



**OKLAHOMA**  
Transportation



# Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project

## *Project Description*

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**FY23 MPD GRANT APPLICATION**

**MPD Grant Request: \$20 million**

## 1. Project Description

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The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project (Project) is a critical 6.25-mile-long infrastructure investment that will improve safety, quality of life, and economic opportunity for Hochatown and the surrounding communities in rural McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The Project will include the reconstruction of US Highway 259 (US-259), more than 1 mile of new sidewalk, 2 miles of new street lighting, and a 1.8-mile multiuse trail. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) requests \$20 million in Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) Program/Rural funding to support the construction of a new, multi-use pedestrian trail and the reconstruction of US-259 to improve vehicular operations and enhance safety for all roadway users.

### 1.1 PROJECT NEED

The Project area is located along US-259, approximately 6.25 miles north of the State Highway (SH) 3 junction and extending north 6 miles into Hochatown, Oklahoma. US-259 is a vital transportation link that provides access for recreational opportunities, commercial traffic, logging trucks, tourists, and local and regional commuters. There is no existing sidewalk infrastructure. Hochatown is a small rural community within McCurtain County, Oklahoma, and designated as a Historically Disadvantaged Community (HDC) as well as an Area of Persistent Poverty (Census Tracts 982 and 985). The community faces extremely high transportation barriers (95<sup>th</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile nationwide) according to the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST). Hochatown was originally a Choctaw tribal settlement, now known as the Hochatown Valley on the eastern side of the Mountain Fork River. In the 1960s, Hochatown was moved to its current location situated along US-259 so the federal government could construct Broken Bow Lake. For generations, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has been the bedrock of the Hochatown community and its culture. Today, Hochatown is located within the Choctaw Nation Reservation.



Hochatown Welcome Sign

Over the past 3 years, the area has experienced a substantial increase in growth due to land investment opportunities for cabin rentals and popular trending tourist destinations. Hochatown is home to approximately 250 residents; however, on any given weekend, during holidays, and seasonally, the town hosts more than 30,000<sup>1</sup> people. In 2021, nearby Beavers Bend State Park reported approximately 2.2 million visitors, making it the most visited state park in Oklahoma. Safety challenges and congestion related to the influx of visitors along US-259 are becoming more frequent and are expected to worsen in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.texarkanagazette.com/news/2022/nov/28/its-official-tourist-haven-hochatown-okla-now-a/>



The existing US-259 corridor within the Project area contains a two-lane, undivided roadway with limited shoulder widths and stormwater conveyance through roadside ditches. There are only limited left or right turning lanes and no existing bicycle or pedestrian facilities. The highway also provides access to more than 100 residential and commercial driveways. The Project will improve vehicular movements, enhance overall safety, and provide a reliable infrastructure investment in a rural community that is often overlooked.

## 1.2 TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Improvements to US-259 are needed to address the rapid growth occurring in Hochatown. Congestion along US-259 is becoming more frequent, and the safety of roadway users is increasingly threatened as traffic volume and collision rates increase. The new Choctaw Landing Entertainment Resort, due to open in 2024 on the south side of Hochatown bringing 100s of new jobs to the local area, is also expected to generate significant traffic (up to 5000 additional daily trips on weekends, according to a 2021 Lee Engineering study).



Traffic Backup on US 259 through Hochatown

There are also concerns about access management for local businesses. There are no secondary roads to US-259 that bypass Hochatown. As a result, all regional traffic must use US-259 through Hochatown. With the increase in growth and the recent incorporation of Hochatown in 2022, the need for transportation planning has become a necessity to support the social and economic infrastructure of a rural community. In addition, logging is the primary industry of this region, with large transport trucks required to share the very tourist-dense highway through Hochatown.



