



**OKLAHOMA**  
Transportation



# Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project

## *Merit Criteria*

Daniel Nguyen, P.E., MBA  
ODOT Project Management, Division Manager  
dnguyen@odot.org

**FY23 RAISE Grant Application**

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

## Merit Criteria

This section describes how the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project (Project) aligns with each of the eight merit criteria for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Program.

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

RAISE Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the RAISE Merit 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 multi-use bike and pedestrian path adjacent to US-259.</li> <li>▪ New street lighting in the urban area of Hochatown will improve nighttime visibility and reduce collisions involving dark conditions.</li> <li>▪ The US-259 corridor through Hochatown experiences <b>collision rates that are 3x higher than the statewide average</b>. The Project will reduce serious injuries in this underserved rural community.</li> <li>▪ Project elements such as the dedicated center turning lane and the installation of street and permanent traffic lighting will <b>reduce the risk of vehicular crashes by 50%</b>.</li> </ul>
Environmental Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Installation of new curbs and gutters in some locations will help manage stormwater more effectively, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillover into the watershed. ODOT will evaluate drainage solutions along the corridor as design advances.</li> <li>▪ Construction of the multi-use trail will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing alternative modes of transportation. Trail connectivity to nearby community parking is a strong desire and will be a consideration.</li> <li>▪ Warm mixed asphalt will reduce visible air emissions and produce lower greenhouse gas emissions.</li> <li>▪ Construction of the Project will <b>reduce 16,500 tons of CO2 emissions</b> due to the capacity improvements reducing congestion and reduced VMT from increase in walking/cycling.</li> </ul>
Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The lane expansion and multi-use trail will improve access to daily destinations, such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks.</li> </ul>
Mobility and Community Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The multi-use trail will include Americans with Disabilities Act improvements and enhance the mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown. Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and feedback from the community.</li> <li>▪ Expanding US-259 lane capacity will restore the flow of traffic, reduce travel delays, and create a safer experience for motorized and nonmotorized travelers.</li> <li>▪ Improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists are expected to generate over <b>162,000 additional pedestrian trips and 34,000 cycling trips</b> in the opening year.</li> </ul>
Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Beneficial long-term efficiencies for reduced travel time, increased travel time reliability, tourism, and job opportunities in the region.</li> <li>▪ The lane expansion and designated center turning lane will improve safety and provide more efficient timely access to daily destinations, local businesses, lodging areas, and planned future job opportunities, and will serve overall to stimulate growth and economic development.</li> <li>▪ Construction of the Project will <b>create approximately 2,000 jobs</b>.</li> </ul>

State of Good Repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Construction of the Project will create a modernized, safer expanded highway with a shared-use path to support connectivity along the corridor and improve overall conditions for a traditionally underserved and disadvantage community.</li> <li>▪ Improving the existing infrastructure will show the community and visitors that the area is growing and may promote business/land investments and future urban growth.</li> <li>▪ Reduction in vehicle miles traveled from those switching to walking for some short trips will produce a <b>state of good repair savings of \$99,000.</b></li> </ul>
Partnership and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ODOT will continue to collaborate with the community members of Hochatown, McCurtain County, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and others to ensure the Project will support all community stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ODOT will employ the use of dynamic message signs to inform the public of public meetings and during construction.</li> <li>▪ ODOT will continue to explore inclusion of solar powered lighting throughout design development</li> <li>▪ ODOT will evaluate the use of AI-improved traffic signal systems/components</li> </ul>

## Safety

The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project will provide improved safety for both local travelers and tourists. In recent years, Hochatown has become a new favorite destination, drawing tourists from throughout Oklahoma, as well as from neighboring states and beyond. The existing US-259 infrastructure is inadequately designed to meet the high level of traffic experienced today and projected for the future, thus necessitating immediate attention to address the needs of the growing region. The existing US-259 within the Project area contains a two-lane, undivided roadway with limited shoulder widths and stormwater conveyed through roadside ditches. There are only limited left or right turning lanes, but no existing bicycle or pedestrian facilities. Large towing vehicles and other trailers are currently unable to make left turns onto side streets and into commercial areas without causing significant traffic backups. These backups increasingly result in traffic delays and rear-end collisions from vehicles suddenly decreasing speed or stopping to make the left-turn movement.



Traffic Backups are frequent on US-259 through Hochatown

In 2022 during the months of July and August, the US-259 corridor through Hochatown reported approximately 7,200 vehicles per day in one direction (either northbound or southbound) or 12,000 vehicles per day in both directions. Segments

between Old Hochatown Road and Carson Creek Road had a higher number of collisions due to an increase in residential and commercial driveways and frequency of side roads.

