

# Talking points at the Capitol

## What to do

- Be extremely polite.
- Thank them for their time and for representing you.
- Be brief.
- Be clear on what you want.
- Share how you are impacted.
- Thank them for supporting the democratic process that gives voice to citizens through their elected officials.

## Share Your Story

- How long have you lived in your residence?
- What is your family history in the area?
- What investments (financial and personal) do you have in your home?
- What is irreplaceable where you live?
  - Have you buried pets or scattered the ashes of loved ones?
  - Have you built structures yourself?
  - Have you planted trees or done your own landscaping?

## This Issue Affects our State

- Bonds used to pay for turnpikes that are never paid off.
- Toll roads are replacing solid infrastructure and resulting in an even greater dependence on toll roads in the future.
- We are relying on a 1950's approach for growth for the year 2050. We should focus on progressive ideas for managing growth.
- Eminent domain can be abused. The OTA has not been forthcoming with records, and the newest release of information on compensation for properties indicates that payment to property owners has not always been equitable.

## Impact of the Toll Roads – Humans and their Properties<sup>1</sup>

- Displace hundreds/thousands of hard-working Oklahomans (and their pets and livestock) when replacement homes are not available.
- Destroy hundreds of homes including barns, outbuilding, shops, and businesses.
- Destroy homes/properties in families for generations where memories have been made with grandparents, children, extended family, and friends.
  - One woman scattered her husband's ashes on the property.
- Destroy homes/properties where people have intentionally relocated for rural life, close to nature, away from town and traffic.
- Destroy the nature of Norman—cut Norman in half twice.

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<sup>1</sup> Impact on Lakeview, Little Axe, and Robin Hill Schools? Roosevelt Elementary? Others?

- For people whose homes and property are not taken, the value they have built up in their homes will be eroded due to proximity to the toll road—they will receive NO COMPENSATION.
- Cemeteries will be impacted indirectly by this toll road.
- Total loss of homes
- Total loss of buildings
- Total loss of property/land
- Total loss of value (direct and indirect)

### **Impact – Water**

- Toll road will pollute Lake Thunderbird and the watershed including the Canadian River and other feeder streams to Lake Thunderbird directly with petroleum and chemical laden run off, air pollution, and light pollution – Norman, Midwest City, and Del City rely on Lake Thunderbird for drinking water.
- Lake Thunderbird is already a declared impaired water source – this will exacerbate this.<sup>2</sup>
- Toll road will pollute and prevent recharge of the Garber-Wellington aquifer threatening the water source of thousands of rural Oklahomans in Cleveland County.
- Watershed recharge happens on pastureland, open spaces, in wetlands, and in tree covered areas. Protection of this vital watershed is one of the key reasons East Norman is zoned to prevent homesteads on anything less than 10 acres. Lack of groundwater will lead to increased wildfires—disastrous for humans, livestock, and wildlife, and eventually, dry wells.
- If city’s start mining water from the aquifer to supplant water currently harvested from Lake Thunderbird, individual wells could likely dry up due to the combination of overtaxing the aquifer, preventing adequate open land, forested area, and wetlands for recharge, and increased pollution in the watershed.

### **Impact – Wildlife and Habitat**

- The wildlife impacts of this proposed plan for building the turnpike in Cleveland County and more toll roads in other locations are catastrophic for wildlife.
- This toll will destroy the most important wildlife corridor in Cleveland County. Wildlife roam from throughout central Norman to Lake Thunderbird and back.
- This plan will cause habitat destruction where the toll road will be built, habitat degradation on either side of the toll road, and habitat fragmentation—wildlife will eventually be trapped inside a desert bounded by I-35 west, 1-240 to the north, Highway 9 to the south and of course this new, proposed toll road to the east with no access to the lake or the cover and resources it provides.