Logging Trucks Utilizing US 259 in Hochatown

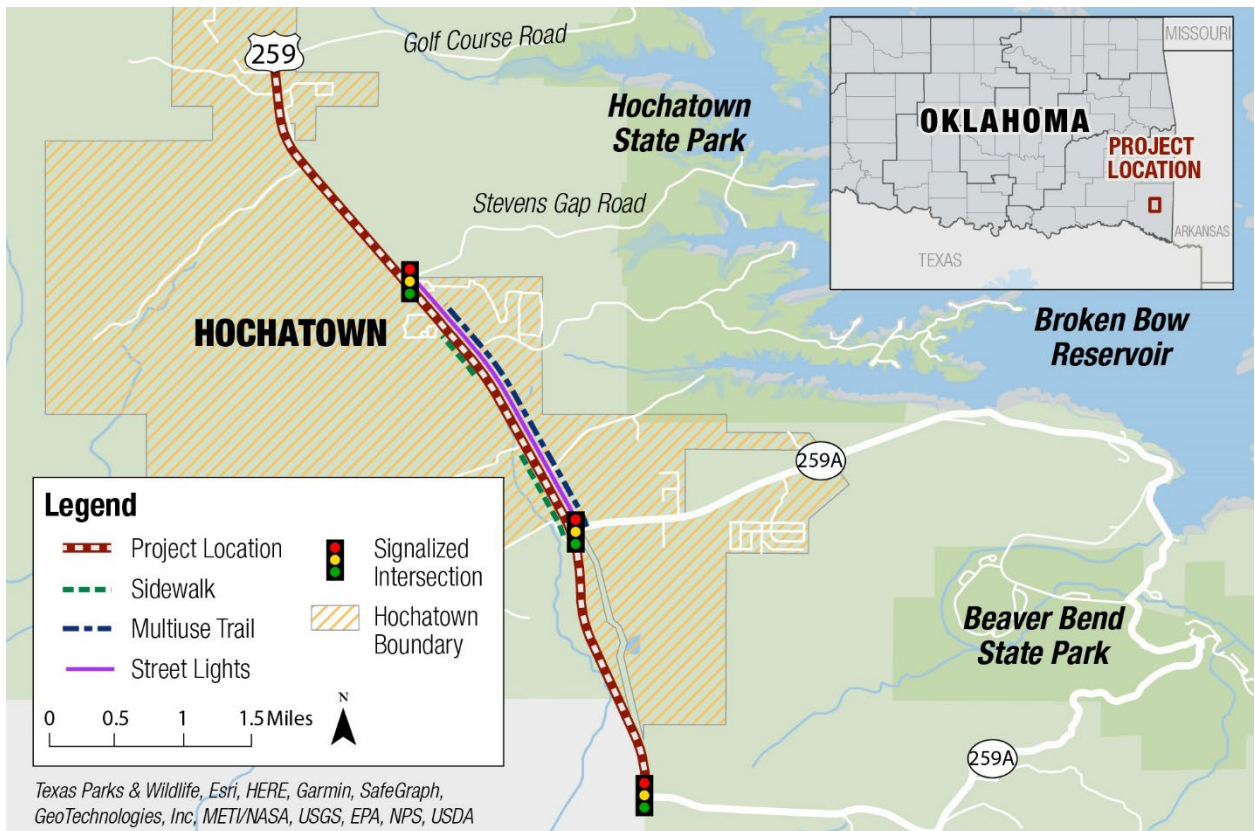
The existing US-259 has limited designated turning lanes. Large vehicles, logging trucks, and vehicles towing trailers are unable to make left turns onto side streets or into commercial areas under existing conditions. The resulting traffic backups cause significant traffic delays and rear-end collisions when vehicles slow down or stop to attempt left turns. At times, vehicles make sudden movements across traffic into commercial areas creating a higher safety risk to other motorists along US-259.

These challenges, along with the booming growth in the area, necessitated immediate interim relief at several intersections along US-259. In 2022, ODOT installed temporary traffic signals with turn bays at SH- 259A North and South, and Stevens Gap Road. ODOT also restriped the intersection at Stevens Gap Road to provide a

lengthened left-turn lanes in both travel directions on US-259 to facilitate safe turning movements. Although these improvements provided some relief from traffic congestion and improved operational efficiency along the US-259 corridor through Hochatown, the rate of growth in the area continues to impact the overall quality of life and safety of both locals and tourists.

Walkability in Hochatown is poor, with no sidewalks. An improved streetscape with bicycle and pedestrian facilities would offer an alternative, healthy, multimodal connection that residents and visitors alike can use to safely access Hochatown's amenities. A reduction in car dependence could help reduce traffic congestion, and being able to park and walk around town could improve patronage for local businesses. Ultimately, the Project will provide safe modes of travel for the rural HDCs facing high transportation barriers in the area and an improved experience when accessing local businesses and recreational areas in Hochatown. Figure 1 illustrates the project location and the proposed elements.

**Figure 1. Project Location and Elements**



### 1.3 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF WORK DETAILS

For the past several years, ODOT has worked collaboratively with the Hochatown community to advance a thoughtful solution that will address the challenges along the US-259 corridor. On October 27, 2022, ODOT held a community outreach event at the Broken Bow Senior High School in the town of Broken Bow to present the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project. The presentation included brief background information, and a description of existing conditions in the

Project area, the Project goals, interim improvements, current operational traffic volumes, and the findings of the level-of-service analysis. ODOT hosted another open forum in Broken Bow on May 16, 2023, to receive community feedback on the decision-making process. This meeting focused more on the 6-mile segment of US-259 between SH- 259A South and Golf Course Road. This meeting delivered new data and information on the suggested safety improvements intended to address the concerns resulting from the substantial growth of tourism and new development.