Over a 10-year period, from 2012 to 2021, a total of 185 collisions occurred along US-259 (Figure 2). Five collisions resulted in 7 fatalities, 70 collisions resulted in injury, and 110 collisions resulted in property damage only. The US-259 corridor has experienced nearly a 70 percent increase in traffic collisions from 2017 to 2021 compared with the previous 5-year period from 2012 to 2016, which is likely due to the increased tourism population and traffic growth in the area. June, July, and October recorded the highest average monthly collisions over the observed period, accounting for nearly 40 percent of total collisions, and weekend days, including Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, account for approximately 60 percent of total collisions (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Total Crashes by Year

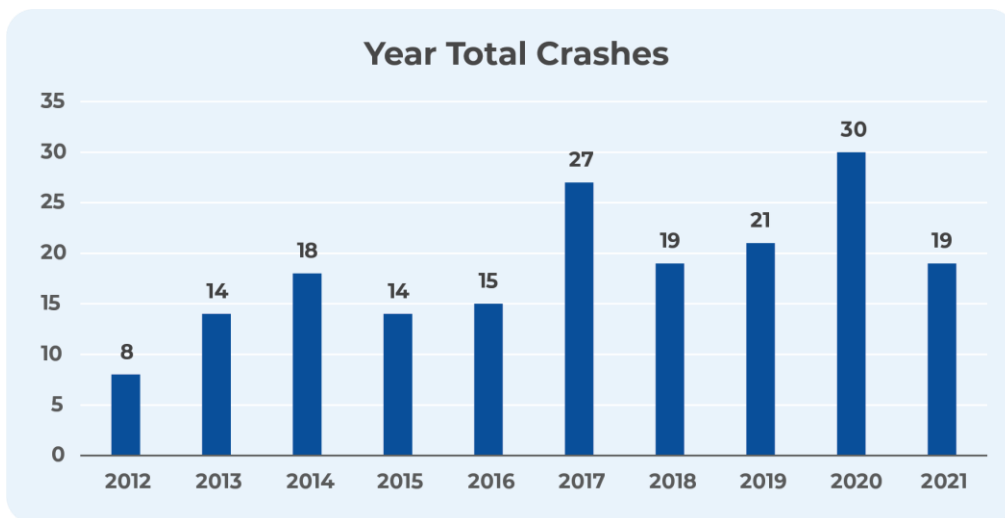
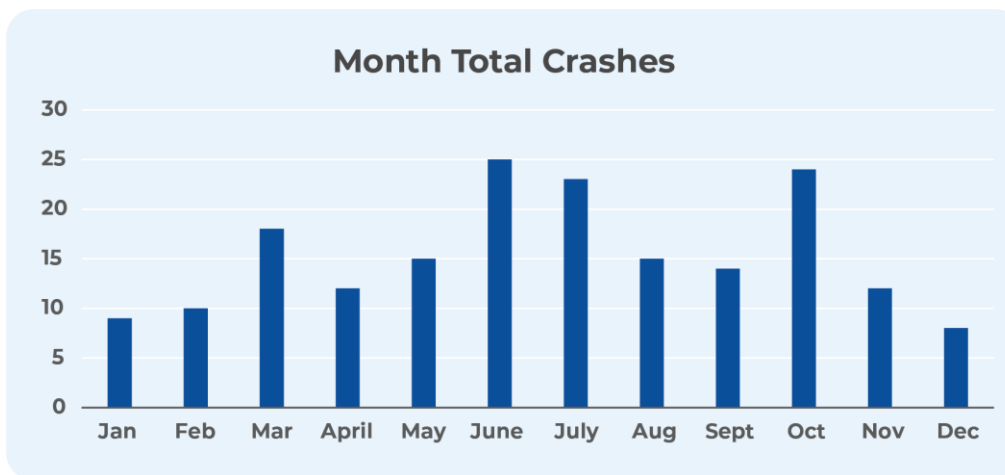


Figure 3. Total Crashes by Month (2012-2021)

