

Agency Solicitation and Virtual Public Meeting Summary

JP 27101(04)(09) – SH-82 North of Tahlequah, Cherokee County

Executive Summary

This document summarizes the virtual public meeting conducted for the SH-82 project beginning 1.4 miles north of the SH-82/SH-51 Jct. and extending northwest to Gideon in Cherokee County. The purpose of the public meeting was to update the public on the latest design for the project, discuss changes to the design that have been implemented since the last public meeting, and obtain public input.

Due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19, ODOT held a virtual public meeting. The public meeting was held on-line between June 5 and July 3, 2020. Thirty-four members of the public signed in on the website. However, sign-in was not required. According to the website analytics, 955 unique users viewed the website over the 4-week period. After the home page, the interactive map was the most frequently viewed, followed by the meeting presentation and the roundabout information page. In total twenty-one (21) written comments/questions were received during the virtual public meeting, including three (3) agency responses, nine (9) comments submitted via the website comment feature, four (4) comments submitted on the interactive map, four (4) paper comment form received by mail, and one (1) comment submitted via the ODOT website after the end of the public meeting.

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board advised ODOT to coordinate with local floodplain administrators on the need for floodplain development permits for the project. The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission (OAC) indicated that project does not appear to pose a hazard to safe and efficient use of navigable airspace. The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, State Parks commented that the project will have no significant adverse impact on any federally funded park or recreation area or state park.

Public comments were focused on specific property concerns and questions about right-of-way acquisition, the proposed roundabouts, anticipated impacts to the skating rink, and general dislike/opposition to the project. There were several other comments outside of these main categories. **Table E-1** summarizes the comments received. Note that the numbers in Table E-1 do not add to 21, since several people made more than one comment.

Table E-1: Major Issues of Concern

| Issue | # of Comments |
|--|---------------|
| Questions about right-of-way | 6 |
| Concerns about roundabouts | 5 |
| Don't like the project | 3 |
| Concerns about impacts to skating rink | 2 |
| Approve of the project | 2 |
| Other | 8 |

Responses to Comments

Roundabout Concerns:

Roundabouts are proposed to increase safety and traffic flow, and reduce cost. While initially roundabouts may cause confusion to drivers because they are unfamiliar, drivers quickly get used to the design and the roundabouts are expected to reduce delay and collisions. Because they reduce the speed of through traffic, they also have been shown to reduce the severity of accidents that do occur.

The roundabout at Jones and Jarvis Road was specifically included to eliminate the need for two T-intersections in close proximity (at the proposed and existing Jones/Jarvis intersections). The roundabout at Jones and Jarvis has been designed to accommodate large vehicles such as a school bus or a truck with a trailer (35 feet).

Right-of-Way Questions:

Right-of-way agents will be contacting affected property owners in the Spring of 2021. ODOT will only purchase the property it needed for the project, unless an owner is left with an unusable parcel. The orange lines on the interactive map represent the estimated future right-of-way limits that will be purchased now for the ultimate four lane highway. Property-specific details will be discussed with each individual owner during the negotiation process.

General Dislike of Project:

The purpose of the meeting was to keep the public informed about the progress of the project. The decision on what alignment to build was made in 2018 after several years of study and public input. The alignment selection was approved by the Federal Highway Administration with a Finding of No Significant Impact in 2018.

Skating Rink Impacts

Access to the Skatehouse will be provided at two locations from Grand Avenue, as it is today. The northernmost driveway on existing Grand Avenue will be relocated to the north side of the property to avoid conflicts with the future drainage ditch. A portion of the existing Skatehouse parking lot will be purchased by ODOT. ODOT will work with the property owner to determine the best solution for future access and parking during the right-of-way acquisition process. The roundabout is anticipated to reduce speeds and collisions at the intersection, thus improving safety for all users, including Skatehouse patrons.

Approve of Project

Thank you for your comments.

Other Questions/Comments:

- Please let me know if there will be a local meeting in Tahlequah. *Response: Due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19, an in-person meeting is not planned.*
- Do you need dirt for the project? If so I have land that could have dirt removed. *Response: Once the project is let and construction starts you may contact ODOT Division 1 to be put in touch with the contractor. The contractor is responsible for obtaining all needed materials.*
- Will there be houses purchased? Is it possible to purchase a house? *Response: Once the demolition contract is let (you will start seeing signs in the area) you may contact ODOT Division 1 to be put in touch with the demolition contractor to discuss a possible purchase.*
- If you're going to trouble you should just make it four-lanes as a longer term solution. *Response: Funding precludes building the four-lane highway for the entire project length at this time. Traffic demand does not indicate the full four-lane will be needed until 2045. ODOT will continue to monitor traffic and collisions on the highway to assess when additional lanes may be warranted.*
- How will this affect drainage on my property? *The project has been designed to accommodate drainage with a combination of culverts and ditches. Specific property concerns can be addressed to right-of-way agents.*
- Why do you have a turnaround lane behind our address? *ODOT Design Guidelines for divided highways include median openings every half mile to facilitate access to properties on both sides of the highway and reduce the amount of back tracking and for access of emergency vehicles.*
- Why can't the existing highway be widened or speed reduced to 55 mph as it was designed for? *The existing highway was evaluated for widening and deemed too costly with the limited state budget and did not increase the safety as much as the proposed 4-lane divided highway.*
- I am concerned about increased noise, trash, and traffic. *ODOT completed a noise study and determined that noise walls are not feasible or reasonable for this project. ODOT will maintain the new highway right-of-way.*