OKLAHOMA Transportation

Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project

Merit Criteria

Daniel Nguyen, P.E., MBA
ODOT Director of Project Delivery
dnguyen@odot.org

FY25 BUILD Grant Application

BUILD Grant Request: $20,000,000

MERIT CRITERIA NARRATIVE

This section describes how the Hochatown Community Access and Pedestrian Safety Project (Project) aligns with each of the eight Project Merit Criteria for the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Program. Table 1 summarizes the BUILD merit criteria and the Project's benefits.

Table 1. Merit Criteria and Project Benefits

BUILD Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the BUILD Merit Criteria
Safety	• Incorporates safety improvements that are part of the Oklahoma Strategic Highway Safety Plan to reduce collisions and save lives. • Protects nonmotorized travellers and communities from safety risks by constructing crossing improvements, installing new traffic lights at intersections, and completing a multiuse bicycling and pedestrian trail adjacent to US 259. • Reduces serious injuries in a rural community. The US 259 corridor through Hochatown experiences collision rates that are three times higher than the statewide average.
Environmental Sustainability	• Aligns with the state's Carbon Reduction Strategy, which Identifies projects and strategies to reduce transportation emissions. • Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and CO2 emissions by 2,600 tons. • Manages stormwater more effectively with the installation of new curbs and gutters to improve resiliency, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillover into the watershed. • Avoids adverse environmental impacts.
Quality of Life	• The lane expansion and shared-use trail will improve access to daily destinations, such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks. • Increases affordable transportation options for safer and more accessible options for commuting, recreation. • By addressing traffic challenges and increasing road capacity, alleviates congestion, improving the overall flow of traffic within Hochatown.
Mobility and Community Connectivity	• Improves system-wide connectivity through improved access to daily destinations—such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks—through lane expansion and construction of a shared-use trail. • Enhances mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown with the shared-use trail and ADA improvements. Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and community feedback. • Expands US 259 lane capacity to restore the free flow of traffic, reduce travel delays, and create a safer experience for motorized and nonmotorized travellers. • Remove physical barriers for individuals by reconnecting communities to direct, affordable transportation options. • Creates the opportunity for more than 53,000 additional pedestrian trips and 41,500 cycling trips in the opening year after the completion of construction.
Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity	• Creates beneficial long-term efficiencies for reduced travel time, increases travel time reliability, improves tourism, and expands job opportunities in the region. • Expands lanes and constructs a designated center turning lane to improve safety and provide more efficient timely access to daily destinations, local businesses,

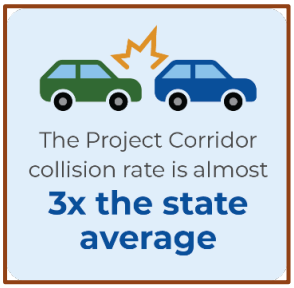
BUILD Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the BUILD Merit Criteria
	lodging areas, and planned future job opportunities. This will serve to stimulate overall growth and economic development. • Improves freight mobility. • Promotes local economic development and entrepreneurship.
State of Good Repair	• Restores and modernizes the existing infrastructure in a remote community that will be maintained in a state of good repair, addressing current and projected system vulnerabilities as demand grows. • Creates a modernized, safer, and expanded highway with the construction of a shared-use trail to support connectivity along the corridor and improves overall conditions for the community. • Addresses transportation vulnerabilities for the community. • The Project will primarily be constructed within the existing right-of-way (ROW) and will necessitate only minimal ROW acquisition.
Partnerships and Collaboration	• 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 whose feedback is incorporated in the Project. • The Project has garnered support from both local community organizations and statewide organizations.
Innovation: Technology, Delivery, Financing	• Innovative Technologies: Allows ODOT to evaluate the use of AI-improved traffic signal systems and components to enhance infrastructure and asset management processes. • Innovative Financing: Receives funding from the $200 million RETRO Fund.

