

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**US-259 ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS
MCCURTAIN COUNTY
JOB PIECE NUMBER 34333(04)(08)**

Prepared for:



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Prepared by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the previous four years, Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) has conducted multiple forms of public involvement regarding proposed improvements to US-259 in Hochatown, which consisted of the following: advisory committee meetings held between July 2021 to October 2021, a conceptual meeting with the advisory committee in June 2022, a community outreach event in October 2022, a public meeting in May 2023, a decision announcement in November 2023, and an open house public meeting in March 2024. This executive summary provides a summary of the public comments received following the announcement of ODOT's selection of the 5-lane configuration and hosting of the open house public meeting.

ODOT announced the selection of the 5-lane configuration for all 6 miles of the US-259 improvements through Hochatown on November 15, 2023. ODOT selected the 5-lane configuration based on the following three factors: 1) the Design Engineer recommended a 5-lane configuration for safety and traffic flow purposes, 2) the majority of the general public was in favor of the 5-lane versus the 3-lane configuration, and 3) the Town of Hochatown passed a resolution recommending the 5-lane configuration for all 6 miles of the US-259 improvements through Hochatown. On March 26, 2024, an open house public meeting was held in Hochatown, Oklahoma at the Chapel of the Pines Hochatown between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the open house public meeting was to present the selected alternative, share findings from the environmental studies, and demonstrate the consideration of all public comments including concerns for parking and pedestrian safety in the proposed improvements design.

The open house public meeting notification flyers with general proposed improvements information and details about the timing and location of the open house public meeting were mailed on March 11, 2024, using the USPS Every Door Direct Mail service to 1,331 addresses along three postal routes adjacent to the proposed improvements. Additionally, meeting notification letters were mailed by USPS and email, on March 11, 2024, to elected officials (federal, state, and local), adjacent property owners, area businesses, and tribal nations. Meeting notification letters were also mailed by USPS and emailed to utilities and resource agencies on March 20, 2024. Four public entities/agencies responded to the notification letters, which are summarized on page 6.

Public involvement for this project followed ODOT's Public Involvement Plan (February 2022) available at Public Involvement Meetings and Hearings (Oklahoma.gov). Review of the 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year-Estimate data for the study area (Hochatown, Census Designed Place) did not indicate the

presence of significant low-income populations in the project vicinity. Review of the EPA Environmental Justice Screen Community Report (0.5-mile buffer around proposed improvements) indicates 31% of the population in the project vicinity is low income, which is lower than the state average. Minority populations are present in the vicinity of the study area. Within the Hochatown Census Designated Place (CDP) 35030, the percentage of the American Indian and Alaska Native Population is higher (10.3%) than the state percentage (7.5%). The percentage of the Hispanic or Latino population within the CDP is lower (2.9%) than the state percentage (11.6%). All populations were considered in outreach methods for the public meetings.

Although signing in was not required, 56 members of the public signed in to the open house public meeting. Demographic information was included on the sign-in sheets. Fourteen attendees were female, 23 attendees were male, and 19 attendees chose not to answer. One attendee was Asian, one attendee was Hispanic, three attendees were Native American, 18 attendees were White, one attendee was White/Native American, and 32 attendees chose not to answer.

With consideration to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates and 2020 Decennial Census data, the known racial composition of the in-house public meeting is nearly representative of the racial composition of Hochatown. Asians are marginally overrepresented (0% in CDP in comparison to 4% at public meeting). Hispanics or Latinos are marginally underrepresented (3% in CDP in comparison to 4% at public meeting). Native Americans are marginally overrepresented (10% in CDP in comparison to 17% at public meeting). Whites are overrepresented (81% in CDP in comparison to 75% at public meeting). Black or African Americans are accurately represented (0% in CDP in comparison to 0% at public meeting). All populations were considered in outreach methods for the public meetings.

During the open house public meeting, layouts of the proposed 5-lane configuration were displayed, and a pre-recorded presentation summarizing the environmental studies conducted for the proposed improvements was played continuously. ODOT staff and the design and permitting consultants were available throughout the open house public meeting to provide information to the public. The public could submit written comments at the open house public meeting or later via mail, email, or voicemail. A website with open house public meeting information was also created to provide the public with a means of reviewing the information online. The website included instructions on methods to provide feedback during the public comment period, held between March 26 and April 9, 2024.

