported 2.2 million visitors, making it Oklahoma's most visited state park. The surge in visitors has led to increased congestion and safety challenges on US 259, which are expected to worsen in the future.

The current two-lane US 259 corridor fails to meet the needs of the area, especially considering its evolving nature. It struggles to accommodate the increasing traffic volume driven by local development and tourism. With no designated turning lanes or bicycle or pedestrian facilities, and with over 100 residential and commercial driveways along its route, the highway faces significant challenges. The Project seeks to improve vehicular flow, enhance safety, and make a reliable infrastructure investment in a rural community often overlooked.

Improvements to US 259 are essential to tackle the growing challenges posed by the increasing traffic congestion in Hochatown. The surge in traffic volume not only hampers the efficiency of the roadway but also elevates safety concerns for road users. The imminent opening of the Choctaw Landing Entertainment Resort in 2024 is projected to exacerbate the situation, bringing with it the anticipation of heightened traffic levels. According to a [traffic study](#) commissioned by the Choctaw Nation in 2021 stated the resort is expected to create hundreds of jobs and significantly contribute to additional weekend traffic.

Moreover, concerns have arisen regarding access management for local businesses, given the absence of alternative roads bypassing Hochatown. Presently, all regional traffic is funneled through US 259, posing challenges for both local businesses and the broader community. The recent incorporation of Hochatown in 2022 has emphasized the necessity for strategic transportation planning to bolster the social and economic infrastructure of this rural community.

The primary industry in this region is logging, necessitating large transport trucks to navigate the heavily touristed highway through Hochatown. The existing US 259 lacks designated turning lanes, posing a particular challenge for large vehicles, logging trucks, and vehicles towing trailers, as left turns become difficult or impossible under current conditions. This leads to traffic backups, delays, and rear-end collisions, escalating safety risks for motorists along US 259.

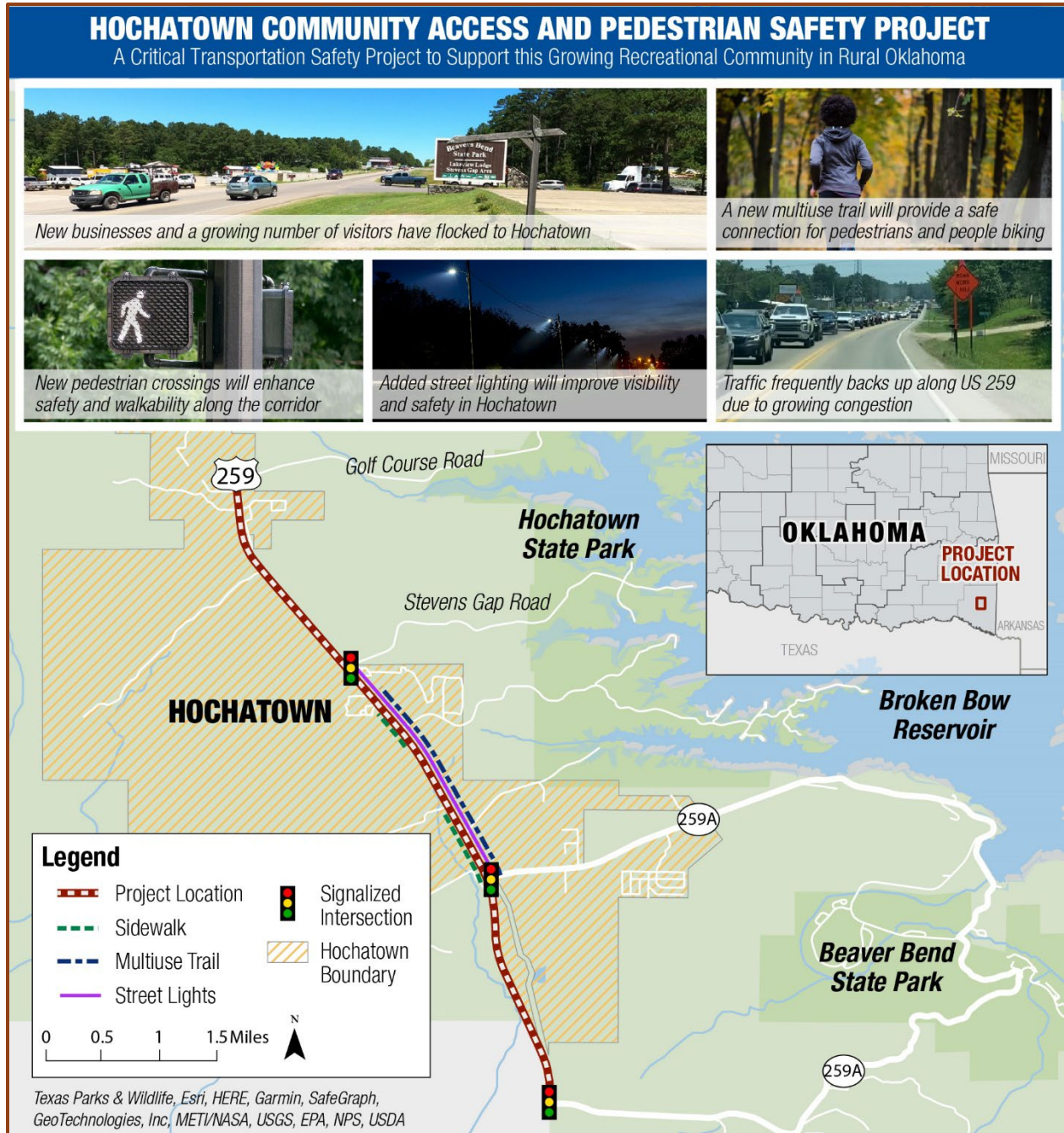
Hochatown suffers from a lack of sidewalks and bicycle facilities, resulting in poor walkability. The absence of sidewalks hampers safe pedestrian movement. Enhancing the streetscape with bicycle and pedestrian facilities would provide an alternative healthy, multimodal connection for residents and visitors to safely access Hochatown's amenities. A reduction in car dependence could help reduce traffic congestion, and opportunities to park and walk around town could improve patronage for local businesses. Ultimately, the Project will provide safe modes of travel for the rural Historically Disadvantaged Communities (HDCs) facing high transportation barriers in the area and an improved experience when accessing local businesses and recreational areas in Hochatown. Figure 1 illustrates the Project location and the proposed elements.