AI = artificial intelligence
RETRO = Rural Economic Transportation Reliability and Optimization

Safety

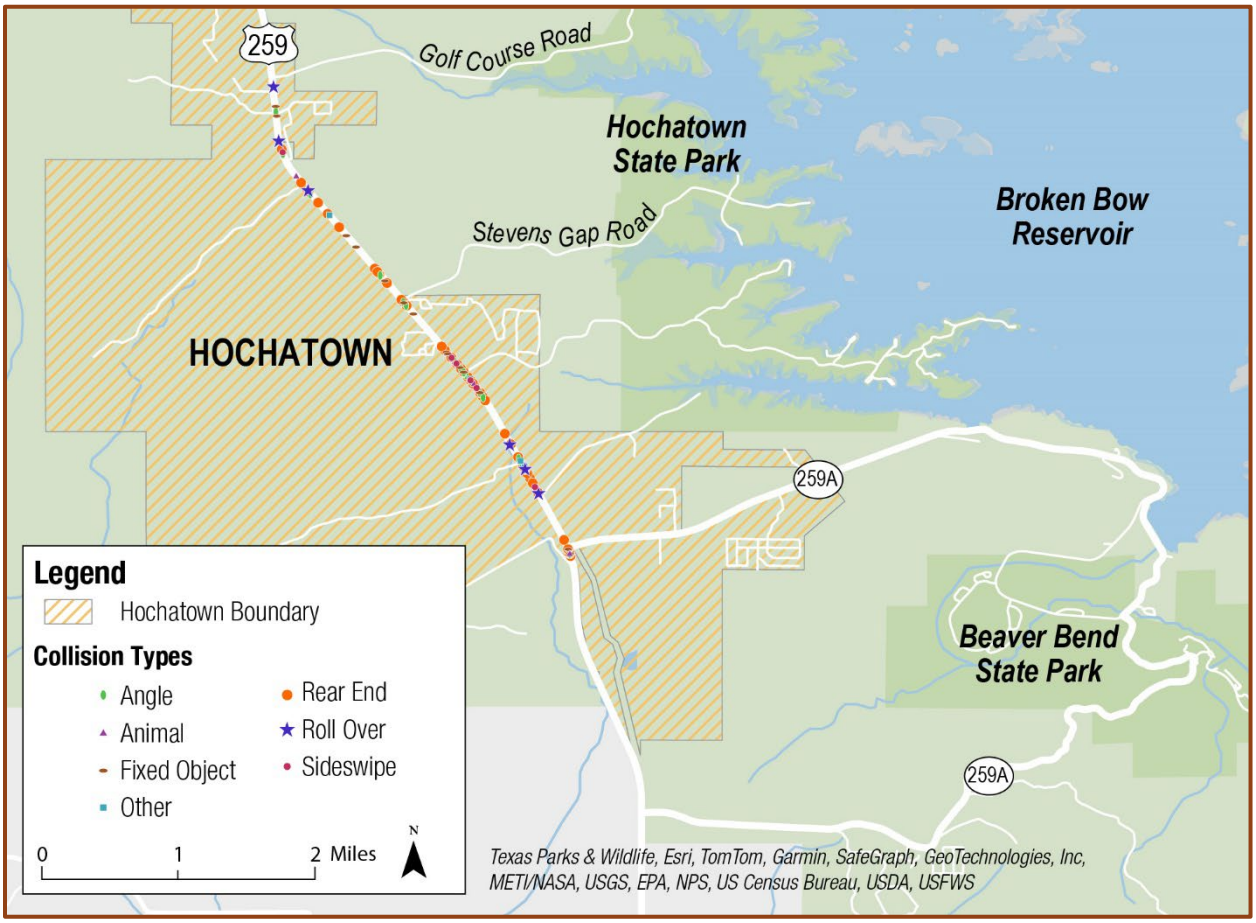
Incorporates Safety Improvements that are part of a Documented Risk Reduction Mitigation Strategy

In November 2023, the State of Oklahoma adopted the vision of the Oklahoma Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), to provide and promote the safest roadway transportation system for all travelers – zero deaths, zero serious injuries. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) considers roadway safety for all users as the primary objective of the agency. As such, ODOT is working with jurisdictions such as the City of Hochatown to incorporate safety improvements that are part of the adopted risk reduction mitigation strategy identified within the SHSP to reduce collisions and save lives.



While ODOT has not conducted a statewide corridor analysis to determine the top high collision corridors, US 259 has nearly a 3 times greater rate of collisions than the statewide average rate for similar facilities. Figure 1 illustrates the locations of collisions based on injury type along US 259 within the areas of persistent poverty Choctaw Nation community Project limits. Both of the census tracts (982 and 985.02) for which the Project is located within are designated as areas of persistent poverty.