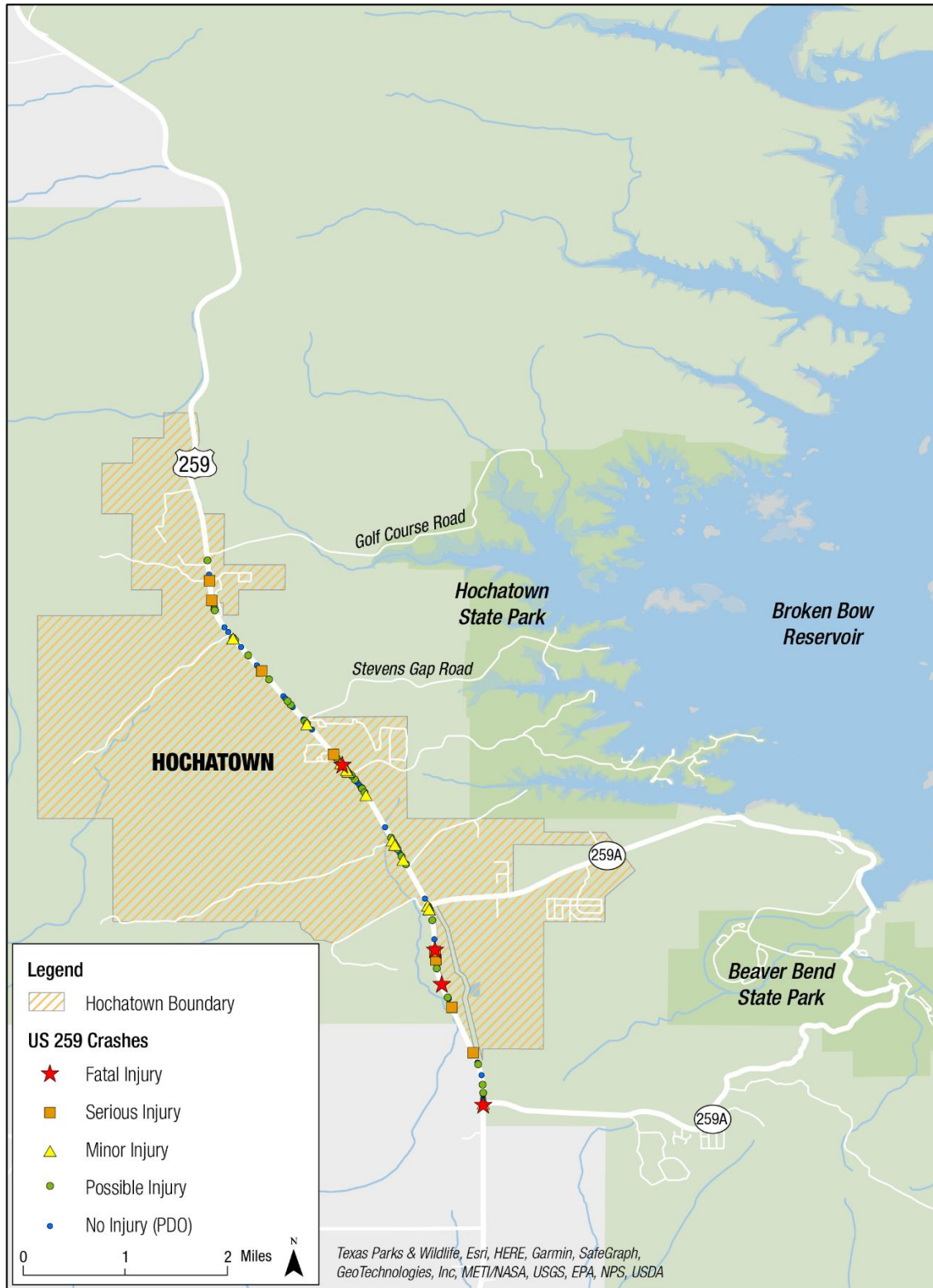


Note:

Total Crashes = 185

Figure 4 as shown below illustrates collisions along US-259 within the Project limits based on injury type.

Figure 4. Collision Map



Rear-end, angle, and roadway departure collisions were the predominant collision types along US-259, making up nearly 88 percent of all collisions (Figure 5). More than 68 percent of rear-end collisions did not occur at intersections, which suggests these instances were a result of a traffic queue where an upstream vehicle was attempting to make a left turn impeding through traffic. The total collision rate for US-259 is nearly 3 times greater than the statewide average rate for similar facilities. The fatal collision rate is also over 2.2 times greater than the statewide average as shown in Table 2. Because there is large tourism population that uses US-259, there are many pedestrian generators near the urban section of Hochatown and the many cabins incentivize nonmotorized transportation to experience local restaurants, shops, and hiking trails at Beavers Bend and Hochatown State Parks. These attractions increase the risk for vehicle, pedestrian, or bicycle conflicts, and this Project intends to proactively improve active transportation infrastructure to enhance the visitor’s experience.

