

CORPORATION COMMISSION APPROVES 10 RAILROAD CROSSING UPGRADES

By Michelle Boyd Waters
Staff Writer

■(GIT) The Oklahoma Corporation Commission recently approved applications by the Burlington Northern Railroad for safety and facility upgrades of 10 railroad crossings.

The number of crossings up for improvement tends to run in spurts, said Patrick Petree, commission public information officer. The commission receives several applications whenever the federal money is available, but they may go three months without seeing an application.

"The commission is required by law to approve or disapprove the applications," Petree said. "But the contract is between the railroad and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation."

G. R. (Buddy) Combs, Corporation Commission railroad manager, said that the intersections ranged from being too rough to being dangerous. He said that each railroad crossing in Oklahoma is given a priority. When the crossing reaches the top of the

priority list, it is repaired, Combs said.

ODOT and Burlington worked on terms agreeable to both organizations and then ODOT sent the application to the commission.

The improvements will include advance warning signs, flashing-light signals with traffic control gate arms and replacement of rail crossing surfaces. Federal railroad grade crossing improvement funds will pay 90 percent of the estimated \$840,825 cost of the upgrades. Cities, counties and the railroad will provide the required 10 percent matching funds.

The upgrade applications approved are:

- **ALTUS:** flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 40 foot concrete crossing surface at Ridgecrest Road. The estimated project cost is \$103,000. The city of Altus will pay \$10,300.

- **BEGGS:** flashing-light signals with gate arms at a county road approximately two miles south and two miles east of Beggs. The estimated project cost is \$76,800. Okmulgee County will pay \$7,680.

- **ENID:** flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 70 foot concrete crossing surface at East Chestnut Avenue. The estimated project cost is \$71,500. The City of Enid will pay \$7,150.

- **FOYIL:** flashing-light signals with gate

arms and a 48 foot concrete crossing surface at State Highway 66. The estimated project cost is \$90,000. Rogers County will pay approximately \$9,000.

- **HENRYETTA:** flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 40 foot concrete crossing surface at Corporation Street. The estimated project cost is \$100,000. The City of Henryetta will pay \$10,000.

- **HOLDENVILLE:** two 32 foot timber crossing surfaces and two railroad crossing advance warning signs at a county road about 1 mile south of Holdenville. The estimated project cost is \$32,845. The Burlington Northern Railroad will pay about \$3,285.

- **OKMULGEE:** flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 32 foot concrete crossing surface at Auction Barn Road. The estimated project cost is \$52,000. Okmulgee County will pay \$5,200.

- **OKMULGEE:** flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 56 foot concrete crossing surface at Sixth Street (State Highway 56). The project cost is estimated at \$156,400. Of the 10 percent required matching funds, the state will pay \$12,360 and the Burlington Northern will pay \$3,280.

- **SAPULPA:** flashing-light signals with gate arms, two railroad crossing advance warning signs and two sets of pavement

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The suit marks the third federal suit filed against the election board this year, noted Ward, who has now presided over five general and three presidential elections as state election board secretary. Currently, the Oklahoma affiliate of the Reform Party also has a suit pending against the state board, alleging discrimination in the voter registration process. An earlier challenge to the state's ballot access laws by the Natural Law Party was rejected by a federal judge.

"I would say the fact that we've had three federal suits filed against us this year is a bit odd," Ward said. "It's not unusual to have a candidate, particularly a defeated candidate, bring an action in district court and to see that move to the Oklahoma Supreme Court during a major election season, but that didn't happen this time."

When the Reform and Libertarian parties' suits are decided, Ward added, essentially every aspect of Oklahoma's election laws will have been touched in one way or another.

"The Natural Law Party took issue with the requirements to get on the ballot," Ward explained. "Then, the Reform Party is challenging the process involved in registering people. This lawsuit addresses the requirements to remain on the ballot. After this, I'm not sure what is left."

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the prison system for a number of years before leveling off.

When department officials speak of bed space, they are usually referring to the number of beds available versus the number of inmates they need to put in them. On Monday, department figures showed there were 79 more beds than there were inmates inside agency facilities, while 316 were waiting to be brought in.

Inmates, however, appear to have a different view of bed space, evidenced by lawsuits which challenge the conditions in which they are housed. According to the facility capacity report, an inmate's gender and unit assignment play a key role in that equation.

The average inmate in Department of Corrections custody is allotted 94-square-feet of space. That is particularly true for the system's male inmates, whose average space assignment is 95.6-square-feet. Women, however, fare worse, averaging just 77-square-feet.

In the cases of both male and female in-

mates there are wide swings in the amount of allotted space. Male inmates assigned to the restrictive housing unit at Clara Waters Community Corrections Center in Oklahoma City get an average of 16.7-square-feet per inmate, while inmates locked in the medical unit at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester have an average assigned space of 238.5-square-feet.

The space difference is somewhat less for women inmates. Female offenders incarcerated at the administrative unit of the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in Oklahoma City have an average of 37.6-square-feet of space, while those at Hollis Community Work Center are afforded 175-square-feet per inmate.

Within the department, those numbers are compared to a state-accepted standard, which may be modified to reflect actual practices, that stipulates a minimum of 120-square-feet per inmate. The facility report, however, recognized that current population trends prevent the department from adhering to that standard.