Southwest Oklahoma Regional Freight Plan

BUILD Grant Application

South Western Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA)

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https://sortpo.org/freight/

DUNS #: 8497511020000
EIN #: 73-0801022
Funding Opportunity #: DTOS59-20-RA-BUILD

BASIC PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name:	**Southwest Oklahoma Regional Freight Plan**
Sponsor:	**South Western Oklahoma Development Authority**
Was a BUILD application previously submitted?	**NO**

PROJECT COSTS

BUILD Request Amount	**$408,350**
Estimated Federal Funding (excl. BUILD)	**$16,650**
Estimated Non-Federal Funding	**$0**
Future Eligible Project Cost (sum of previous rows)	**$425,000**
Previously Incurred Project Cost	**$0**
Total Project Cost	**$425,000**
Are matching funds restricted?	**NO**

PROJECT LOCATION

State(s) in which project is located:	Oklahoma
Urbanized area in which project is located:	N/A
Population of Urbanized Area:	N/A
Located in an Opportunity Zone?	YES - **Partially**

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

Urban or rural?	**RURAL**
Is the project or a portion of the project currently located NHFN?	**YES**
Is the project or a portion of the project located on the NHS?	**YES**
Do the project components include an intermodal or freight rail project, or freight project within the boundaries of a public or private freight rail, water (including ports), or intermodal facility?	**YES**

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Southwest Oklahoma (the Region) is a critical economic generator for the State of Oklahoma and United States. The Region is host to many growing industries and provides vital freight connections through a robust system of air, rail, and roadway networks which connect energy production (wind, oil, and gas), agriculture production, and military installations to broader statewide and national facilities and supply chains.

Due to the importance of the Region's contribution to local, state, and national economies, a strategic regional freight plan is needed for the Region to plan and coordinate the safe, efficient, and cost-effective movement of commodities and goods. As such, the South Western Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA) seeks a BUILD planning grant to identify investment strategies and prioritize regional freight projects. The goal of the Southwest Oklahoma Regional Freight Plan (the Project) is to strategically direct local, state, and federal resources toward improved system performance for efficient movement of freight. Accordingly, the Project includes a public engagement process intended to promote stakeholder participation from the freight and logistics industry, business community, elected officials, tribal governments, and the general public to find consensus on a prioritized project list. Identifying and prioritizing regional freight investments will allow the Region to maximize state, local, and federal resources.

Figure 1: General Project Location

Freight transportation systems must safely and effectively provide for the efficient and cohesive movement of goods and commodities across multiple municipalities, counties, regions, and states. Because of this, the Project location is defined within the transportation planning jurisdiction of The Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SORTPO), one of Oklahoma's largest regional transportation planning organizations (RTPO). The transportation planning process is funded through State Planning & Research funds and by local funds provided by SWODA and the Association of South Central Oklahoma Governments (ASCOG). ASCOG and SWODA are regional councils of governments. SORTPO' s planning area covers 14,180 square miles and includes 16 counties. SORTPO's location, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, is nestled along the north western border of Texas and serves as a direct link to the economic opportunities in Texas, mainly energy production and agriculture.

Through interstates, state and U.S. highways, and railways, the Region connects to statewide commodity flows and commodity flows in Texas and other regions. Oklahoma's freight network carries goods and commodities to and from Arkansas, California, Kansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Wyoming. Components of Oklahoma's network includes interstate highways and railways, some carrying over 90 million tons of freight each year. In total, over 800 million tons of freight are carried annually through the Oklahoma statewide freight network (air, waterway, railway, and highway combined), valued annually at an estimated $1.3 billion.[1] Because of this, the Region's freight network is transporting more rurally produced goods than it was originally intended to accommodate. For example, in 2019, the American Gypsum Company, manufacturer of gypsum wallboard for the construction industry, alone transported 716,800,000 tons of outbound gypsum wallboard throughout the United States via the Region's freight network. Furthermore, approximately 63 percent of the State's annual freight movement is traveling through the Region, creating wear and tear to the infrastructure while providing no real direct economic benefit to the Region.[2] The Project will help ensure that the Region's freight network will accommodate trips generated by the demand for these rurally produced goods and commodities.

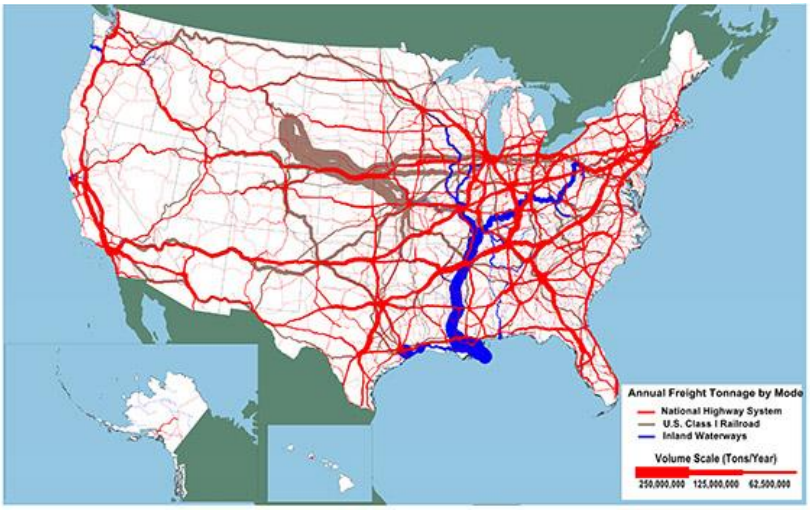
> In total, over ***800 million tons of freight*** are carried annually through the Oklahoma statewide freight network, valued annually at an estimated **$1.3 billion.**[1]

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

Although the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, local governments, rail companies, and Aeronautics Commission continue to invest infrastructure dollars in the Region's freight network to maintain a state of good repair, several challenges currently exist within the network that lead to safety concerns, inefficiencies, and increased maintenance costs. Freight traveling through the network creates congestion, bottlenecks, and excessive idling times. It is forecasted that freight trips will increase and planning for the rehabilitation and expansion of the freight network will be critical[3]. The Project will more precisely forecast economic trends in order to guide the Region's infrastructure investment strategy, providing accelerated project delivery and maintaining a state of good repair. Figure 2 shows annual freight tonnage for all modes throughout the United States[4].

Figure 2: Tonnage on Highways, Railroads, and Inland Waterways: 2007



[1] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 2. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf
[2] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 2. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf
[3] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 4. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf
[4] Freight Facts and Figures 2012. https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/freight_analysis/nat_freight_stats/docs/12factsfigures/figure3_1.htm

Current economic trends (shown in Table 1**Error! Reference source not found.**) identify market trends that impact the Region's freight network[5]. These include increased production of energy and agriculture products, truck platooning, population growth, and increased traffic.

Table 1: Identified Market Trends

	Market Trends
-	National energy independence will require increased production of crude oil, refined petroleum products, natural gas, solar energy and wind energy.
-	The agriculture industry will continue to grow because of the Region's increased production of cattle, cotton, soybean, and wheat.
-	The Region's goods production will facilitate the growth and advancement of retail centers transforming these sites to key distribution centers for local (i.e. family farms) and national businesses (i.e. wallboard).
-	Truck platooning and other new technological advances may further increase the need for facility upgrades.
-	Population growth near retail centers and medical facilities will lead to a greater need for convenient and safe access to jobs in the Region.
-	Rural residents and workers will see an increase in traffic on existing local roads not intended for forecasted freight trips. These residents need continued access to healthcare, schools, and jobs.

At-grade rail crossing. Source: SWODA

Safely transporting operational materials and products associated with these goods and commodities will most likely require facility upgrades (i.e. updating bridge decks and substructures to handy heavy loads), increasing capacity (i.e. new lanes), and implementing safety measures (i.e. rumble strips, passing lanes, rail track and bridge upgrades, and crossing signal upgrades). The Project will assist the Region, stakeholders, and partners in developing solutions to critical issues associated with the market trends above. Current critical issues are shown in Table 2 on the following page.