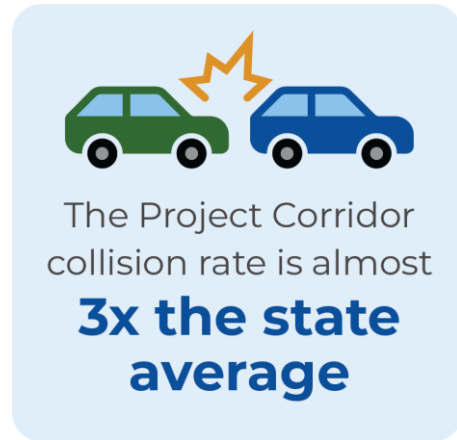


Figure 5. Collision Types

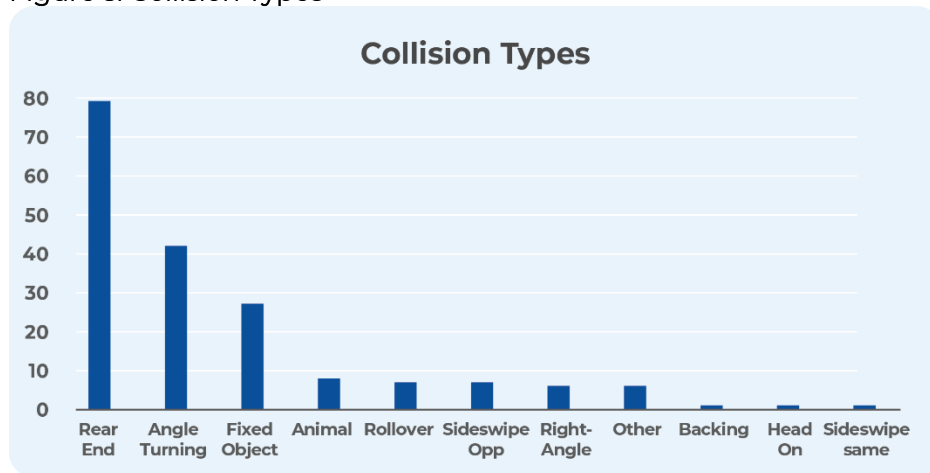


Table 2. US-259 Collison Rates

	Project Corridor Rates	Statewide Rates (2018–2020)
Total Collisions	220.93	74.99
Fatal Collisions	5.97	2.70

The Project will reduce the occurrence of crashes, injuries, and fatalities within an underserved and historically disadvantaged community. Roadway speeds will be reduced in the urban area to the north and south of SH-259A North to 45 miles per hour. The lower speed will improve safety and reduce the likelihood and severity of collisions throughout the area as it continues to develop and multimodal traffic increases. Additional safety elements will be implemented, such as consolidation of driveways and access management improvements, which will assist with traffic flow

and allow vehicles to safely enter and exit properties. Traffic signals will be installed, and intersection approaches will be widened to include dedicated turning lanes, which will provide safer vehicle movements at Stevens Gap Road and SH-259A North and South. Parallel to the roadway, ODOT will construct a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian trail to promote safety and mobility for active transportation modes to those traveling in the area. Within the urban section, ODOT will install new sidewalk and improve *American with Disabilities Act* accessibility components. Figure 6 illustrates the project location and the proposed elements.