Public Comment Topics and Responses

There were 21 public comments received following the 5-lane configuration announcement in November 2023, and 14 public comments received during the public comment period from March 26 to April 9, 2024. One commenter submitted 2 comments; therefore, 35 comments were received by 34 commenters. Comments often addressed multiple topics.

Topic – Safe Pedestrian Access

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding pedestrian safety due to proximity of the roadway to parked cars, pedestrians crossing the 5-lane roadway, and impaired driver visibility due to the 5-lane configuration.

Response: *ODOT is designing the proposed improvements in conformance with national safety standards set by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and ODOT. ODOT is proposing to incorporate sidewalks and crosswalks in the project to improve safe pedestrian access. Additionally, medians are being considered in the design at various locations to increase safety at crosswalks.*

Topic – Parking

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding available parking and how the expansion of US-259 would impact existing parking negatively.

Response: *ODOT, in cooperation with the Town of Hochatown, is committed to incorporating community public parking solutions to mitigate parking concerns. Additionally, shuttle drop-off locations are being considered in the design to allow for safe drop-off and pick-up of large groups of pedestrians.*

Topic – Flow of Traffic

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding traffic speeds and vehicles turning left across additional lanes of traffic.

Response: *ODOT appreciates your input on safety and speed concerns. The present speed limit varies from 45mph - 65mph through the roadway. ODOT is proposing to reduce the speed limit to a maximum of 45 mph through the area. Additionally, ODOT is designing the proposed improvements in conformance with national safety standards set by the FHWA and ODOT. Additionally, the addition of the center lane allows the driver to help see oncoming traffic. In regard to turning left, the additional lane in each direction will help with traffic congestion, which will allow for increased spacing between signals and interchanges.*

Topic – Traffic Noise Concerns

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters expressed concerns regarding an increase in traffic noise caused by the proposed improvements.

Response: *A traffic noise study was completed for the proposed improvements, and modeling indicates a decrease in future traffic noise for the majority of the roadway due to the proposed reduction in the speed limit. Noise barriers were not considered feasible due to driveway and access requirements.*

Topic – Beauty/Aesthetics

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding how the proposed improvements could affect the beauty and aesthetics of Hochatown’s rural or “small-town-feel.”

Response: *ODOT will continue to review other successful road improvement projects in similar tourist areas (such as Gatlinburg, TN) and collaborate with the community to enhance the aesthetics of the area. Improvements such as vegetated medians at various locations will be considered during the detailed design process to help improve safety, traffic flow, and provide an aesthetic benefit.*

Topic – Property & Business Impacts

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding impacts to property and businesses.

Response: *ODOT will maintain access to residences and businesses throughout construction. The proposed roadway improvements are anticipated to be within existing right-of-way to minimize private property impacts. Expansion of US-259 will allow for accommodation of traffic increases associated with the projected future growth of the area. Additionally, ODOT is proposing to incorporate sidewalks and crosswalks to improve safe pedestrian access.*

Topic – Wildlife

Topic Summary: Multiple comments expressed concerns regarding wildlife and potential for increased collisions with deer crossing a wider highway.

Response: *ODOT is considering the strategic placement of signage to warn highway users in areas potentially crossed by wildlife. Based off roadway design criteria, the proposed improvements will have a clear zone of 15-feet from the outer most traveled lane, allowing for additional visibility for wildlife. Additionally, the proposed traffic speed reductions are expected to reduce the severity and frequency of interactions with wildlife.*

Topic – Cost

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated concerns regarding the higher cost of the 5-lane alternative, and how additional funding is needed to acquire more ROW to provide a safety zone.

Response: *ODOT selected the 5-lane alternative because it meets traffic demands while remaining sensitive to the needs of the community. ODOT is invested in providing a roadway that meets the present and future needs of the area.*

Topic – Support for Proposed Improvements

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters stated support and approval of the proposed improvements.

Response: *ODOT appreciates your comments and participation in the public involvement process.*

Topic – Questions About Right-of-Way

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters inquired about the location of the present right-of-way and how the proposed improvements would impact their property.

Response: *The proposed US-259 improvements are anticipated to remain within ODOT’s present right-of-way to minimize private property impacts. Structures or appurtenances currently built within ODOT’s present right-of-way may need to be removed prior to construction but all improvements will be evaluated*

with public use as a consideration. The width of the present right-of-way varies in this area between 65' and 130' from the center line of US-259.