Figure 1: U.S. Route 259 Collision Map (2017 to 2021)



PDO = Property Damage Only

From 2017 to 2021, 91 collisions occurred within the Project area, resulting in 7 severe injuries and 2 fatalities for vehicular users. No pedestrian or bicyclist fatalities or severe injuries occurred. The US 259 corridor has experienced an 82% increase in traffic collisions from 2017 through 2021 compared with the previous 5-year period from 2012 through 2016, which is a result of the increased tourism and traffic growth in the area. June, July, and October had the highest average monthly collisions recorded over the 2012 through 2021 observation period, accounting for 41% of total collisions, and weekend days, including Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, accounted for approximately 58% of total collisions. The construction of the center turn-lane and the installation of street lighting is expected to reduce the number of expected crashes per year from 18.8 to 12.4, an average reduction of 6.4 crashes per year, valued at $3.0 million.

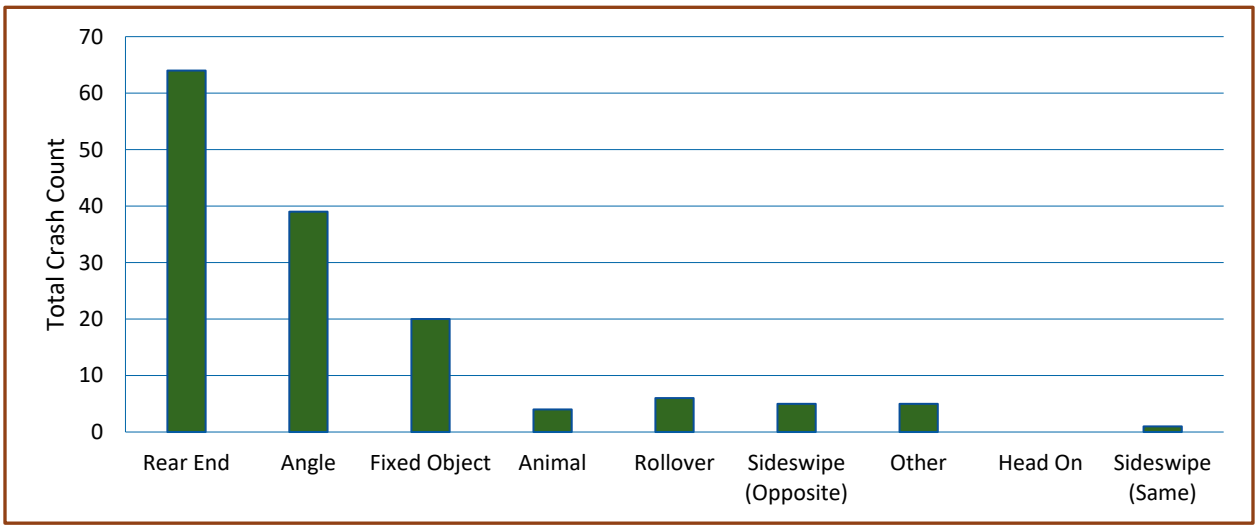
Protects Non-Motorized Travelers from Safety Risks

As many tourists use US 259, there are many pedestrian generators near the urban section of Hochatown, and the users of nearby cabins utilize nonmotorized transportation to experience local restaurants, shops, and hiking trails at Beavers Bend State Park. Despite this, no pedestrian or cyclist facilities exist along US 259. This Project intends to proactively improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, including sidewalks, to enhance the visitor experience and protect vulnerable user safety.

Reduces fatalities and/or serious injuries in rural communities to bring them below the state-wide average

Rear-end, angle, and roadway-departure (fixed object) collisions are the predominant collision types along US 259, making up about 85% of all collisions (Figure 2) due to the geometry of the roadway. US 259 is a two-lane, undivided roadway with limited shoulder widths and stormwater conveyed through roadside ditches that contribute to overflooding. Limited left or right turning lanes forces large vehicles and vehicles towing trailers to make left turns onto side streets and into commercial areas, leading to significant traffic backups and rear-end collisions when vehicles suddenly decrease speeds or stop. The Project will reduce vehicular collisions by removing conflict points between vulnerable road users and vehicles through expanded capacity of the existing two-lane highway and the inclusion of a center two-way left turn lane to reduce vehicle queuing that leads to collisions.