[5] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 4. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf

Table 2: Critical Issues

Critical Issues	
Peak Origin-Destination Travel Times & Routes	Need for data of current freight movement to, from, and within the region, including general origins and destinations, peak times, routes, and traffic counts.
Projection of Growth Patterns	Modeling projected growth of goods and commodities in 5-year and 10-year timeframes, including land use changes that pinpoint 'hot spot' generating freight trips. (i.e. distribution centers, new rail yards).
Linkage Planning and Logistical Efficiencies	Identification of links that connect mobility of air, truck and rail freight modalities within the Region that can provide efficient distribution of goods and commodities, while potentially addressing safety (i.e. moving freight better suited by train) or homeland security concerns (i.e. routes for military equipment).
Accurate Cost Estimation & Priority Projects	Detailed cost estimates for high-priority projects, and planning-level estimates for others. Establishment of a list of recommended projects, including prioritization, to help ensure monies are available and secured.
Assessment of Current Condition	Assess the current state of truck and rail freight system operations and identify ways to effectively prioritize and address future freight congestion issues, key regional bottlenecks, infrastructure deficiencies, potential technologies to increase flow and safety, and urban and rural land use requirements and policies.
Freight Technologies	Identification of existing and future desired freight technologies and methods that correlate with regional workforce capabilities and capitalize on other regional assets, including research and development of energy alternatives, and emerging technologies.
Barriers and Gaps to Access Jobs, Healthcare, and Services	Identifying gaps and barriers between employers and employees, residents and healthcare, and other safety concerns of rural residents where the transportation network does not promote their mobility.
Streamlining Approval Process	Strategic recommendations and guidance that outlines decision-making processes and targeted regional actions and policies for priority investments within the Region.

Opportunities

This Project will address critical needs within the Region. Oklahoma is committed to an investment strategy that can accommodate the pursuit of national goods and commodity independence, while ensuring residents have safe mobility options. Increased freight efficiencies would produce quantifiable regional economic benefits and reduce adverse impacts to the environment. For example, accelerating projects such as improvements to at-grade crossings and upgrades to lane width and pavement conditions would dramatically increase transportation safety. Updating current systems by providing improvements such as new and widened shoulders would help address issues with oversize/overweight (OS/OW) loads, mainly associated with the regional wind energy, agriculture, and oil and gas industry operations. Identifying these types of accelerated projects would help Oklahoma ensure transportation dollars are maximized with future projects.

Source: www.kswo.com

Source: GreenGeezer

FUNDING REQUEST

The BUILD planning grant funding request for this project is $408,350, which includes allocations for each major component of the Project including public participation, economic and network assessment and gap analysis, innovative technologies consideration, project prioritization, evaluation against performance measures, and a final plan. SWODA and ASCOG receive State Planning and Research (SPR) Funds for 80 percent of the management and oversight of the 16-county regional transportation planning process. ASCOG and SWODA provide local matches comprising 20 percent. The annual planning work program will include funding to oversee the execution of the Project to further leverage federal funding.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Project, supported by the ASCOG and SWODA, boasts numerous supporters, including the Lieutenant Governor, State and Federal Congressional delegations, industry representatives, local business owners, and other stakeholders. These partners understand the importance of the Project and share the common goal of advancing the Southwest Oklahoma Regional Freight Plan in order to prioritize projects and accelerate project delivery. ***Each partner understands the wholistic benefits provided by focusing finite resources on solutions that improve small rural highways and key National Highway Freight Network (NHFN) corridors***. A snapshot of Project partners is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** on the following page; a complete list of partners is provided on the project website[6].

[6] Letters of Support. https://sortpo.org/freight/

Figure 2: Project Partners

Project Partners				
Project Partners	**South Western Oklahoma Development Authority**	**Southwest Oklahoma Regional Transportation Planning Organization**	**Association South Central Oklahoma Governments**	**Oklahoma Department of Transportation**
Lieutenant Governor		 **Matt Pinnell** **State of Oklahoma**		
Congressional Delegation	 **Frank Lucas** **U.S. Representative**	 **Tom Cole** **U.S. Representative**	 **James Inhofe** **U.S. Senator**	
Supporting Agencies and Organizations	Oklahoma Department of Commerce • WATCO American Gypsum • Oklahoma Grain & Feed Association Oklahoma Farm Bureau • Dolese Brothers • Farmrail System, Inc. Wilco MFG/NOV Oklahoma Southwest Alliance • Oklahoma Rail Association			

PROJECT OVERVIEW

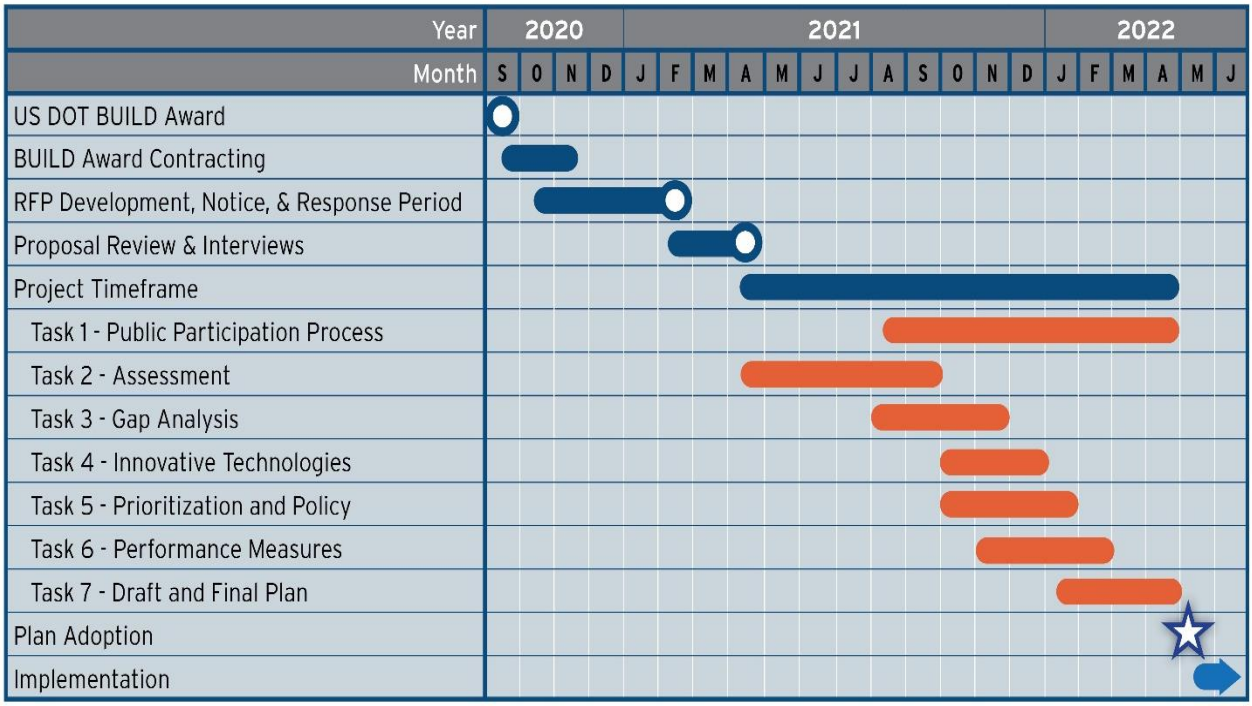
The Project is supported by SORTPO's sixteen countywide long-range transportation plans (LRTP) aimed at identifying issues, opportunities, and trends and influencing transportation decisions for each SORTPO county in the next 20 years.[7] These plans were developed between 2015 and 2019 through a cooperative effort coordinated by SORTPO, the counties, the member jurisdictions, and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT). These county LRTPs will contribute to the Project by providing identified freight and other transportation issues, opportunities, and trends at the county level that can be applied holistically at a regional level.

[7] County Long Rang Plans (LRTP). https://sortpo.org/transportation/country-long-range-plans-lrtp/#

Planning efforts resulting in the delivery of key projects have improved local and national supply chains, while simultaneously improving rural residents' safety and quality of life. The Project will ensure the local, state, and federal resources are efficiently expended. Closely aligning the Project's goals to those from existing regional plans and policies as well as national goals will be a top priority.

As a part of The National Freight Policy outlined in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, states are required to develop a statewide freight plan. ODOT completed its Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (OFTP)[8] in 2017. The Project will integrate existing long-range transportation and freight plans, and will be developed cooperatively between the partner organizations, ODOT, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), local government agencies, economic and community development professionals, and private business and industry professionals. The Project comprises seven phases, illustrated in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Figure 4: Project Phasing and Schedule



The Project has identified seven goal task areas, as shown in Table 3 on the following page, aimed at addressing the market trends and critical issues identified in Table 2. Within these seven goal areas are objectives and example performance metrics that could be used to continually evaluate freight network performance and ensure strategic investments are successful. These objective task areas align with both the state and national freight policies[9]. The final goals and objectives will be determined through the regional freight planning process with input from the Project Partners and stakeholders.

