

## STATE TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT PLEASED WITH UNANIMOUS VOTE

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■(GIT) Out of the approximately \$280 million in new money for Oklahoma, the Department of Transportation could receive \$27 million. HB2667 would re-appropriate funds from the Oklahoma Vehicle License and Registration Act to the General Revenue Fund and the State Transportation Fund. The measure passed unanimously in the House Tuesday. If it becomes law, the State Department of Transportation could construct a five-year statewide improvement plan. According to State Secretary of Transportation, Neal McCaleb, the move would "put dollars back into Oklahoma roads."

The measure, authored by Rep. Fred Stanley, D-Madill, would take 3/10th's of 1 percent to 5.3 percent from the general fund. The funds would then be credited to the State Transportation Fund through the Treasurer's Office. McCaleb said that most of the funds will go toward the construction projects. "We could add a few people to maintenance, but we would be reluctant to add administrative positions," he said.

McCaleb explained that over the last five years, the department has lost funds. "This would restore lost federal funding." To compensate, he explained that the department had reduced its employees by 20 percent. However, contracts increased by 50 percent.

"This is an important economic development issue." He continued, "However, it is also an issue of life and death." McCaleb said 60 percent more deaths occur on dilapidated roads.

If the bill passes on the Senate floor and the governor signs it into law, the department will start receiving the money in 1997. McCaleb said he was pleased with today's outcome.

Yesterday, the Transportation Commission met and adopted a resolution including HB2667, plus several other measures. The resolution read:

"WHEREAS, Transportation funding in Oklahoma is insufficient to meet road building demands and a stable, reliable source for adequate transportation funding is now required to continue interstate, highway and road improvements; and

"WHEREAS, state transportation's share of the total state budget has not been reduced to 4.5 percent from 7.2 percent during the last five years, and Oklahoma leads the nation in the diversion of highway user fees to non-transportation purposes; and

"WHEREAS, the Governor has requested \$40 million in new funding for Fiscal Year 1997, toward that end, House Bill 2667 would earmark an additional five percent of the motor vehicle tax collections for the State Transportation Fund to increase by \$27 million; and

"WHEREAS, the Native American gasoline tax exemption erodes available fuel taxes resulting in the loss of millions of dollars for road building and maintenance, and all road users have a responsibility to share in the financing of all Oklahoma's highways, House Bill 2208 preserves the individual Native American fuel tax exemptions while assuring continued funding of state highways by collecting user fuel taxes at the wholesale level; and

"WHEREAS, creative interstate and highway financing would become a reality in Oklahoma on road projects where leaseback's would allow immediate construction with amortized payments as proposed in Senate Bill 986 and Senate Bill 683; and

"WHEREAS, Oklahoma Department of Transportation employees and managers have proven their efficiency by increasing construction FY '95 contract lettings by \$104 million over the FY' 91 contract lettings while the ODOT work force has declined by more than 600 employees;

"NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE OKLAHOMA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION:

"THAT the Oklahoma Transportation Commission strongly encourages Oklahoma legislators to seek, find and implement viable economic solutions to Oklahoma's transportation financial dilemma; and

"THAT the Oklahoma Transportation Commission enthusiastically supports the passage of

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