Figure 2: Collision Types (2017 to 2021)



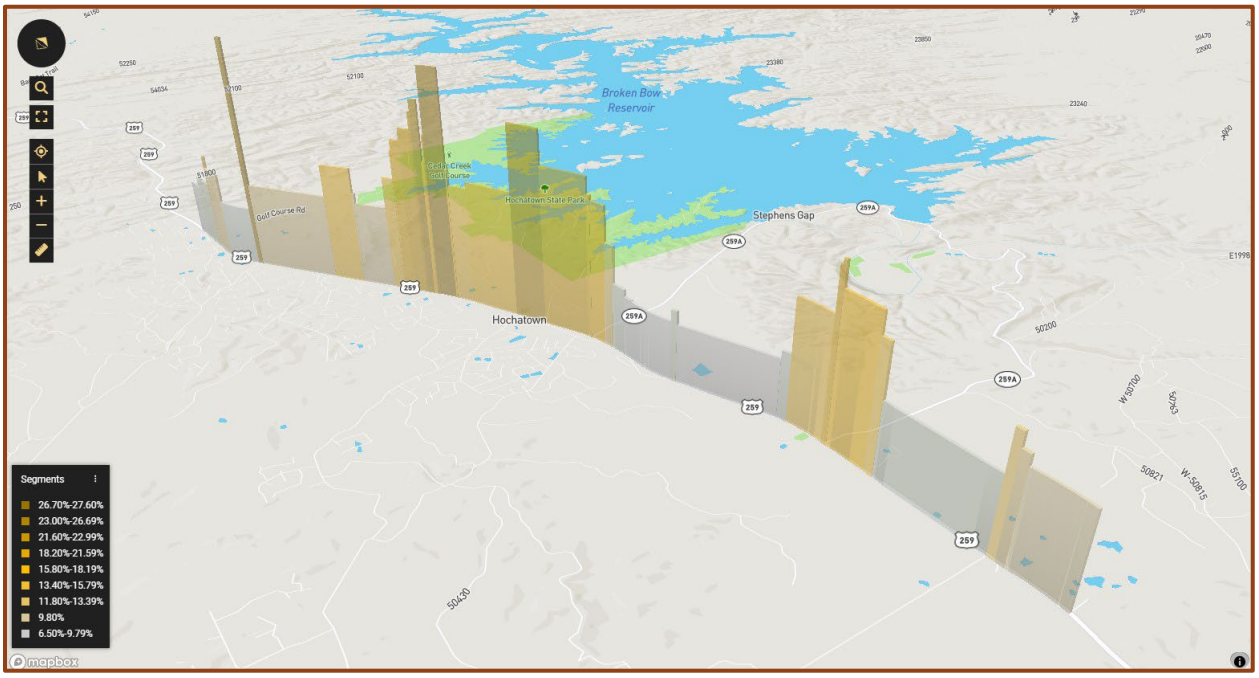
In recent years, Hochatown has become a popular destination, drawing tourists from throughout Oklahoma, as well as from neighboring states and beyond. The existing US 259 infrastructure is inadequately designed to meet the high levels of traffic experienced today and projected for the future. The Project avoids an average of over 51,000 vehicle-hours of delay per year for cars and trucks over the 20-year analysis period as a result of the higher movement efficiency of the improved roadway geometry.

Traffic Safety Analysis

A segment analysis was carried out on the US 259 corridor through Hochatown (see Figure 3). This analysis offers insights into trips along the corridor, utilizing analytics derived from Navigation-GPS data—location records generated by connected cars and turn-by-turn navigation apps for mobile devices. From July 2023 to January 2024, an average of 9,700 daily vehicles traveled along the US 259 corridor through Hochatown. During the summer season, the daily traffic from Monday to Thursday averaged 11,100 vehicles, while daily traffic from Friday to Sunday averaged 13,300 vehicles, an increase of 20%. Findings consist of:

- High congestion being observed toward the center of Downtown Hochatown.
- The average speed primarily falls within the range of 50 to 60 mph.
- Travel times along this corridor are generally less than 10 minutes.