[8] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022). https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf
[9] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022). https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf

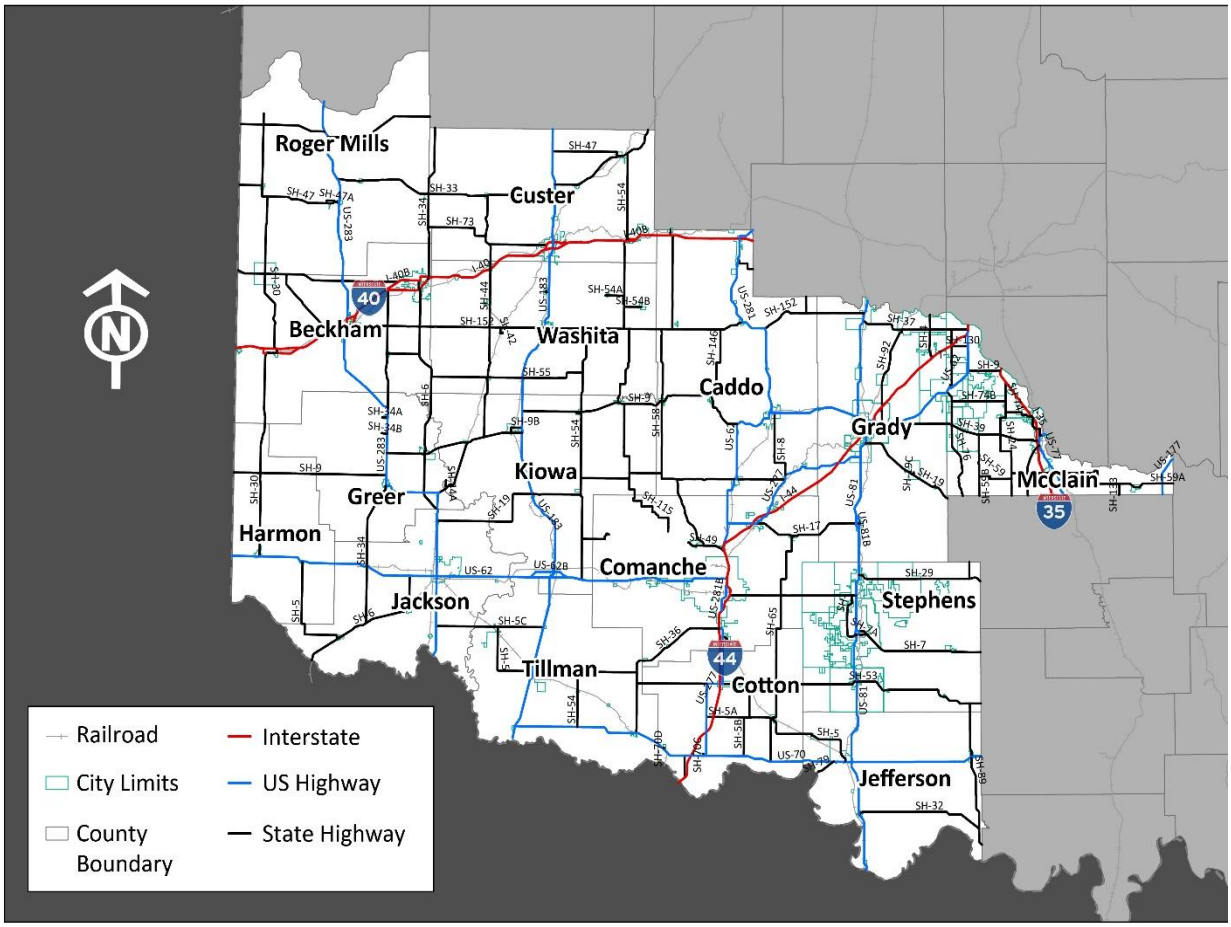
Table 3: Project Objectives and Example Performance Measures

Goal Area	Objective	Example Performance Metric
Safe and Secure Travel	• Provide for a safer, more secure, and resilient transportation system for the Region's residents, businesses and visitors. • Ensure the ability of rural highways to safely accommodate growth in freight traffic.	• Reduced traffic collisions • Reduced highway fatalities • Reduced rail collisions
Infrastructure Preservation	• Support infrastructure preservation and maintenance.	• Highway pavement conditions • Bridge conditions • Railway conditions • Rest areas conditions
Mobility: Choice, Connectivity and Accessibility	• Improve accessibility and mobility for people and freight. • Improve the national defense readiness capability of public highways and railroad infrastructure.	• Reduced traffic delays • Percent of travel meeting Level of Service • Decreased truck idling time
Economic Vitality	• Support a transportation system that enhances regional connectivity, retains existing businesses, promotes new businesses, and enhances freight movements.	• Increased freight travel time reliability • Number of job opportunities created by transportation system per 1-million-dollar investment
Environmental Preservation & Mitigation	• Reduce impacts to the county's natural environment, historic areas and underrepresented communities resulting from transportation programs and projects.	• Tons of mobile emissions from on-road motor vehicles per TMR (PMR) • Number of Alternative Fueling Stations within 1 Mile of Roadway • Number of improvements for water runoff
Efficient Intermodal System Management and Operation	• Improve freight system mobility and operations. • Increase efficiency through modernization of assets and streamlining of processes.	• Utilization of ITS systems for emergency or traffic assistance • Truck hours of delay • Truck planning time • Roadways within freight intensive areas
Regional Collaboration	• Improve the regional transportation system to advance equity and contributes to communities' livability and sustainability while protecting the natural, cultural, and developed environments. • Strengthen partnerships creating opportunities to exchange information, coordinate projects and work together collectively to enhance the region's transportation system.	• Reduction in loss of life between motorist and freight vehicle • Reduction in duration of time and number of road closures

PROJECT LOCATION

The Project encompasses SORTPO's planning area (Figure 5) in the southwest region of Oklahoma along the Texas border. Precise geospatial information is provided on a map on the Project website[10]. SORTPO encompasses 14,180 square miles covering 16 counties (Beckham, Caddo, Comanche, Cotton, Custer, Grady, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Jefferson, Kiowa, McClain, Roger Mills, Stephens, Tillman and Washita), 120 municipalities, 19 conservation districts, two military installations (Fort Sill – Fires Center of Excellence and Altus Air Force Base), 18 higher education campuses/career technology centers, and is home to eight Native American tribes. While much of the Region comprises farming and agricultural lands, there are areas that contain higher population densities, including the cities of Altus, Chickasha, Duncan, Elk City, Lawton, and Weatherford.

Figure 5: SORTPO Freight Map



Within the SORTPO planning area, short-range and long-haul freight trips transport cotton, wheat, wind energy equipment, and oil and gas products, among others. Additionally, access to air cargo locations allows the transport of high-value and rapidly transported goods. Major industries located in the Region that use the freight network include agriculture (grain elevators), mining, oil and gas, and manufacturing.

[10] https://sortpo.org/freight/

The Region is host to major companies, including Goodyear Tire & Rubber Plant (Lawton), Bar S Foods (Lawton, Altus, Elk City and Clinton), Haliburton Technology Center (Duncan) and other Halliburton Energy Services operations, and Family Dollar Distribution Center (Duncan).

Cotton Elevator in Southwest Oklahoma. Source: SWODA

SORTPO's location, nestled along southwest Oklahoma's border with the north western border of Texas, also serves as Oklahoma's direct link to the economic opportunities in Texas, mainly energy production and agriculture are predominant to this part of the U.S. The Project will evaluate connections to industries in other Oklahoma regions and other U.S. states. As such, the Project will assess key freight highway, air, rail, and highway corridors, including highways within the NHFN. The Project's interstate highways include I-44, I-35, and I-40, which are within the NHFN. Key US Highways in the project area include: 62, 70, 81, 183, 283 and 277 and State Highways within the project area include 5, 6, 7, 9, 19, 30, 44, 54, 76, and 152. The Region's rail lines include the two class I railroads: BNSF Railway Company (BNSF) and Union Pacific (UP). There are also four Class III short-line railroads: Farmrail Corporation and Grainbelt Corporation (Farmrail System, Inc), Wichita, Tillman & Jackson Railway, Hollis & Easter Railroad, and Stillwater Central Railroad. Much of the Project is situated in the Great Plains, and the relatively even topography is well-suited for the rail industry. The Class I railroads which serve multiple markets and through traffic in the Region and the Class III railroads provide critical connections to business, such as Farmrail System, Inc's short-line rail freight system that carries approximately 940,000,000 tons of inbound and outbound freight through the Region[11].