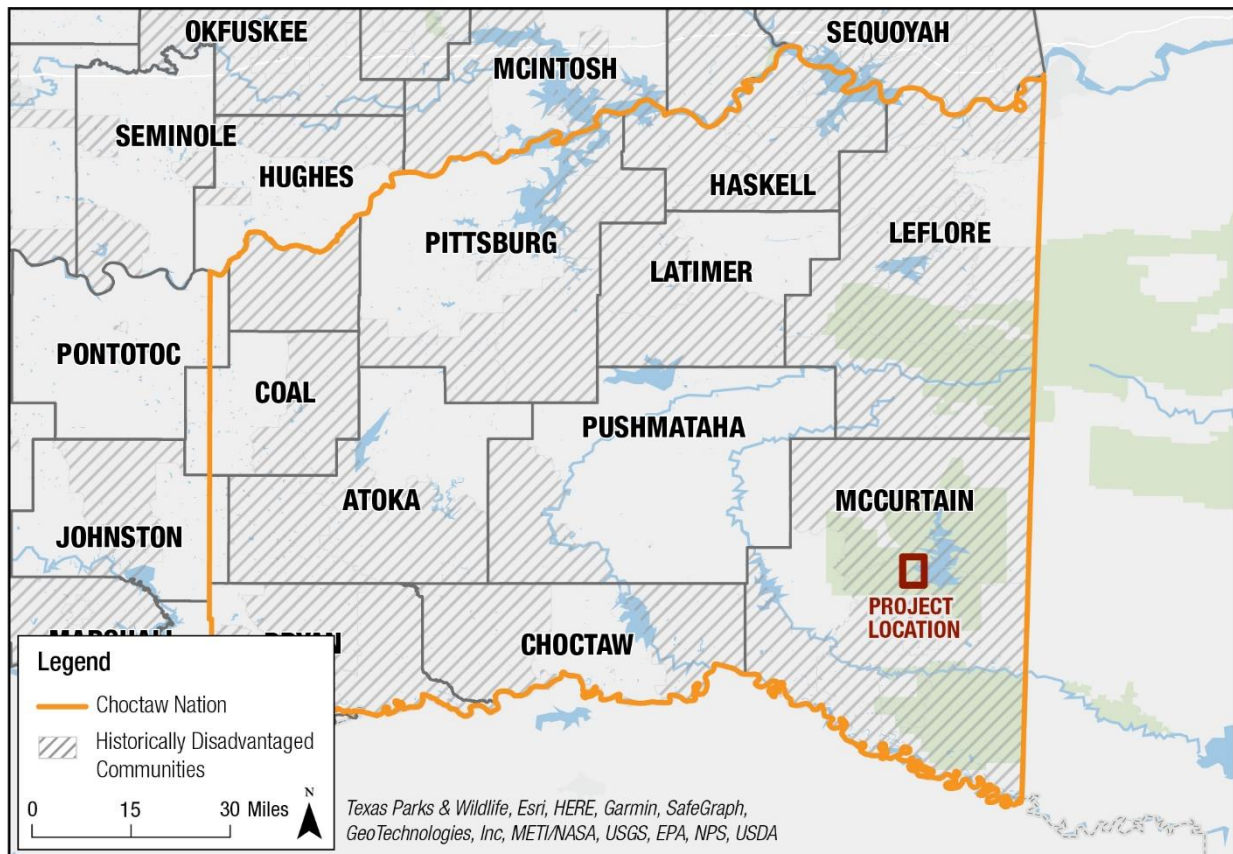
Figure 6. Project Elements



## Environmental Sustainability

Hochatown is a Historically Disadvantaged Community that has experienced environmental injustices and disproportionate burden of the consequences of anthropogenic climate change, beginning with the forced resettlement of the Choctaw Nation to the current reservation lands. Although the Choctaw Nation has adapted, the legacy of colonization, resettlement, and industrialization continue to impact residents. The Project will improve safety and connectivity to a historically underserved area and will enhance the growing community and may provide opportunities for new development. Additionally, ODOT will continue to consider the needs of the Choctaw Nation and Hochatown community members throughout the design of the project.

Figure 7: Historically Disadvantage Communities



Some of the consequences of climate change have placed additional stress on the community and its limited infrastructure. Rising average temperatures, along with more extreme heat days, have increased demand for air conditioning, leading to greater demand on the energy system and an increased demand for shaded areas and water-based recreation activities, which has further increased traffic to and the impact on public parks and natural resources. More frequent precipitation and winter storms have led to more historic flooding, making stormwater improvements essential to store, absorb, and divert water. The increased severity of windstorms and tornadoes, as well as moderate risk of wildfires, has highlighted the need for safe routes for evacuation and emergency access.



The Project will benefit both residents and the surging number of tourists by providing multimodal access throughout the town and to activities at Beaver Bend State Park with greater efficiency, as well as improved accessibility for emergency vehicles and evacuations. Stormwater improvements will be included to manage stormwater more effectively, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillover into the watershed.

The multi-use trail will be completed to allow a variety of options for people to travel throughout the corridor and community with co-benefits of encouraging modal shift from vehicles to active transportation, thus helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many visitors and residents already walk and bike the corridor, whether by necessity or choice, and the trail will provide safety benefits to encourage more bicycle and pedestrian travel. Solar powered lighting along sidewalks and the trail area will be considered throughout the design of the project.

ODOT will place warm mixed asphalt as part of the project. Warm mixed asphalt will reduce visible air emissions and produce lower greenhouse gas emissions compared to hot mix asphalt. Lower burn temperatures are needed to produce warm mixed asphalt which generate lower emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>e. Additionally, there is less energy needed to operate burners which reduce overall fossil fuel consumption.

Ultimately, a capital investment in the US-259 project through Hochatown not only helps to meet growing traffic demands and improve safety, but helps to support numerous stakeholders, like the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, that identify the Broken Bow region as their home and are an integral part of the cultural fabric of this now-thriving community.