Figure 3. US 259 Corridor Segment Analysis by Streetlight



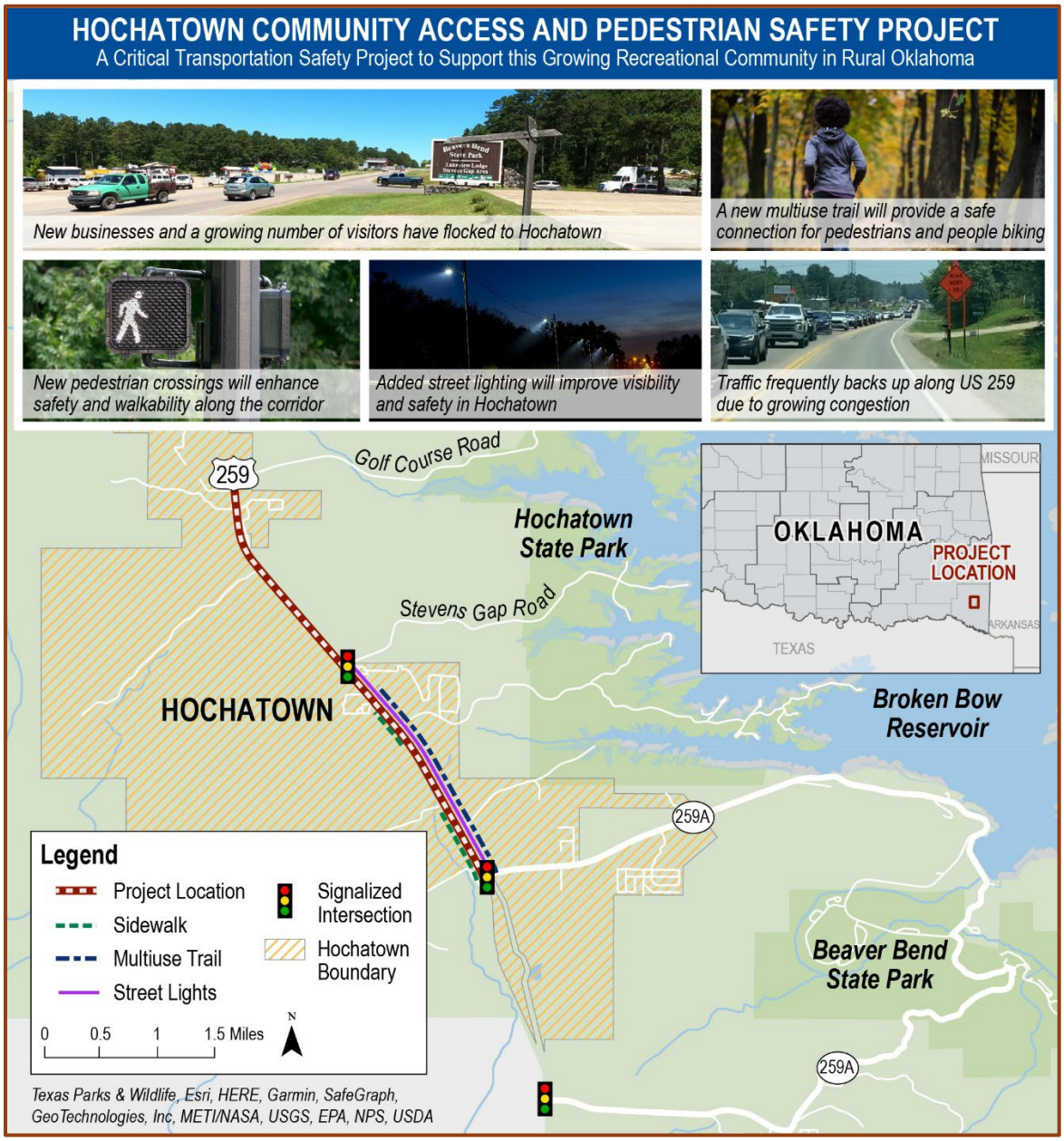
Solution

Immediate attention is required to address the needs of the growing region, which the Project will provide via improved safety for both local travelers and tourists as well as both drivers and pedestrians.

The Project will decrease the frequency of crashes, injuries, and fatalities with an annual mortality reduction of $2.0 million. On average, the value of safety amenities and facility enhancements will amount to $161,000 annually, serving approximately 85,000 bicycle trips and 103,000 pedestrian trips annually. Figure 4 illustrates the Project location and the proposed elements.

- Roadway speeds will be reduced to 45 miles per hour in the urban area to the north and south of State Highway (SH) 259A North, as part of an identified safety strategy from a traffic study of the corridor. Lower speed will improve safety and reduce the likelihood and severity of collisions as the area continues to develop and multimodal traffic increases. Reduced collisions will improve traffic flows as incidents of traffic congestion will be reduced.
- Driveways will be consolidated, and access management improvements will occur to improve traffic flows and allow vehicles to safely enter and exit properties as segments between Old Hochatown Road and Carson Creek Road have an abnormal number of collisions due to an increase in residential and commercial driveways and a higher frequency of side roads.
- Permanent 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.
- Shared-use bicycle and pedestrian trail to promote safety and mobility for pedestrians and cyclists, inclusive of 1 mile of new sidewalk and improved ADA accessibility components.