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Lawton-Fort Sill Airport provides commercial passenger and cargo air service for southwest Oklahoma. There are two military airports: Altus Air Force Base and Henry Post Army Airfield that serve two Department of Defense (DOD), military installations. There are four regional airports that serve as business jet hubs: Chickasha, Duncan, Elk City and Weatherford. In addition to multiple smaller airports there is the Oklahoma Space and Industrial Development Authority (OSIDA) at Burns Flat which provides a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) controlled, non-restricted airspace corridor.

The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has further revealed the need for United States companies to bring back manufacturing and production from overseas. Southwestern Oklahoma's logistically central location

[11] Freight flows over the last 5 years gathered through the SORTPO Freight Working Group network

along major freight corridors, and relative location to Oklahoma City, make the Region prime for manufacturing growth opportunities. This is illustrated by private railroad investments, including $16.5 million in short-line rail infrastructure improvements[12], that will increase the compatibility and connectivity to rail operations outside of the Region and shows private commitment to regional economic expansion.

> *"The coronavirus pandemic is causing us to rethink concentrations of population and industry that have created high-cost, high-risk urbanized areas of commutation dependency, prompting a strategy to revive America's rural heartland for economic, safety, social and health reasons and made possible by modern communications technology and established transportation arteries."*
>
> – George Betke, CEO of Farmrail System,

The Project area covers a network of interstate highway, rail, and air corridors that traverse both rural and urban areas. As such, the Project network passes through several Opportunity Zones located in more densely populated areas (see Figure 6). In total, 10 Census Tracts in eight SORTPO counties have been designated Opportunity Zones. Although portions of the project corridors are within these designated areas, the character of southwest Oklahoma is predominantly rural. Commodities such as wheat, cotton, and petroleum products flow through the Region's freight networks and the rural nature of the Region provides abundant opportunity for the agriculture, oil and gas, and wind industries.

Figure 6: SORTPO Opportunity Zones

[12]Farmrail Letter of Support. http://sortpo.org/freight/

GRANT FUNDS, SOURCES, AND USES OF PROJECT FUNDING

SWODA along with their state and local partners are excited about the opportunity to leverage federal funds in this rural part of the nation for a much-needed regional freight plan. SWODA requests $408,350 in BUILD discretionary grand funds to coordinate the safe, efficient, and cost-effective movement of goods throughout the region. This request would cover 96 percent of the total project cost. The Region's expansive rural freight network and current fiscal constraints and uncertainties have exhausted all available funding sources for the Project and BUILD funding is needed to ensure the Project's completion. The total cost of the Project is listed in Table 4 and includes a breakdown of how funds will be spent for the Project. Additionally, the Project's funding sources are provided in **Error! Reference source not found.** While the Project does not include a formal "local match," SORTPO will manage and administer the Project through State Planning and Research (SPR) Funds matched by SWODA and ASCOG.

Table 4: Project Cost

Componment	Cost	Percent
Materials & Supplies	$20,000	5%
Task 1 - Public Participation Process	$75,000	18%
Task 2 - Network Assessment	$85,000	20%
Task 3 - Gap Analysis	$46,000	11%
Task 4 - Innovative Technologies	$42,000	10%
Task 5 - Project & Policy Prioritization	$52,000	12%
Task 6 - Performance Measure Evaluation	$32,000	8%
Task 7 - Draft and Final Plan	$73,000	17%
Total Project Cost	**$425,000**	**100%**

Table 5: Project Funding Source

Funding Source	Amount	Percent
SPR Funds	$16,650	4%
BUILD Funds	$408,350	96%
Total Project Funds	**$425,000**	**100%**

In addition to ODOT, SWODA, ASCOG, and local partners continue to prioritize investment in the SORTPO transportation network. This is evidenced by ODOT's investments of roughly $198,000,000 dollars committed over the next 5 years for 97 county bridge projects and 150 miles of county roadway improvements, such as the U.S. 81 Realignment Project. Additional transportation investments include the following, among others: [13]

- Over $29,000,000 in local and private contributions to roadway and bridge improvements
- Approximately $4,700,000 in railroad crossing upgrades
- Approximately $6,400,000 in Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission projects

SAFETY

The Region's network of rural highways that once served small farm-to-market transport of agricultural goods and machinery now supports large-scale commercial farming and energy sector operations. In addition to this, feral swine populations have dramatically increased in the area, creating safety issues when these and other animals cross roadways. Extreme weather events, unsafe at-grade rail crossings, and trucks traveling through residential and commercial areas also threaten the safety of those traveling through Southwest Oklahoma.

Feral hog on roadway. Source: nps.gov

The change to larger-scale agricultural operations has increased the number of OS/OW trucks utilizing rural highways and the NHFN. Many rural highways lack modern safety design that have been proven to reduce fatalities and collisions. OS/OW freight trucks regularly enter and exit roadways at slow speeds with little acceleration, causing conflicts with other motorists and increasing the likelihood of vehicular incidents. Narrow roadways, few passing lanes, limited sight distance, and lack of shoulders make it difficult for motorists to pass OS/OW freight trucks safely. In 2017, Comanche County ranked fifth (first being the worst) out of 77 Oklahoma Counties for the total number of fatality and injury crashes.[14] Safety is SORTPO and ODOT's top priority, and the Project intends to identify crash hotspots, opportunities for safety-related improvements, and strategies for implementing technology to inform drivers of weather-related events to improve the Region's safety and decrease vehicle incidents.

Feral hog populations in Oklahoma are estimated between 600,000 and 1.5 million and these animals are most active at night when visibility is low.[15] Large hogs enter roadways, sometimes unseen, colliding with vehicles or forcing drivers to swerve off roadways, causing injury and/or vehicle damage. Livestock and deer entering roadways also threaten the safety of those traveling through the Region. The Project aims

[13] Known Transportation Investments in SW Oklahoma, Private and Local. SWODA, 2020.

[14] https://public.tableau.com/profile/ohso4757#!/vizhome/OHSODashboard_0/StatewideCrashesDashboard-Large

[15] Feral Hogs. https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/feral-hogs/learn

to identify wildlife crossing hotspots as well as opportunities to implement wildlife detection techniques to reduce the amount of interactions with wildlife on the Region's roadways.

Extreme weather events are a common occurrence for the Region and include excessively high temperatures, significant rain and flooding events, earthquakes, and tornados. The Region's flat terrain and waterways make it prone to flooding, which often impacts the transportation system and can lead to damaged infrastructure along roads, bridges and rail lines[16]. Flooding on roadways and bridges threatens the safety of drivers who are unaware of the dangers of driving through flood waters, even at seemingly shallow depths. Adding innovative technologies along the roadways would help inform drivers of extreme weather events, provide network redundancy during an event, improve resiliency of roadway reconstruction, and improve safety.

Example of flooding on roadways in Southwest Oklahoma (Source: ODOT)

The Region has numerous at-grade rail crossings that need improvements and signalization upgrades. Large trucks and rail cars carrying chemicals and petroleum products pose a high risk in a collision causing chemical and petroleum spills. In 2018, all fatal train involved crashes in Oklahoma happened in rural areas,[17] making these improvements a top priority for the Region. The Project aims to identify locations of signal crossings in need of upgrades.

The Region's areas with higher population densities, such as the cities of Lawton, Elk City, Duncan, Chickasha, Weatherford, and Altus, are key activity centers for retail that facilitate distribution of goods and commodities as well as provide healthcare, schools, and places to live for workers. Major companies and industries located in or near these cities generate large amounts of freight traffic, such as the Family Dollar Distribution Center in Duncan which alone produces 1,000 truckloads per week and carries enough product for three stores. When large freight trucks travel through commercial and residential areas, they can create conflicts with rail cars and those traveling by car, bike, or foot, threatening safety and disrupting network efficiency. It is of vital importance that rural residents and workers safely get to and from their destinations, and the Project will identify conflict areas such as these for potential future rerouting studies.

Assessing hotspots of vehicle, train, natural disaster, wildlife, and resident incidents will help in the identification of priority projects that can help decrease injury and loss of life and enhance quality of life for the Region. The Project will assess and identify potential safety improvement methods, such as those identified in Table 6 on the following page. These methods below align with already outlined technologies and strategies included in the ODOT Freight Plan and other federal disaster preparedness materials.