## Quality of Life

The Project will improve access to daily destinations, such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, local businesses, trails, parks, and recreational areas like Beavers Bend State Park and Broken Bow Lake in the Ouachita National Forest.

Beavers Bend State Park is located east of Hochatown along the shores of Broken Bow Lake and Mountain Fork River in the Ouachita National Forest, one of the oldest and largest national forests in the South. The scenic beauty of Beavers Bend State Park draws the attention of millions of visitors per year, making it one of Oklahoma's most popular areas. With more than 3,482 acres of park to explore, the towering trees, crystal clear waters, and rugged terrain make this state park an outdoor lover's paradise. Beavers Bend State Park features the following:

- 18-hole Cedar Creek Golf Course
- Hiking Trails
- Mountain Fork River & Broken Bow Lake
- Miniature Golf & Paddle Boats
- Ziplining
- Train and Trail Rides



Welcome to Beaver Bend State Park.

Currently, the predominant mode of transportation is by car because there is a lack of safe, connected, or accessible pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The Project will invest in the creation of a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian trail that runs parallel to US-259 to provide better sidewalk connectivity, as well as safer street crossings, to increase accessibility and enhance quality of life. Providing non-vehicular modes of transportation increases transportation equity for the underserved community and improves access and public health for travelers and tourists. Additionally, the proposed roadway capacity expansion, including a center two-way left turn lane, will reduce congestion to daily destinations and improve safety for its users when making left-turn movements across US-259.

The Project will provide improved accessibility to many of the Hochatown's most visited assets and activities, thus increasing the overall quality of life. Motorists will experience shorter travel times along US-259, and the multi-use trail will expand transportation options and improve safety, connectivity, and mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists. Permanent traffic signals will be installed at Stevens Gap Road and SH-259A North and South and will include pedestrian crossings and pedestrian friendly signals. These intersection modifications will provide multiple points for pedestrians to cross safely along US-259.

ODOT is committed to supporting a safe and effective transportation system that provides multimodal opportunities for active transportation.




Visitors Paddle on Broken Bow Lake



26-mile-long David Boren Hiking Trail

**OKLAHOMA STATE PARKS**

 **Accessible Information**  
Beavers Bend State Park

**The following park amenities are available:**

- Fully accessible comfort station near the old Nature Center
- Acorn Campground:
  - One fully accessible comfort station, five RV sites
- Armadillo campground on Stevens Gap:
  - One comfort station, three RV sites
- Carson Creek:
  - One fully accessible comfort station, one RV site
- Blue Jay primitive campground:
  - Two sites
- Coyote primitive campground:
  - Two sites
- Cabin #48 accessible and meets ADA specs.
- Lakeview Lodge-One double/double room, one king and one suite, and all public areas of the lodge (Stevens Gap Area.)

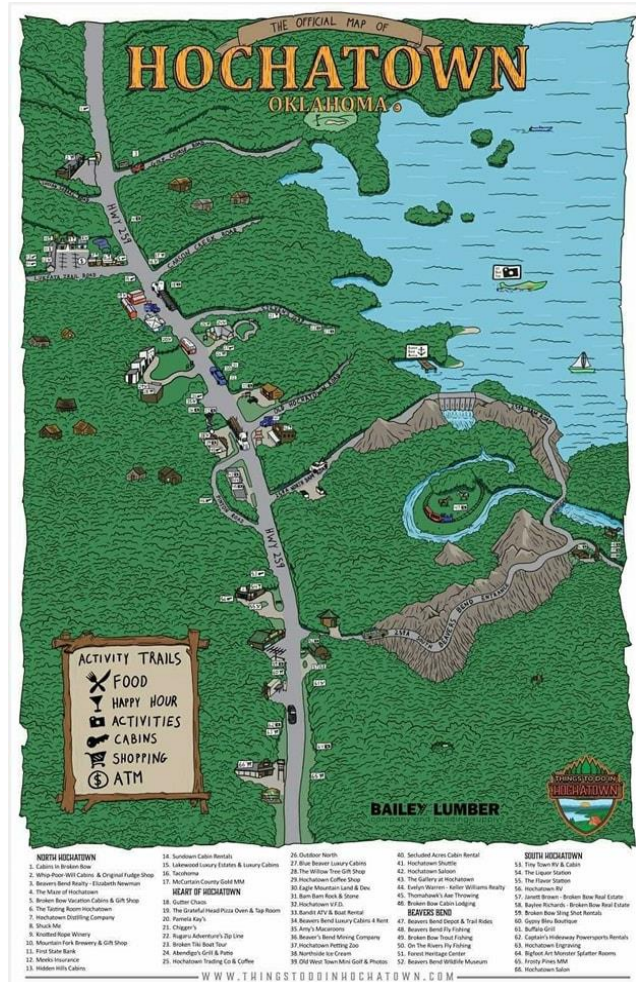
Other:  
Forest Heritage Center entrance and public restrooms