The Solution: How the Project Addresses the Transportation Challenges

The Project represents a critical initiative aimed at addressing immediate challenges while fostering long-term benefits for a community grappling with limited transportation infrastructure. The recent incorporation of Hochatown as a city within McCurtain County on November 28, 2022, marks a pivotal milestone. The new local government is facing constraints in public services and infrastructure to support the increasing influx of tourists and businesses, and there is a strong commitment to implementing necessary improvements for the community's welfare. Hochatown's incorporation has

granted the city greater autonomy, allowing it enhanced control over local affairs, particularly in infrastructure development. In September 2023, the Town of Hochatown passed [Resolution 2023-7](#), urging ODOT to enhance US 259 between Broken Bow and Hochatown to alleviate significant traffic congestion.

Figure 1. Project Location and Elements



The Project encompasses vital improvements to address escalating transportation challenges. With the area experiencing substantial growth driven by cabin rentals and tourist destinations, the surge in visitors has led to increased congestion and safety concerns along US 259. The Project focuses on

modifying intersections; enhancing traffic capacity; installing critical infrastructure like curbs, gutters, and retaining walls; and updating signage for speed reductions. Drainage improvements, access management, and the addition of sidewalks and shoulder widths will help ensure safety and accommodate diverse modes of transportation. Notably, the construction of a shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail reflects a commitment to sustainability and healthier alternatives. Overall, this Project is pivotal for alleviating congestion, enhancing safety, and fostering a more accessible and resilient community in Hochatown.

Project Background and History

The Hochatown stretch of the US 259 corridor has faced persistent traffic congestion issues. Over the recent years, ODOT has engaged in collaborative efforts with the Hochatown community to develop a comprehensive solution aimed at tackling the challenges posed by the traffic conditions along the US 259 corridor. In response to these challenges and the area's rapid growth, ODOT implemented interim relief measures in 2022. Temporary traffic signals with turn bays were installed at SH-259A North and South, and Stevens Gap Road. Additionally, the intersection at Stevens Gap Road was restriped to extend left-turn lanes, aiming to enhance safe turning movements. Although these improvements offered some relief, the continuous growth in the region continues to impact the overall quality of life and safety for both residents and tourists.

In September 2023, the newly incorporated Town of Hochatown passed Resolution 2023-7, requesting ODOT to improve US 259 between Broken Bow and Hochatown to accommodate the substantial traffic congestion on the roadway. On October 27, 2022, ODOT held a community outreach event at the Broken Bow Senior High School in Broken Bow to present the Project. The presentation included brief background information, a description of existing conditions in the Project area, the Project goals, interim improvements, current operational traffic volumes, and the findings of the level-of-service analysis. ODOT hosted another open forum in Broken Bow on May 16, 2023, to receive community feedback on the decision-making process. This meeting focused more on the 6-mile segment of US 259 between SH-259A South and Golf Course Road. This meeting delivered new data and information on the suggested safety improvements intended to address the concerns resulting from the substantial growth of tourism and new development in the area.

Project Location

The Project is located within Hochatown and just outside the city limits in McCurtain County.

Community Profile

Hochatown is a small rural community within McCurtain County, Oklahoma. It is designated as an HDC and as an Area of Persistent Poverty (Census Tracts 89.982 and 89.985). Hochatown is located within the federally recognized Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which covers nearly 11,000 square miles of southeastern Oklahoma and encompasses all or parts of 13 Oklahoma counties.

Incorporated on November 28, 2022, Hochatown faces limited public services and infrastructure for its growing tourist and business influx yet is enthusiastic about planning and delivering necessary community improvements. The Project is an ideal RAISE Grant candidate, offering immediate relief and long-term benefits to the HDC with transportation constraints. The Project boasts a favorable benefit-cost ratio of 2.17, indicating benefits more than double the costs. Addressing all eight RAISE merit criteria, detailed in the application's Merit Criteria section, underscores its comprehensive eligibility for grant consideration.