[16] https://www.odot.org/p-r-div/lrp_2015_2040/2040_LRTP_Full_Document.pdf,

[17] http://ohso.ok.gov/Websites/ohso/images/CrashBooks/2018/2018_S6_MiscTransport.pdf

Table 6: Potential Safety Improvement Methods

Safety Need	Potential Method
Rural Roadway and Highway Upgrades	• Adding rumble strips alerts drivers diverging from their lane and will help prevent or lessen the severity of crashes. • Adding shoulders, passing lanes, and clear zones to allow trucks and other vehicles to safely pull over, safely pass other vehicles, or minimize collision opportunities. • Adding wildlife detection devices in areas with high animal crossings warning vehicles of animals detected in roadways.
Natural Disaster Planning & Upgrades	• Add new technologies like real-time signs, systems that capture and report safety-related issues, and other technologies that ensure timely information to motorist and emergency personnel.
Hazardous Route Planning & Upgrades	• Planned routes for the safe transport of hazardous materials. • Emergency coordination in case of emergency or spill.
Rail Crossing Improvements	• Provide visibility and enhanced signalization to reduce collisions with trains.
Network Redundancy & Multimodal Safety	• Provide a grid network when possible for motorists to access local emergency service. • Add acceleration/deceleration lanes in areas of higher population densities and major industries (i.e. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Plant, Family Dollar Distribution Center)

STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Increased demand on the freight network will involve additional maintenance and operational improvements to ensure that freight continues to move safely and efficiently. The total inbound, outbound, and through movement within the state is forecasted to grow by 1.4 billion tons by 2040. [18] Increased demand necessitates increased OS/OW loads and superloads (heavy cargo loads that typically weigh 180,000 pounds or more). Loads of this size create faster deterioration of pavement and bridges resulting in poor driving conditions.

> The total inbound, outbound, and through, movement within the state is forecasted to ***grow by 1.4 billion tons by 2040.***

This is exemplified by US 81 in Grady County, an identified bottleneck location in the OFTP which carries superloads. This highway is used to transport energy, agricultural, and other heavy goods leading to substantial deterioration of the roadway condition. [19] In 2014, the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety

[18] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 2. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf
[19] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 5. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf

issued over 253,000,000 OS/OW and superload permits, or roughly 693 per day[20]. The Project will use quantifiable data to identify corridors like US 81 and needed investments that can facilitate State of Good Repair.

Oklahoma rail lines located within the Project area include BNSF, UP, and several Class III short-line rail lines. BNSF serves 966 route miles throughout Oklahoma. The Region hosts four short-line railroads that provide critical connections to businesses in various parts of the state which plays an essential role to the local economies. These railroads are critical to the transport of cotton, wheat, minerals and hydrocarbon. Additionally, new or upgraded facilities have the potential to reduce bottlenecks in urban areas if rail infrastructure cannot support the increased demand. For example, rail bottlenecks in Jackson and Tillman Counties and south of Eldorado to Quanah, Texas are primarily due to bridges and tracks that are not able to support the weight requirements of the cotton industry. Several challenges to maintaining the short-line rail system's state of good repair include:[21]

Farmrail System Inc. short-line railroad. Source: Farmrail System Inc

- **Track Upgrades:** Upgrade critical lines to accommodate higher capacity and heavier weight cars.
- **Unit Train Capacity:** Ensure lines can hold unit train capacity (minimum of 110 cars).
- **Corridor Preservation:** Program to help retain abandoned rail lines for future rail use.

The Project will further identify, quantify and prioritize superloads and bottlenecks that impede freight movement by roadway and rail to increase the efficiency of the system and aid in preparation for freight growth. Resulting upgrades will enable Oklahoma to maintain a competitive freight transportation economy, ensure compliance with industry standards.

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

The primary goal of the Project is to strategically direct local, state, and federal resources toward improved system performance for agricultural operations, industries, and facilities that attract, generate, and distribute significant amount of freight contributing to both local and national economies. Oklahoma's natural resources provide opportunities for energy and agricultural production, transportation, and distribution. As part of the United States' national defense, energy, and food independence, Oklahoma and the Region need to continually optimize the opportunity to generate and export resources, including

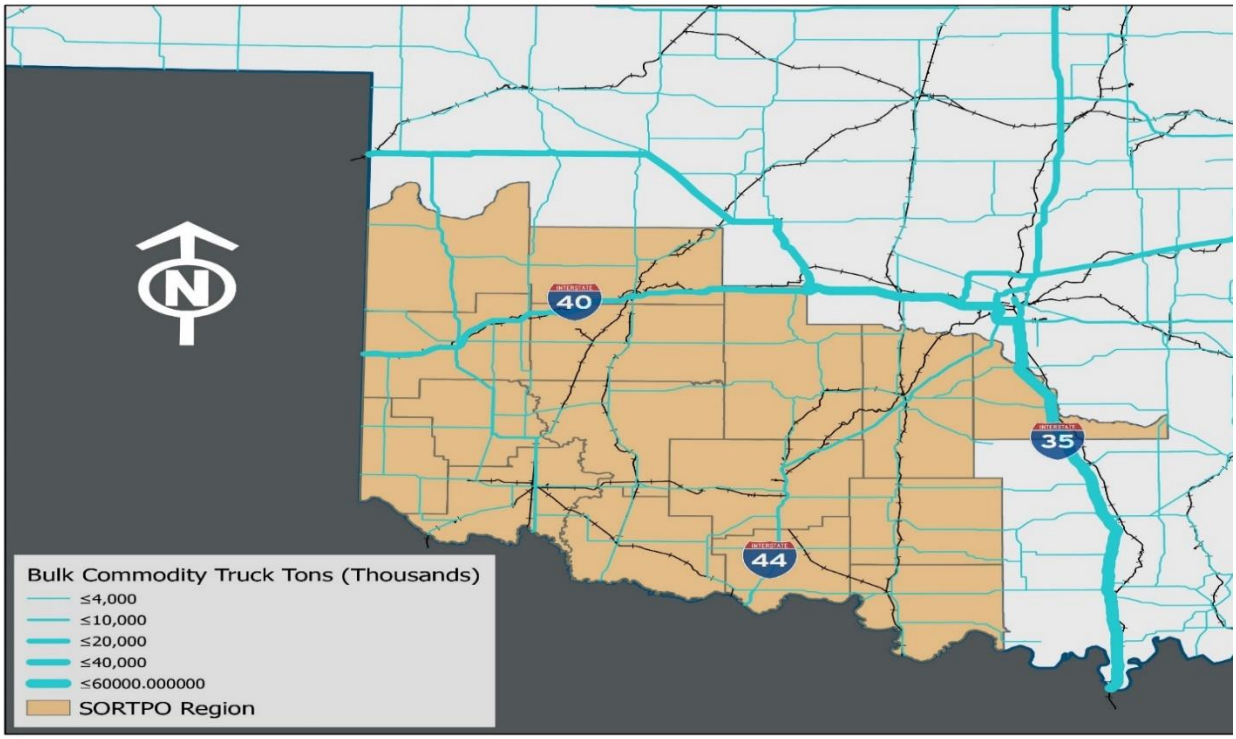
[20] http://www.swpermitsok.com/Oklahoma%20Update%20Newsletter%20Volume%201%20Issue%201.pdf

[21] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 2. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf

minerals, refined petroleum products, and agriculture. In portions of the Region's freight network, up to 60,000,000 tons of freight is transported annually, as shown in Figure 7. Oklahoma supplies agricultural products throughout the U.S. and internationally. In total, Oklahoma shipped $5.4 billion worth of goods around the globe in 2017.[22] Truck freight traffic in the State of Oklahoma is projected to grow by 46 percent between 2015 and 2045.[23]

In total, ***Oklahoma shipped $5.4 billion worth of goods around the globe in 2017.***[1] Truck freight traffic in the State of Oklahoma is projected ***to grow by 46 percent between 2015 and 2045.***[1]

Figure 7: Regional Freight Flows



The Project will provide the investment strategy critical to ensuring the freight network is in a state of good repair, preserving prior infrastructure investment and facilitating new opportunities for goods movement. Emerging markets include energy, transportation and distribution, agricultural and biosciences, military, and information and finances.[24] Specific to the Region, the energy, transportation and distribution, and agricultural and biosciences are most prevalent, though there is strong military presence including Altus Air Force Base and Fort Sill Fires Center of Excellence. These industries not only contribute to the United States' energy and food independence, but also provide jobs to rural Americans in various Opportunity Zones certified by the Secretary of the US Treasury. Providing an investment

[22] World's Top Exports, Oklahoma's Top 10 Exports. http://www.worldstopexports.com/oklahomas-top-10-exports/

[23] ODOT Freight Plan HIS Markit Transearch

[24] https://www.newsmax.com/FastFeatures/industries-in-oklahoma-economy/2015/04/13/id/638098/

strategy for roadway improvements, technology enhancements, and safety improvements will improve efficiency, reduce delay, and minimize conflicts on the transportation network between commerce and residents. The Project will also leverage the investments in developments such as the Altus Reservoir Project, which is currently in the planning phase and aims to encourage economic development along the Altus Reservoir Trail Loop.[25]

Table 7 highlights potential methods to reduce congestion, deterioration, delay, crashes, and potential subsequent economic impact. The Project will assess the opportunities to incorporate these methods into projects included in the investment strategy.

