

# TURNPIKE

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2021 should see an early completion date as the OTA works to make rapid progress and avoid rising costs.

"We started in January 2018 with the initial construction, and all the projects are firing off. You're going to see major changes in the coming months," said Joe Echelle, Assistant Executive Director for Maintenance, Engineering, and Construction of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

***"Our best anticipation is that most of the dirt work will be complete by spring, and most of the bridges will be done by next fall. We should be able to start surfacing in the summer of 2019. We should be able to start installing the toll equipment in the summer or fall of 2019. I'm going to pad myself with some time and say we should be ready late 2020. We've always said we were going to try to finish this by 2021, and the later we wait to get started the more expensive that goal becomes."***

OTA officials say the toll road will feature four interchanges including SE 29th Street, Reno Avenue, NE 23rd Street and Britton Road.

Those east and south running roads that do not have an interchange with the toll road will run either over or under the new turnpike.

"Most of the existing roads, but not all, will run over the turnpike. Probably 70 percent of the crossroads will have bridges going over the turnpike, and on those closest Choctaw and Harrah we've put sidewalks on those bridges. There may not be sidewalks going up to the bridges, but someday there could be if the bridges are already done," said Echelle.

So far most of the cost has been on the north end of the toll road, but work can now clearly be seen picking up near Harrah. Rising costs and some underestimates have resulted in the project moving quicker than even the OTA anticipated.

"We're paying more for right of way than expected, and there are more utilities than we thought," said Echelle. "Our alignment was chosen to miss rooftops, and that created additional costs in utility relocation and right of way acquisition. We've missed rooftops, but sometimes had to buy the houses anyway. That's been a lot of what we've been doing on the EOC project for the last year."

Despite a vocal opposition, the OTA moved forward with the acquisition of nearly 400 parcels.

OTA officials say the top priority

was to take as few homes as possible to complete the project, despite the added costs with that process. Over 1,000 public comments provided through public meetings, phone calls, written and online communications were used to help establish the loop's final path, according to the OTA.

"It can't be about the type of rooftops, and has to be the amount of rooftops. So we came up with our plan in an effort to avoid the most rooftops and cross the North Canadian River at the easiest point. Crossing the river where we did helped us avoid about a two-year delay," said Echelle.

"We've bought property from nearly 400 people, and you don't hear much complaining from them. We tried to be as close as we could to the power plant, but that has a web of lines coming out from it. Anytime you move one of those towers it costs millions if not tens of millions. We also had to cross a rail road bridge just south of the river. We needed a good interchange at I-40, because we didn't want to impact an existing interchange and wanted to work into the ongoing expansion of I-40."

Officials say property that could not be purchased with an offer has gone through the condemnation process, but most of those did not enter condemnation out of opposition.

"I think there are 386 parcels, and

that ends up being around 340 different property owners. We have accessed right of entry to go to work on about 95 percent of those. I think there are 15 to 20 that are in condemnation. About two-thirds of those are in condemnation not because we can't come up with a price, but because someone passed away who had title to the property or something like that. It's faster to get these people the check if we go through a 60-day condemnation," explained Echelle.

"When we offer someone \$100,000 and they come back with \$1 million we need to keep working and come up with a solution. The most important thing we're doing, as a part of this, is how we purchase right of way. The final offer we've made before going into condemnation was significantly more than what condemnation court has awarded them, every time. We have no part in that condemnation process, and don't know what those awards will be. I see our final offers and I see the condemnation awards, and it's significantly less than our offer every time."

As part of the right of way acquisition the OTA partnered with Oklahoma County and Oklahoma City to acquire additional right of way to be used for future service roads.

Service road right of way will start where the toll road meets NE 23rd Street, and run south parallel with the turnpike. Limited stretches will be built by the OTA, while the county or cities will be responsible for expanding those if needed.

Hefner Road will be the location of the new road's major toll gate, and that gate should employ about 20 local workers who will access the gate from Hefner on the west. That toll plaza will feature Pikepass lanes on the left and cash lanes on the right.

For more information about the EOC Corridor and other OTA projects visit [www.drivingforwardok.com](http://www.drivingforwardok.com).

**Work is currently underway on the NE 23rd Street interchange just east of Luther Road.**

**PHOTO BY RYAN HORTON**