ADA Information at Beavers Bend State Park

## Mobility and Community Connectivity

One of the main benefits of the Project is the increase of mobility and connectivity for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Currently, the existing US-259 is unable to accommodate residents and the influx of tourists visiting the area by vehicles, causing major traffic delays. During weekends, holidays, and summer months, the small, rural community of Hochatown experiences longer trip times, and increase of vehicles queuing, and bumper-to-bumper traffic. Large vehicles and towing vehicles are unable to make safe left turns into local businesses and popular tourist destinations like Broken Bow Lake.

The Project will expand the capacity of the existing two-lane highway and include a center two-way left turn lane to reduce vehicle queuing and rear-end traffic collisions caused by the sudden change in traffic flows. The expansion of lanes will promote better quality of life and mobility for the community and its visitors, making automobile trips easier and more direct. ODOT will install pedestrian friendly signals and crossings at each of the intersections where permanent traffic signals will be installed. There are currently no safety signals or dedicated crossings for pedestrians. Installation of pedestrian crossings and signals will allow locals and visitors to traverse US-259 safely when accessing businesses, restaurants, and other popular destinations. The Project will restore the flow of traffic that has been otherwise impacted by the booming growth and will provide further mobility and connectivity to address future needs for the growing region.



In addition to the lane expansion, ODOT will construct a multi-use trail that will run parallel to US-259 as part of the Project. This multi-use trail would provide opportunities to the community and its visitors to use the trail as another means of transportation to get to and from daily destinations. The multi-use trail will be approximately two miles and will provide a safe, accessible path for nonmotorized travel for the underserved community and visitors alike. In addition to serving as a recreational trail for walking, running, and cycling, this will help reduce the number of cars on the highway for short-distance trips between lodging areas, restaurants, breweries, wineries, and other popular adventure or activity destinations in Hochatown.



Will eliminate  
**125,200 hours**  
of vehicle delays

## Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Hochatown became a fast-growing popular destination spot for Oklahomans and visitors from neighboring states. Hochatown is a rural community that approximately 250 people call home; however, on the weekends, holidays, or during popular seasons, Hochatown can have more than 30,000<sup>1</sup> people visiting the area. Beavers Bend State Park is a popular state park in Oklahoma with more than 2 million visitors each year and is only accessible from within the project limits. For most of its years, Hochatown has been an often-overlooked community in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma in McCurtain County but has since experienced tremendous growth from cabin rental investment opportunities and tourism. The newly incorporated city has seen a 145 percent increase<sup>2</sup> in travel spending compared to 2019.

The Project is expected have beneficial long-term efficiencies for reduced travel time, increased travel time reliability, tourism, and job opportunities in the region. The Project's lane expansion and designated center turning lane will improve safety and provide more efficient timely access to daily destinations, local businesses, lodging areas, and planned future job opportunities, and will serve overall to stimulate growth and economic development.



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**Michael Willeby Park Ranger Perspective: Behind the Hustle and Bustle of Beavers Bend**  
By: Hochatown Staff

Hochatown, OK - Mike Willeby serves as Park Manager III of Beavers Bend State Park and Nature Center and has become known to many as a trustworthy voice in the local community. The Oklahoma Native and longtime Law Enforcement Agent has been with the Commission and Tourism Department for more than 15 years and counting.

As regional tourism numbers continue to boom in McCurtain County, Broken Bow Lake and Beavers Bend State Park remain among the most popular destinations for recreation in the area. Connecting with people is something that helps Mike and his Department maintain a smooth operation at the Beavers Bend recreational facilities. "A variety of different people from all parts of the world come to visit here," notes Willeby "and many people don't realize how much there is to offer in terms of outdoors, fishing and accommodations." Witnessing large volumes of diverse travelers year-round is no easy task, but the staff's value on community and excellence is clear.