Table 7: Economic Competitiveness Methods and Benefits

	Methods to Facilitate Financial Security & Quality of Life	Key Benefit to Economy
A	New shoulders, passing lanes, barriers, wrong-way signage, bridge heightening, and separated rail grade crossings.	Creates a safe transportation system for movement of goods large and small.
B	Pavement technologies that increase useful life and reduce maintenance costs.	Withstand heavy loads from agricultural materials and area conditions.
C	Include water treatment, soil treatment, and erosion control within projects.	Ensures the "Great Plains" natural resources our preserved, particularly areas that produce United States food supplies.
D	Protect and build upon ongoing investments in the energy sector corridors.	For national and economic security make the United States less vulnerable to price and supply fluctuations in the Middle East and elsewhere.
E	Upgrade the system to include conflict detection, signage and features for semi or autonomous vehicle systems that capture and report safety-related issues, cybersecurity, and ITS.	Has multiple benefits, including prevention of loss of life during extreme weather events, providing route information for freight vehicles in order to maximize drive-times, and provides emergency services real-time information for threats to national security.
F	Follow US DOT Every Day Counts that help to rapidly deploy and shorten project delivery.	Benefit as many users as quickly as possible, accelerated project delivery.
G	Improve access to facilities including a modernized grid.	Provide measurably increased safety and efficiency for rural workers to access industry.
H	Infrastructure that will facilitate easy connection of interstate travel between other states commerce, using technology and governmental coordination.	Using new technologies that are optimal for area conditions.

[25] https://www.altusok.gov/198/Altus-Reservoir-Project

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is a priority for Southwest Oklahoma. Maintaining air quality standards, fertile agricultural areas, and improving stormwater drainage on freight networks will improve the quality of life for residents in the Region. Clean energy production and fueling will further improve air quality while bolstering the regional economy. The Project provides the following improvements to support a more sustainable environment.

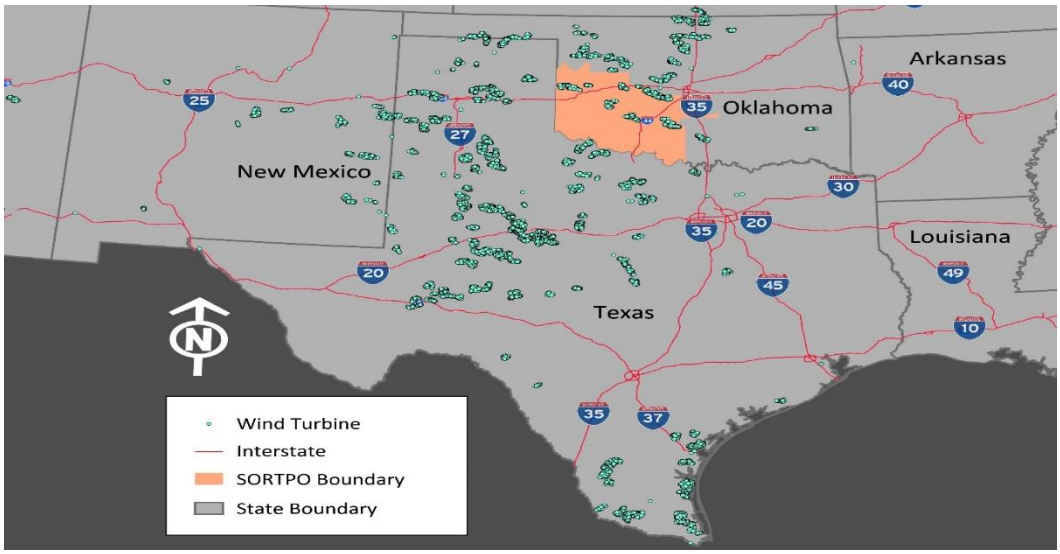
CLEAN ENERGY

Oklahoma has maintained its leadership in the energy sector for many decades and will continue to do so in the future. As the demand for clean energy increases and coal and petroleum demands decrease, Oklahoma is poised to adjust its energy production methods to meet the demand. In the Region, wind energy and natural gas production offer more environmentally viable options over fossil fuels and enhance air quality and quality of life.

WIND ENERGY

Oklahoma produces a significant amount of wind energy. The state has almost 8,200 Mega Watts (MW) of installed wind capacity and supports between 6,000 and 7,000 wind energy jobs.[26] In 2015, Oklahoma ranked third in the nation in net electricity generation from wind, and the Region's wind energy industry is growing.[27] As shown in Figure 8, The Region has over 1,151 wind turbines at 18 different projects already in operation and one more project in Custer County is currently in the planning phase.[28] Bolstering the functions of this industry will lead to greater industry capacity and increased environmental sustainability.

Figure 8: SORTPO Wind Turbine Locations



[26] America Wind Energy Association, 2017, Wind Facts at a Glance. https://www.awea.org/wind-101/basics-of-wind-energy/

[27] Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan (2018-2022), Chapter 4. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/OKFreightPlan2018_2022.pdf

[28] U.S. Wind Turbine Database. https://eerscmap.usgs.gov/uswtdb/viewer/#7.29/34.901/-97.433

By upgrading freight network facilities, OS/OW vehicles carrying wind energy equipment and machinery may travel through the network more efficiently making this industry even more attractive to potential investors and contributing to improved environmental sustainability. This will not only improve industry operations in the Region but will facilitate the movement of wind energy equipment to and from surrounding states and other Oklahoma regions.

Oversize road freight. Source: Tulsa World

ALTERNATE FUEL CORRIDORS [29]

As part of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, FHWA designated specific US highway corridors for electric vehicle (EV) charging, hydrogen, propane, and compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling. In 2016, the Region's I-35, I-40, and I-44 corridors were designated as alternate fuel corridors for EV charging and CNG fueling[30]. The Project will expand this effort by identifying additional opportunity locations for charging stations and compressed natural gas stations in Southwest Oklahoma along these designated Alternate Fuel Corridors. This supports ongoing US DOT measures, like providing fuels for transit vehicles.

REDUCED CONGESTION-RELATED EMISSIONS

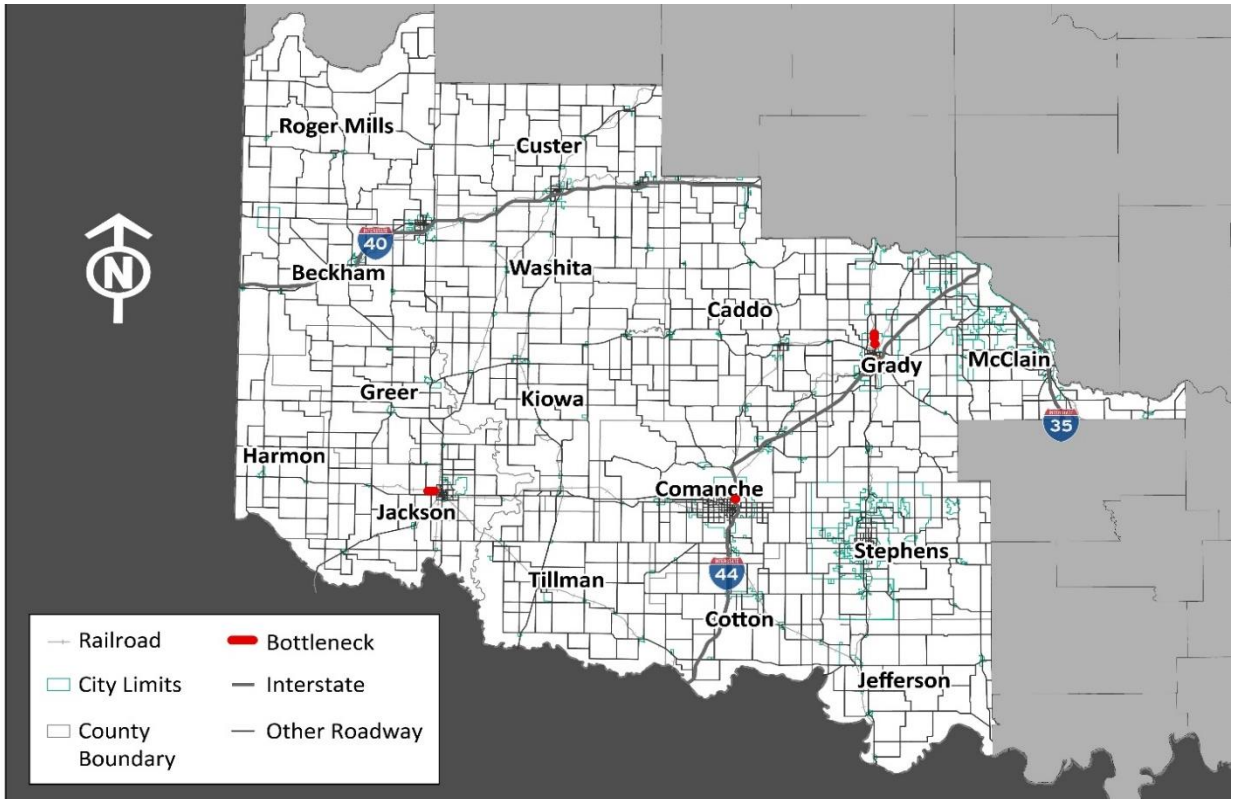
Bottlenecks and other disruptions to the freight network increase idling times creating unnecessary emissions. Federally mandated air quality standards must be upheld, and systematic reductions of vehicle emissions is critical. Within the Region, three roadway bottleneck locations have been identified (shown in Figure 9 on the following page), one along US-277 at the I-44 on-ramp in Chickasha, one along US-62 at the I-44 on ramp in Lawton, and one in Altus on Market St. A vital component of the Project is to reduce bottlenecks in the regional freight network by identifying opportunities to increase freight network efficiencies. This effort would expand upon current truck route planning and feasibility studies, such Lawton Metropolitan Planning Organization's Feasibility of a Freight Route for the Lawton West Side Industrial Park[31], aimed at rerouting truck traffic to circumvent residential areas and reduce bottlenecks. Creating bypasses to these and other congested urban areas within the Region and improving freight network efficiency would reduce time spent in traffic, thereby reducing adverse environmental impacts by improving air quality.

