

*SURFACE* is a publication of TRUST dedicated to bringing news about the financing of Oklahoma's transportation infrastructure to community, business and policy leaders around the state. This biannual publication has a central focus of:

- Federal and state funding
- Regulatory news from state Capitol and Congress
- TRUST events and news
- Innovative topics on transportation funding

# SURFACE

SPRING 2021



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## SENSE OF NORMALCY RETURNS TO LEGISLATURE, CAPITOL

**WITH COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES AND DEATHS DECREASED, AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF OKLAHOMANS RECEIVING VACCINES,** the Oklahoma Legislature and the state Capitol gradually returned to a sense of normalcy during the 2021 legislative session. Even with the pandemic still part of daily life, Senate and House members completed a full session, avoiding the interruptions that impacted the 2020 session. Lawmakers convened February 1 and adjourned Sine Die May 27, one day before mandatory adjournment. With 23 new members elected in 2020, the 149-member body enjoyed more than a \$1 billion budget surplus in crafting the final \$8.3 billion FY22 state budget which runs July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022. The surplus was due to CARES Act funding and the state economy, including the oil and gas industry performing better than expected in 2020 despite a nationwide economic fallout caused by COVID. The surplus led to a very smooth session as far as budget priorities go with lawmakers increasing common education funding by \$170 million, and reducing the personal (5% to 4.75%) and corporate (6% to 4%) income taxes. ODOT and transportation



Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Rob Standridge speaks at the April 6th TRUST Transportation Briefing.

funding were beneficiaries as the ROADS fund was fully funded, the \$180 million scheduled to be swept from transportation in FY22 will not occur, and \$20 million was returned to the County Improvements for Roads and Bridges (CIRB) fund to return its annual cap to \$120 million.

Shortly after the legislature convened, the state Board of Equalization certified nearly \$9 billion available for FY22, and Governor Kevin Stitt and legislative leaders quickly called for a significant deposit to the Constitutional Reserve (Rainy Day) fund and other state savings accounts; a goal which was achieved with a \$800 million deposit.

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# TRUST Hosts Transportation Briefing



TRUST members and transportation advocates filled the Blue Room during the TRUST Transportation Briefing.

**AS DAILY LIFE CONTINUED TO TRANSITION BACK TO NORMAL**, TRUST aided the cause by hosting its annual Transportation Day program, albeit without the annual luncheon, on April 6th in the beautifully renovated state Capitol Blue Room. The briefing was headlined by Governor Stitt, and also included remarks from Secretary of Transportation and ODOT Executive Director Tim Gatz, Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Rob Standridge, Senate A&B Subcommittee Chairman

John Haste, House Transportation Committee Chairman Avery Frix, House A&B Subcommittee Chairman Todd Russ and McCurtain County Commissioner Jimmy Westbrook. TRUST President Neal McCaleb providing opening and closing remarks with TRUST Executive Director Jami Longacre serving as emcee.

Our hope is that in 2022, TRUST will be able to return to its full and traditional lineup of events including our Transportation Day luncheon and program, Senate and House Transportation Committee dinners and the TRUST Innovation Forum. ■



House A&B Subcommittee Chairman Todd Russ provides a funding update at the TRUST Transportation Briefing.

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The session proceeded smoothly throughout its four months with most legislative activity routine although two issues, critical race theory and Medicaid Managed Care, did garner significant public attention. Also, the process of Senate and House redistricting was certainly at the forefront as well. Redistricting occurs every ten years based on results of the U.S. Census. The new legislative and congressional district lines will be in place for the 2022 election cycle, although legislators will return in special session this fall to wrap up mainly the congressional redistricting process due to a delay in receiving final population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. With regards to everyday transportation progress, the ODOT eight-year highway and bridge construction plan continues to progress statewide, and remains the most influential policy and funding development for transportation in Oklahoma history. ODOT is extremely close to reaching its goal of reducing the number of structurally-deficient bridges on the state highway system to less than 1%. In 2004, the state had 1,168 structurally-deficient bridges. Today, that number is less than 80. The tremendous progress has afforded ODOT the opportunity to focus more resources on other needed areas such as incorporating more two-lane highway development, pavement and widening projects into the eight-year plan. County projects also continue to advance through the CIRB fund which provides monies for county priority bridge and highway projects.

In Washington, D.C., Congress and the Biden administration are working on a five-year, \$303 billion bipartisan transportation infrastructure package including major appropriations for highways, bridges, rail, waterways and airports nationwide. Over \$4 billion is earmarked for Oklahoma surface transportation projects. Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe, the ranking minority member on the Environment and Public Works Committee, is working with Democrats and the White House on the (STRA) bill, which recently cleared the EP&W Committee. It remains to be seen what a final bill might look like when considered by the full Senate and House. To date, members of Oklahoma's House delegation have expressed skepticism regarding the bill's ultimate intent, however the bill is a work in progress, and could potentially result in a sizable federal investment into Oklahoma's transportation infrastructure.