Willeby recently confirmed that some exciting things are coming up at Beavers Bend. Live animals, including small reptiles, birds, raccoons, and possibly a bear will be located inside in the park's future. A special enclosure obtained from the "Flare King" crew on Netflix has been included in the updates, big as well. Additionally, Mike also announced that a September completion date has been set for a new lodge and Tiny Houses are in the works. To handle crowds equivalent to "the size of a small city," he has put it, Willeby operates by moving proactively instead of reactively. This means ensuring all equipment at the park is up to date and every

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**The Haunted History of Beavers Bend**  
Muntz on the Mountain

Photo Credit: The Hochatowner

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://nondoc.com/2020/11/23/hochatown-southeast-oklahoma-unlikely-tourism-hub/>

The Project will reduce delays for both vehicles and pedestrians and will improve system connectivity. The multi-use path for bicyclists and pedestrians may increase access to retail areas, restaurants, and saloons, and provides a link to other nearby trails. Access to employment will also be improved with safer, more efficient travel times.

As a relatively small community, Hochatown has had to adjust and adapt quickly to the overwhelming positive amount of increasing business performance. The community is continuing to develop and plans for future growth, such as a new Choctaw Nation entertainment and resort development located adjacent to US-259A.



Estimated Travel  
Time Savings:

**\$2.4 million**

### Tourist Attractions and Businesses Line US-259 in Hochatown



This proposed new development will create more than 2,000 new jobs in the area and will include a small grocery store or market, dining options, and a fuel station, and will provide educational opportunities of the Choctaw Nation history. The Choctaw Nation is coordinating with ODOT to prepare for the development of and the increased traffic coming to the area. The Project will indirectly promote an increase in tourism, support future job opportunities, and ultimately improve a main transportation link in a rural community.



Will support  
the creation of

**2,000 new jobs**  
in the foreseeable future

## State of Good Repair

The existing US-259 corridor is a two-lane undivided highway with varying shoulder widths, no turn lanes, and no pedestrian or bicyclist facilities. While the overall pavement condition along US-259 in the Project area is currently rated as “good” the percent of the roadway with cracking is rated as “fair” and “poor”. The Project will provide a modernized, safer expanded highway with a shared-use path to support connectivity along the corridor and improve overall conditions



US-259 north of Stevens Gap Road.

for a traditionally underserved and disadvantage community. Without construction of the Project, Hochatown will continue to be negatively impacted by its transportation network deficiency which may affect long-term economic growth and the accessibility and mobility of residents and tourists. Travel delays due to bumper-to-bumper congestion and rear-end collisions would continue to increase. The Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project will improve existing infrastructure showing the community and visitors that the area is growing and may promote business/land investments and future urban growth.

ODOT strives to combat pavement deterioration as a result of traffic and weather conditions. The Project is a rural two-lane highway that no longer meets the needs or expectations associated with a modern transportation and is struggling to meet the demands of it’s users. As the area continues to develop, pavement deterioration will be subjected to further deficiencies because of traffic loads and environmental conditions. The Project anticipates the current and future growth and will take a preventative approach in improving US-259 to a state of good repair to further ensure safety and minimize traffic delays due to pavement deterioration

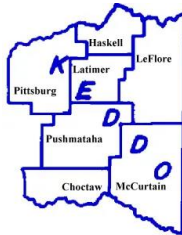
## Partnership and Collaboration

ODOT held a community outreach event on October 27, 2022, at the Broken Bow Senior High School’s auditorium to present the Project. The presentation included a brief background and existing conditions of the Project area, Project goals, interim improvements, current operational traffic volumes, and the findings of the level-of-service analysis. ODOT will continue to engage with the community throughout the Project development process.



## STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

Support letters have been received from the City of Broken Bow, Kiamichi Economic Development District of Oklahoma (KEDDO), and Oklahoma Trucking Association, Broken Bow Chamber of Commerce, McCurtain County, Oklahoma State Commerce, and Choctaw Nation. All letters of support are available in the Appendix of this application.



## Innovation

### INNOVATION TECHNOLOGY

In addition to traditional public outreach, ODOT will employ the use of dynamic message signs to inform the public of public meetings and construction. These assets will help inform the public and provide communication to allow users to plan alternative routes. These efforts reduce congestion during construction while improving the safety and efficiency of movement through and around the work zone.

ODOT will evaluate the use of traditional and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-improved traffic signal systems/components. AI traffic signal monitoring and detection solutions will identify patterns in traffic and use precise technology to accurately identify users at intersections. This system will optimize traffic operations for various users and serve as an innovative strategy to protect and better serve vulnerable users, improve traffic flow, and reduce congestion within the community. Inclusion of this system will reduce risk of injury to pedestrians and cyclists from heavy freight vehicles and other large towing vehicles. Another consideration for the upgraded signals is high speed signalized approaches and associated dilemma zones.