[29] U.S. DOT Alternative Fuel Corridors. https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/alternative_fuel_corridors/

[30] Corridor-Ready Alternative Fuel Corridors (2016). https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/alternative_fuel_corridors/ready_2016/

[31] Feasibility of a Freight Route for the Lawton West Side Industrial Park, Lawton Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2015

Figure 9: SORTPO Bottleneck Locations



REDUCED STORMWATER IMPACTS

With any new improvements to the regional freight network, including new roadways, roadway widening, or the addition of passing lanes, design considerations for stormwater will be made to help reduce runoff and filter sediment. This is especially important given the relatively high amounts of stormwater runoff that agricultural lands produce when compared with forested lands[32] Southwest Oklahoma's flat terrain and numerous rivers and creeks make it especially prone to flooding, causing disruptions to the regional freight network. The Project will plan for improvements that will follow the ODOT Roadway Drainage Manual,[33] the standard for designing and planning roadway drainage systems for the State of Oklahoma. As a part of this, best management practices for stormwater improvements will be used and include improvements such as detention ponds, catch basins, and rain gardens, among others. These improvements will help prevent issues such as flooding that can slow or halt traffic, overtax the stormwater drainage systems, degrade water quality, and cause stormwater-related damage to adjacent properties.

[32] Stormwater Management: Best Management Practices (BMPs). https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/ess-nps-savvy-bmp_209386_7.pdf

[33] ODOT Roadway Drainage Manual. https://www.ok.gov/odot/documents/Chapter%2010%20Stormwater%20Drainage.pdf

QUALITY OF LIFE

The Region is part of a tri-state area known as the "Southern Great Plains" comprising Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. This area accounts for a quarter of all US energy production,[34] and thus significantly contributes to America's high standard of living. The economy of the United States depends on freight connections to this area for the movement of goods and commodities that contribute to a high quality of life for Americans.

A fundamental component of a high quality of life is access to jobs. As investment in the production and transportation industries increases in the Region, so will employment opportunities for its rural residents. In 2019, freight, logisticians, transportation and material moving, and production-related occupations accounted for roughly 12% of the Region's occupations.[35] As these employment numbers continue to grow, so will the need for reliable transportation to and from these locations, including access to higher education and vocational training facilities. The Project will aim to identify investment strategies that improve the access to jobs of rural residents.

Students at a regional technology center train to become certified aircraft mechanics. Source: Altus.af.mil

The Project will also aim to identify technologies and strategies that improve the freight network while simultaneously expanding access to broadband internet for rural residents. By expanding broadband service along interstates and highways as well as preparing for future expansion, the Region's potential to implement innovative technologies increases. Innovative technologies can enhance safety, efficiency, and quality of life and help ensure economic competitiveness. Wireless broadband can be used to integrate and expand police, fire, and health services. Broadband internet can also enable the nearby communities to attract and retain job-creating businesses and improve the productivity of home-based businesses by competing in regional and global markets. The Coronavirus pandemic further exposed the need for broadband in rural communities as schools and resources shut down, leaving many areas unable to virtually access necessary resources[36].

Furthermore, roadway improvements that benefit freight movement will also improve residential access to emergency services. This improved roadway network, in conjunction with expanded broadband availability, will help improve access to medical care through transportation to in-office visits and telemedicine capabilities. Figure 10 on the following page details the locations of these facilities in the Project area and potential distances emergency personnel are required to travel to reach those within the Region.

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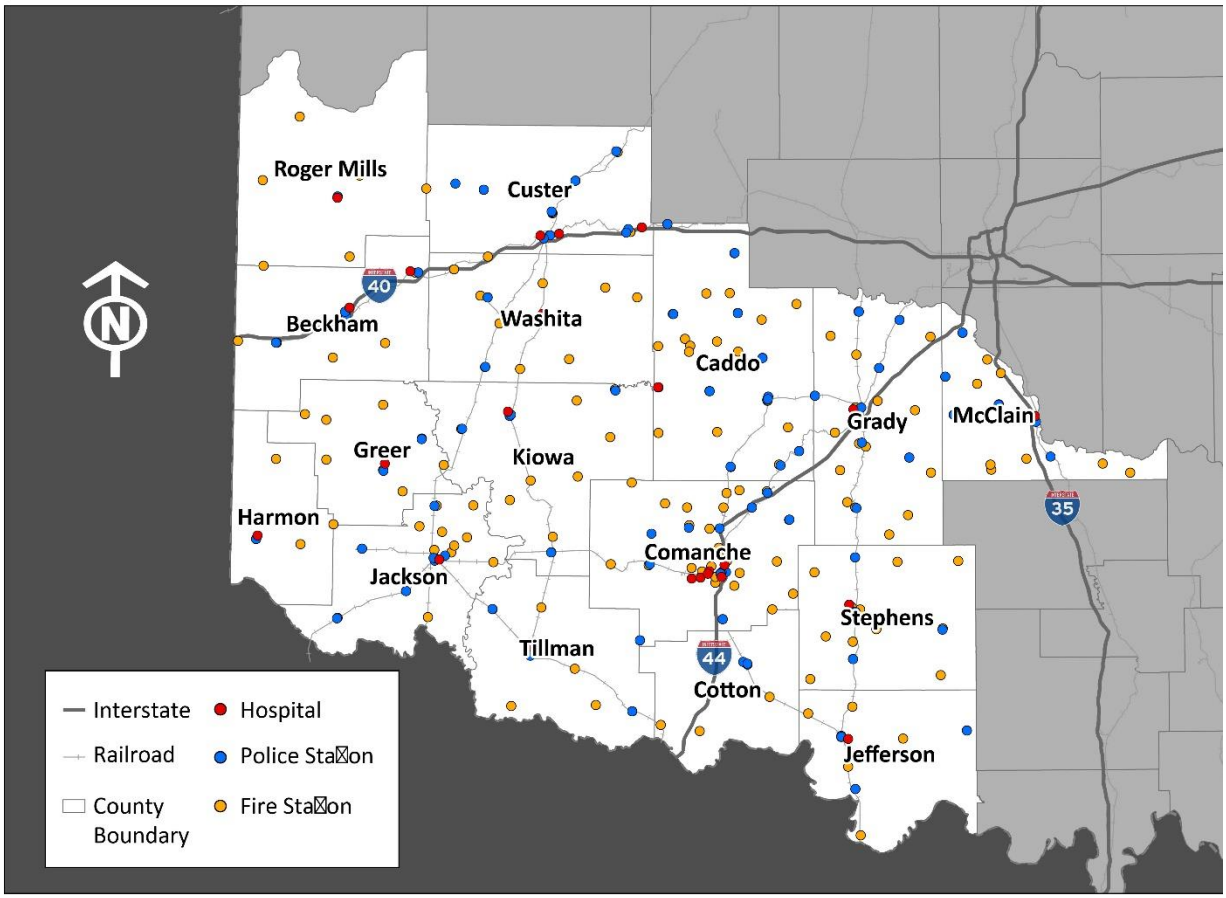
[34] U.S. Energy Information Administration, Electricity Data Browser. https://www.eia.gov/electricity/data/browser/

[35] https://www.ok.gov/oesc/Labor_Market/Occupational_Employment_Statistics/

[36] https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/internet/rural-broadband-coronavirus/

Figure 10: SORTPO Emergency Services Locations



INNOVATION

As mentioned above, the Region, like many other rural areas throughout the country, lacks the essential broadband and cellular service needed to conduct the every-day activities of a modern world. In addition to expanding broadband service, the Region will identify new technological innovations into the investment strategy as they arise that are aimed at improving transportation and quality of life. To help with this effort, innovative financing techniques would expand access to capital funds for transportation improvement projects. The following innovation methods will be incorporated into the Project and successful delivery is highlighted below.

BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

Ensuring reliable high-speed service for the area will encourage economic competitiveness and growth and improve quality of life for those living and working in the Region. Furthermore, strategic installation of broadband and cellular infrastructure will allow implementation of innovative transportation technologies throughout the Region, such as connected and autonomous vehicle (CAV) and truck platoon deployment, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), wildlife detection signals, and vehicle-to-infrastructure communications. To date, fiber optic cable has been installed along I-44, from Duncan to Altus, and from Altus to Clinton, but more is needed. The Project will identify gaps in broadband service

in the Region and how to effectively plan and promote for the delivery of reliable and connected service. ODOT has identified that, at a minimum, the Region's NHFN interstate corridors should be equipped with continuous high-speed service, and additional highway and roadway corridors will be identified.

REDUCING RURAL ROADWAY DEPARTURES

Reducing fatalities on rural roadways is a priority for the region. Providing countermeasures, such as shoulders, centerline rumble strips, friction treatments, and roadway reflectors, helps keep vehicles in their lanes, preventing or reducing the severity of crashes on rural roads. Wildlife detection signals can also prevent roadway departures and crashes by warning oncoming drivers if wildlife is detected on roadways. The Project will identify crash hotspots, problem areas, and areas with frequent wildlife crossings for application of these and other corrective measures, thereby improving safety along roadways in Southwest Oklahoma.

OKLAHOMA INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The Oklahoma Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Program[37] uses ODOT's 2,600 linear miles of fiber optic cable to improve transportation throughout the state. Through expanded broadband internet deployment, the Region can increase its participation in this program to improve transportation efficiency and safety. This program specifically benefits the movement of freight by offering the following initiatives:

- Dynamic message signs,
- Road weather information system,
- Bluetooth sensors to provide commercial motor vehicle origin and destination data, and
- Vehicle-to-infrastructure communications

Example of Dynamic message sign

While fiber optic cable already exists along a few of the Region's corridors, more is needed. This would allow technologies such as probe data to monitor speed and provide real-time traffic information. Cameras and weather sensors could provide notification of weather and road conditions. Furthermore, signal cabinets and transmission infrastructure should provide more space than needed to allow for expansion in the future. The Project will identify locations where the ITS Program can be incorporated.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As outlined in FHWA's Every Day Counts-5 Innovations, Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) is used to obtain a broader reach during the public engagement process. The Region's vastness and rural nature can create challenges to attending public meetings and utilization of virtual meetings in some situations would help the general public provide valuable input to freight issues and concerns. The deployment of high-speed

[37] https://www.odot.org/hqdiv/p-r-div/itscvo/pdfs/statestrategic04.pdf

fiber-optic cable along freight corridors will facilitate the application of VPI as part of future public involvement efforts throughout the Region. The Project will identify places where VPI can be incorporated.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

As identified by FHWA's Center for Innovative Finance, utilizing Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) will help deliver roadway projects by providing private capital for transportation improvement. P3s would allow creativity and efficiency to help attract freight industries to the Region. The Project will identify P3 funding opportunities along the regional freight network to help enable regional economic growth by providing capital and accelerated project delivery. This includes opportunities for P3 tolling leases that provide upfront capital and monthly revenues to help fund transportation improvement projects. In 2017, Oklahoma passed a senate bill to outline the structure of P3 infrastructure project assessment[38]. The State's Oklahoma Turnpike Authority currently maintains tolling along I-44 in Grady, Comanche, and Cotton Counites[39], and utilizing P3 tolling in addition to State tolling would provide access to much-needed private capital. The Project will evaluate the potential to leverage additional public and private partnerships such as these throughout the Region.

PARTNERSHIP

SWODA, ASCOG, ODOT, and other partners are committed to improving conditions and safety on Oklahoma's transportation network. Working under the SWODA umbrella, SORTPO will administer the Project through SWODA's funding administration and oversight. ODOT's Field Divisions 3, 5, and 7 are responsible for project identification and implementation receiving input from SORTPO, stakeholder/public participation events, regional partners, counties, and municipalities.

The Project will guide freight investments to support the Region's freight and economic visions and goals for safety, efficiency, equity, community development, and sustainability. The final plan recommendations are intended to be incorporated into partner agencies' specific long-range freight development plans to promote regional efficiency and consistency. This effort will be led by SORTPO staff with direct oversight by the SORTPO Policy Board.

SORTPO stakeholder engagement as part of the Countywide Long-Range Transportation Plans. Source: SWODA

Since 2015, 16 countywide long-range transportation plans have been adopted by the SORTPO Policy Board whose members, along with those of the SORTPO Transportation Technical Committee, include representation from the private sector. Regional partners and stakeholders through surveys and meetings identified a higher preference for projects that improve

[38] https://www.levelset.com/blog/new-legislation-for-oklahoma-p3-projects-and-infrastructure/
[39] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turnpikes_of_Oklahoma

safety, freight movement and support economic development. Strategies identified in each of the county plans include:

- Conducting a freight assessment and study for the Region,
- Prioritize transportation projects that serve major employment and activity centers, rail facilities and freight corridors, and
- Identify and designate routes and connections as freight priority corridors.

SORTPO works closely with many regional organizations and local municipalities, businesses and freight stakeholders. Various entities in the Region have shown their support for the project by providing letters of support. Some of these partners include:

- Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell, State of Oklahoma
- House of Representatives:
    - Representative Marcus McEntire, District 50
    - Representative Brad Boles, District 51
- Lyle Roggow, President, Duncan Area Economic Development Foundation
- George C. Betke, Jr, Chairman, Farmrail System, Inc.
- Brad Boles, General Manager, WILCO/NOV Completion & Production Solutions
- Kermit A. Frank, Jr., Director, Communications and Community Relations, Dolese Brothers Co.
- Roland Mower, Director Clinton Economic Development Authority
- Laura McNichol, Senior Vice President, Government & Industry Relations, Watco Companies
- Clark Southard, Chairman Oklahoma Southwest Alliance

All letters of support can be found in the *Letters of Support* section on the project website[40].

RISK ASSESSMENT

Because this is a planning project, and no construction or project delivery-related risks directly apply, risk assessment is not required for funding eligibility. However, SORTPO, SWODA, ASCOG, and ODOT are committed to delivering this project and tangible results associated with the Project. As a part of this commitment, ODOT's Division 5 and 7 engineers are voting members of the SORTPO Transportation Policy Board and have provided a joint letter in support of the Project. The District Engineers are active in this program to help ODOT identify safety issues and make informed decisions on project prioritization for the Region. Additionally, through the annual Planning Work Program, SPR and local funds are committed to the regional transportation planning process allowing staff to begin the work immediately on this project ensuring that the Project will be prioritized.

[40] Letters of Support. http://sortpo.org/freight/

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT BENEFITS

The Project will identify critical freight and transportation needs within the Region. The SORTPO Region is committed to an investment strategy that can accommodate the pursuit of national goods and commodity independence, while ensuring residents have safe mobility options. Increases in freight efficiencies would identify and produce quantifiable regional economic benefits and reduce adverse impacts to the environment. Improving at-grade crossings and upgrading lane widths and pavement conditions would dramatically increase transportation safety. Updating current systems by providing improvements such as new and widened shoulders would help address issues with oversize/overweight loads.

Through broad public involvement, stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and project prioritization, the Project will create a wholistic and project-specific approach that addresses the issues important to the Region. Identifying these types of accelerated projects will help Oklahoma ensure transportation dollars are maximized with future projects. Creating cohesive freight vision for the Region will enable system efficiency and the realization of goals for freight movement within the Region.