The design for the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project is expected to be completed by December 2023. Construction bid letting is targeted for Summer 2024 and construction will begin in December 2024. The Project is anticipated to be open and fully operational by May 2026.

The specific scope elements that will be advanced as part of the project include the following:

- Modify the intersection at Stevens Gap Road, and SH- 259A North and South
- Provide adequate capacity to handle traffic demands
- Install new curb and gutter, and retaining walls to minimize project impacts
- Update advanced speed-limit warning signage for traffic speed reductions
- Improve drainage structures, including headwalls and end treatments
- Improve access management and reduce conflict points
- Install sidewalks and shoulders
- Construct a multiuse bicycle and pedestrian trail

#### 1.4 AN IDEAL MPDG PROJECT FOR A GROWING RURAL COMMUNITY

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project is an ideal MPDG candidate as it will provide immediate relief and long-term benefits to a disadvantaged community with constrained transportation infrastructure which encourages car dependence. On November 28, 2022, Hochatown became an incorporated city within McCurtain County. This new local government has limited public services or infrastructure to serve the growing number of tourists and businesses flocking to the area but is eager to plan and deliver the necessary improvements for the community. Incorporation has allowed Hochatown, however, to gain greater autonomy and control over local affairs, including infrastructure development that align with the community's growth and development goals.

The Project addresses each of the six MPDG Project Outcome Criteria as shown in Table 1 and described in more detail in the Project Outcome Criteria section of this application. The benefit-cost analysis for the Project resulted in a benefit-cost ratio of 2.92 indicating that the benefits of the project are more than double the costs.

**Table 1. Project Outcome Criteria and Project Benefits**

MPDG Project Outcome Criteria	How this Project Addresses the MPDG Project Outcome Criteria
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protects nonmotorized travelers and communities from safety risks by constructing crossing improvements, new traffic lights at intersections, and completing a multiuse bicycling and pedestrian trail adjacent to US-259.</li> <li>▪ Improves nighttime visibility and reduces traffic collisions in low-light conditions with the installation of new street lighting in the urban area of Hochatown.</li> <li>▪ Reduces serious injuries in this underserved rural community. The US- 259 corridor through Hochatown experiences <b>traffic collision rates that are 3 times higher than the statewide average.</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Reduces the risk of vehicular crashes by 50%</b> with the installation of project elements like a center turning lane, and street and permanent traffic lighting.</li> </ul>
State of Good Repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creates a modernized, safer expanded highway with a shared-use trail to support connectivity along the corridor and improves overall conditions for a traditionally underserved and disadvantaged community.</li> <li>▪ Reduces miles traveled for those switching to walking for some short trips to produce a <b>state of good repair savings of \$177,000.</b></li> </ul>
Economic Impacts, Freight Movement, and Job Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generates beneficial long-term efficiencies for reduced travel time, and increased travel-time reliability, tourism, and job opportunities in the region.</li> <li>▪ Provides lane expansion and designated center turning lane for more efficient access to local businesses and planned future job opportunities, and to stimulate growth and economic development.</li> </ul>
Climate Change, Resiliency, and the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manages stormwater more effectively with the installation of new curbs and gutters in some locations, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillover into the watershed.</li> <li>▪ <b>Eliminates 16,500 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions</b> by capacity improvements to reduce traffic congestion, and expansion of pedestrian access and bicycling to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT).</li> </ul>
Equity, Multimodal Options, and Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improves access to daily destinations—such as workplaces, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks—by expanding roadway lanes and constructing a multiuse trail.</li> <li>▪ Enhances mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown with the multiuse trail and Americans with Disabilities Act improvements. Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and collection of feedback from the community.</li> <li>▪ Expands US- 259 lane capacity to restore the free flow of traffic, reduce travel delays, and create a safer experience for motorized and nonmotorized travelers.</li> <li>▪ Creates the opportunity for more than <b>162,000 additional pedestrian trips</b> and <b>34,000 cycling trips</b> in the opening year.</li> </ul>
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Features the use of dynamic message signs by ODOT to inform the community of public meetings during the construction period.</li> <li>▪ Enables ODOT to explore inclusion of solar-powered lighting throughout design development.</li> <li>▪ Allows ODOT to evaluate the use of artificial intelligence-improved traffic signal systems and components.</li> <li>▪ Incorporates Warm Mix Asphalt which offers a range of benefits that align with modern sustainability and performance goals while also addressing environmental concerns.</li> <li>▪ Receives funding from the \$200 million the Rural Economic Transportation Reliability and Optimization (RETRO) Fund.</li> </ul>