Topic – Question About Turning Movements

Topic Summary: One commenter inquired about how the proposed improvements will impact guests and their ability to turn left at their place of business.

Response: *During construction, ODOT proposes to maintain one lane of travel in each direction and will maintain access to all properties. Additionally, ODOT is committed to maintaining access to all properties adjacent to US-259 in the permanent roadway configuration. During the design process, the two-way left turn lane and median sections will be evaluated for safe and effective placement of left turn bays along the corridor.*

Topic – Design Recommendations

Topic Summary: Multiple commenters provided ODOT with recommendations for the proposed improvements. Recommendations ranged from adding a pedestrian bridge spanning over the highway, grass medians, green spaces, streetlights, large sidewalks, a noise barrier, a guard rail, long turn lanes, flashing lights, speed limit evaluations, adjusting the start and end of project, and grading to reduce need for retaining walls.

Response: *Thank you for recommendations on how we can optimize the proposed improvements to US-259. These recommendations will be considered during the detailed design phase, and ODOT will continue to collaborate with the community during design and construction.*

Topic – Question about Relocation of Mailbox

Topic Summary: One commenter inquired about relocating a mailbox to the same side of the road as their residence/business.

Response: *Thank you for your question. ODOT will coordinate with the local postmaster regarding the safe placement of mailboxes.*

Public Entity/Agency Responses

The following four public entities/agencies responded to the notification letter:

- **The Oklahoma Conservation Commission** responded with a letter by email:
The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) appreciates the opportunity to review this ODOT proposal as described in your letter of March 20, 2024. A review was completed using the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Survey of McCurtain County and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory maps. No hydric soils were indicated within the project boundaries. However, intermittent streams were indicated in multiple locations within the project area. OCC requests construction practices that minimize erosion and soil laden runoff during and following construction activities. In addition, OCC requests adequate cross-sectional drainage and consistent streambed gradient be incorporated at these intermittent stream crossings to minimize short and long-term erosion impacts to adjacent lands.

- **The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ)** responded by email.

In response to your requests on behalf of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT), we have completed a general environmental impact review for the project listed below.

Project

Letter dated March 20, 2024 - US-259 improvements from South SH-259A to Golf Course Road, State Job Piece 34333 (04)(08), Hochatown, OK (McCurtain County) 34.168, -94.762

Adverse Environmental Impacts Under DEQ Jurisdiction

None anticipated for the project.

Additional Regulatory Considerations

A. *Prior to beginning any construction activity disturbing more than one acre, you must submit an NOI and obtain authorization under OKR10, construction stormwater. If you need assistance, please contact DEQ's Stormwater Unit at (405) 702-6100.*

B. *It is unclear whether water and wastewater utilities will be affected by these projects. If so, please note that water and wastewater infrastructure projects that will require a construction permit from DEQ's Water Quality Division include the following:*

- *Construction of new water and wastewater treatment facilities;*
- *Modifications and upgrades to existing facilities;*
- *Construction of new water distribution and wastewater collection lines;*
- *Relocation of existing water distribution and wastewater collection lines;*

Projects that do not require a construction permit include:

- *Replacement of existing equipment with same type and size equipment;*
- *Replacement of existing water and wastewater lines with the same size line in the same location.*

Please contact DEQ's Water Quality Quality Division (Construction Permitting Section) if you have specific questions or need further clarification. Rocky Chen is the manager of this section and can be reached at (405) 702-8140 or rocky.chen@deq.ok.gov.

C. *If USACE determines a Section 404 Permit is required for this project, then you must obtain a Section 401 Water Quality Certification from DEQ. Contact Elena Jigoulina in our Water Quality Division at (405) 702-8200 for questions regarding the 401 Certification.*

Additional recommendations to consider may be found in our guidance document, Additional Recommendations for Your Project.

For future projects, please include GPS coordinates in decimal degrees (DD.DDDDD) and continue including street addresses, section/township/range, or other location information.

- **The Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB)** responded by email:

The OWRB permitting staff has reviewed your environmental statement and has found no questions or concerns.

Please note that if any surface or groundwater is to be used or moved in the completion of this project, a permit through the OWRB may be needed.

- **The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission** responded by email:

After reviewing the information provided (attached to this email) ODAA can conclude neither project suite causes an aeronautical hazard to nearby airports.