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<sup>2</sup> From the OU Daily, 4.7.2017 by Kayla Branch. “The state officials are only looking at closing or temporarily closing lakes that are not generating revenue and that’s not the case for Lake Thunderbird,” O’Leary said. “Lake Thunderbird is what is called an ‘impaired body of water,’ so that means that the state has determined that the water quality in Lake Thunderbird is diminishing very rapidly to the extent that if we do not do something, then we would no longer be able to harvest that water for drinking purposes.” The water running into the lake is runoff, meaning that when it rains, the water runs off impervious surfaces and through Norman’s water infrastructure, eventually finding its way to Lake Thunderbird and carrying chemicals and pollutants with it, O’Leary said. Norman receives up to 70 percent of its drinking water from Lake Thunderbird, but because pollutants in the lake have far surpassed state recommendations, the city is worried about what could happen in the future if the lake could no longer be used as a water source due to its pollution level, O’Leary said.

- The wildlife habitat destroyed is unique and disappearing—cross timbers, grasslands, and wetlands.
- No matter where the route is “tweaked” if it runs along the west side of Lake Thunderbird, it will be disastrous for wildlife, some of which we know to be threatened or endangered.<sup>3</sup>
- It will negatively affect bald eagle nesting sites as well as those other resident and migratory birds, negatively affect an important stop for tens of thousands of migratory birds that travel the central north/south flyway in the spring and fall each year, and it will kill thousands of animals that seek the area around Lake Thunderbird consisting of wetlands, forested areas, and freshwater.

### **Impact – Geologic**

- The proposed southern extension along Lake Thunderbird destroys a section of the only vein of barite rose rocks found in the world.

### **Impact – Economic**

- Loss of property taxes that support schools and surrounding cities.
- Loss of sales tax from people having to move outside of Norman and Cleveland County – not enough homes to absorb them.
- Loss of business along I-35.
- Loss of businesses along the route.
- Loss of active pastureland and small-scale farming along the route.

### **Impact – WildCare Oklahoma**

- The proposed toll road runs about half a mile from the front of WildCare – an organization that has served this state for nearly 40 years, the result of thousands of people’s time, commitment, passion, and financial investments. The proximity of this toll road may make the location untenable for the work we do – the added noise, pollution, and light are all detrimental to wildlife.

### **Counter Arguments**

#### **SAFETY**

The OTA argues that the toll roads improve safety. However, The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration determined speed, people not wearing safety belts, and driving under the influence to be the most prevalent causes of highway fatalities— the turnpike addresses none of these causes.

In 2020, the speed limit was increased on parts of the Turner, Muskogee, Cherokee, Indian Nation, H.E. Bailey, and Kickapoo Turnpikes and despite a decrease in traffic volume, Oklahoma had the highest number of fatalities on the roads since 2007.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oknaturalheritage.ou.edu/content/biodiversity-info/endangered-species/>

## **REPLACEMENT**

The OTA states that homeowners will receive fair compensation for their homes. In the current housing market, there are not 600 total homes available in the area, much less 600 comparable homes. This will force many people looking for comparable property and home out of the area and to face a historically difficult time in our nation to find a new home.

## **LIVABILITY**

NO ONE moves to a community because it has toll roads—they live in communities because of the school, the sense of community, access to parks and recreational activities. People seek livability, not turnpikes. Toll roads destroy community livability.

## **PROCESS**

Spent borrowed money to hire contractors without authorization.

No consultation.

The OTA waited until bills could no longer be introduced to announce the proposed turnpikes—trying to eliminate democratic process.

When the South Extension met opposition, the OTA renamed a portion of the South Extension to avoid progress on the project in a blatant attempt to circumvent possible delays in their progress.

## **RURAL LIFE**

A cynical assault of rural Americans and rural culture. In the words of Governor Stitt, "That's why we've decided to do it now to make sure we're getting it out there when it's really just farmland, pasturelands you're not disrupting."

## **INDUCED DEMAND**

Traffic engineers made note of the phenomenon that increased roads do not alleviate road congestion since at least as early as the 1960s, but now social scientists have collected enough data to show how this happens pretty much every time we build new roads. If our goal is to alleviate congestion, we should consider alternatives to new roads.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

- HOV lanes
- carpool lots
- express lanes within existing highway/turnpike infrastructure
- light rail
- bus routes
- incentivize employers to allow workers to continue working from home
- improve existing infrastructure