As is the case every year, proper investment in Oklahoma's most valued physical commodity, our highway and bridge infrastructure, cannot be understated. It is imperative state and federal leaders continue to invest in transportation, and that is where TRUST and all transportation advocates play a key role. In reality, the mantra of TRUST has never been more important. Every year there are more and more entities vying for more funding, and maintaining transportation as a core priority in the eyes of the legislative and executive branches has never been more important. TRUST will continue to foster that environment at the state Capitol each day, and that job is only made possible by the continued support of TRUST members, and for that, thank you! ■



# TRUST LEGISLATIVE AGENDA - 2021

“Our legislative agenda continues to be the benchmark from which TRUST operates at the state Capitol, and it has proven to be a solid foundation in representing our mission to utilize all transportation-generated revenues for transportation purposes.”

*TRUST President Neal McCaleb*

- **Motor vehicle fees redirected to transportation.** A core TRUST principle is all transportation-derived revenues are used strictly for transportation. TRUST supports returning all motor fuel taxes and the remaining allocation of vehicle-related fees to transportation purposes, and encourages the appropriate allocation of motor vehicle fees to state highways, county roads and municipal streets taking into consideration previous vehicle-related fees and general fund allocations. TRUST will continue to support this concept as a matter of sound public policy.
- **Protect ODOT eight-year highway and bridge construction work plan.** TRUST’s top priority is ensuring funding remains at a level where no current projects are interrupted, no planned projects cut and no motor fuel taxes and vehicle-related transportation fees diverted from ODOT’s investment strategy which includes the eight-year construction work plan, the Asset Preservation Plan and highway maintenance. TRUST opposes the diversion of funds from ODOT’s general budget and/or the eight-year plan to aid budget deficits.
- **Support the full statutory allocation to the ROADS fund.** In an effort to continue the replacement and rehabilitation of state highways and bridges, TRUST supports this statutory allocation as a core business function of the state.
- **Infrastructure bond financing.** During uncertain budget times TRUST supports infrastructure bond financing to maintain critical transportation funding and projects, and vehemently opposes the diversion of motor fuel taxes and vehicle-related transportation fees to non-transportation uses of state government.
- **Restore funding to County Improvements for Roads & Bridges (CIRB) five-year construction work plan.** To rehabilitate county bridges and highways, TRUST supports the CIRB program and its revolving fund to be used strictly for CIRB transportation projects with no interruption of current projects and no elimination of planned projects. Furthermore, TRUST calls for the restoration of diverted funds from CIRB to the state budget over the past several years.
- **Protect transportation-dedicated revolving funds.** TRUST supports the protection of transportation dedicated revolving funds. The funds are intended to fund transportation infrastructure projects and should not be diverted for other governmental purposes.



McCurtain County Commissioner Jimmy Westbrook provides a CIRB and county roads update.

- **Renovation of Ports of Entries - Weigh Stations.** TRUST supports methods to complete the construction of Oklahoma’s new ports of entries in order to protect highways and bridges from overweight freight. Doing so will result in additional revenues from fines and fees due to increased monitoring of overweight commercial traffic. TRUST also supports returning the one-cent transportation user fee from the Petroleum Storage Tank Indemnity Fund to transportation needs to service the bond debt. This allows for no revenue impact or increased taxes while utilizing transportation fees to support transportation needs.
- **Innovative funding for transportation.** TRUST supports innovative and alternative transportation funding that is revenue equitable but not punitive, and for the intended purpose of establishing equitable mobility through a comprehensive approach to increase overall transportation funding. ■

## Why Join TRUST?

Be part of the voice for transportation advocacy that works with members of the state legislature to implement solutions. Without your membership to TRUST, we risk losing the valuable momentum we have gained over the past 15 years. At the state Capitol, we must have a constant and growing voice for transportation and urge you to join us in this vital cause.

## MISSION STATEMENT

TRUST, *Transportation Revenues Used Strictly for Transportation*, is an advocacy group dedicated to restoring Oklahoma's transportation infrastructure. We are committed to creating a culture within Oklahoma government that values and adequately funds transportation as a core priority.

## Principles of TRUST

- Use all state transportation-related taxes and fees strictly for transportation
- Protect and grow dedicated funds for Oklahoma's transportation system
- Educate policy makers and the public on the importance of investing in highways and bridges
- Support leaders who are committed to transportation as a core priority of state government
- Use high-quality, lasting materials in building and maintaining highways and bridges
- Advocate efficiency and accountability within the state legislature and Oklahoma Department of Transportation

## TRUST ONLINE restoreTRUST.org

### OKLAHOMA TRANSPORTATION NEWS



Our online news page is updated daily with local and national legislative and transportation articles. In addition, to receive our weekly Oklahoma Transportation News email newsletter, please contact TRUST membership director Helra Han at helrahan@gmail.com.

### FOLLOW TRUST ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK



You can follow TRUST on Twitter and Facebook under the username "restoreTRUST". If you have not "liked" TRUST on Facebook, please do so today.

### EVENTS ONLINE

Our updated TRUST website - restoreTRUST.org - allows members to register for our annual events, and renew their membership with just a few clicks. Please take advantage of this convenient method to stay engaged with TRUST. For questions on events or membership, please contact TRUST membership director Helra Han at helrahan@gmail.com.

### UPDATE YOUR MEMBER PROFILE

In an effort to maintain accurate mailing and contact lists, TRUST continually updates our membership database. If you have changes to your email or mailing addresses or wish to add or delete contacts within your organization, please contact TRUST membership director Helra Han at helrahan@gmail.com.

### TRUST STAFF

Jami Longacre - Executive Director

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