Figure 4. Project Location and Proposed Elements



Environmental Sustainability

Aligns with the State Carbon Reduction Strategy

The Project aligns with the state's approved Carbon Reduction Strategy and will significantly reduce transportation-related air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the area by reducing traffic congestion, thereby reducing idle vehicle emissions.

The Project will reduce CO_2 emissions by 2,600 tons through capacity improvements to reduce congestion.

Reduces Transportation-Related Air Pollution and GHG Emissions in Communities

The Project will benefit both residents and the surging number of tourists by providing multimodal accessibility throughout the town and to activities at Beaver Bend State Park, where no infrastructure currently exists. The shared-use trail will support a variety of options for people to travel throughout the corridor and community as many visitors and residents already walk and bike the corridor, whether by necessity or choice, the trail will provide a safe route to encourage bicycle and pedestrian travel. Solar-powered lighting along sidewalks and the trail area will be considered as a safety measure.

- Based on reduced traffic congestion, vehicle idling, and improving mobility, the Project is expected to increasingly reduce the amount of CO_2 emissions into the future. Over the 20-year analysis period, the reduction in annual CO_2 emissions is expected to average 134 metric tons per year for a total reduction of 2,681 metric tons.
- New pedestrian and cycling facilities are projected to induce 53,000 pedestrians and 42,000 cyclists annually.

Improves the Resilience of At-Risk Infrastructure

The U.S. Forest Service indicates that Hochatown faces a significant wildfire risk over the next 30 years. Access to Hochatown primarily relies on US 259, restricting entry and exit options during significant wildfire emergencies. The Project will improve accessibility for emergency vehicles and evacuations by improving transportation network efficiencies and traffic flows. The revision of the roadway geometry under the Project will enable average travel speeds of 47 MPH, compared to an average travel speed of 43 MPH under existing conditions.

Stormwater management improvements will be incorporated to remove runoff more effectively from the roadway to minimize pooling and eliminate untreated spillover into the watershed.

- Installation of new curbs and gutters will help manage stormwater more effectively, removing runoff from the roadway to minimize pooling while eliminating untreated spillovers into the watershed. ODOT will evaluate drainage solutions along the corridor as design advances.

Quality of Life

Improves Access to Daily Destinations

The Project will improve access to daily destinations in and around Hochatown, such as jobs, public health infrastructure, grocery stores, places of worship, local businesses, trails, parks, and recreational areas like Broken Bow Lake (Figure 5) and Beavers Bend State Park (Figure 6) within the Ouachita National Forest. Accessibility will be improved through the expansion of affordable transportation infrastructure (multi-use path) and improved travel flows.

Figure 5. Visitors Paddle on Broken Bow Lake

The US 259 corridor struggles to handle both residents and the surge of tourists using vehicles, resulting in significant traffic congestion. Furthermore, Hochatown suffers from a deficit of sidewalks and bicycle facilities. The construction of the new pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure, including the shared-use path, sidewalks, and crosswalks, is expected to benefit existing and

induced users; local residents and tourists visiting. The Project will also expand the capacity of the existing two-lane highway and include a center two-way left turn lane to reduce vehicle queuing. 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.

Increases Affordable Transportation Options for Safer and More Accessible Options

ODOT will ensure a variety of mobility options exist. Improved roadway infrastructure will reduce fuel consumption, leading to fuel and travel time savings. Improved transportation network efficiency will likewise improve travel times for all modes of transportation.

Figure 6. Welcome Sign to Beavers Bend State Park

Alongside the lane expansion, the Project will involve the construction of essential sidewalks and a shared-use trail running parallel to US 259. This development aims to offer multimodal transportation options for both residents and visitors, increasing the variety of modal choices between Hochatown's amenities. ODOT is committed to supporting a safe and effective transportation system that provides affordable, accessible multimodal opportunities for access to key daily destinations, as well as local attractions.

The Project is geared toward improving safety and connectivity in this area of persistent poverty area, fostering growth within the community and potentially opening doors for new development. ODOT remains committed to addressing the needs of both the Choctaw Nation and Hochatown community members throughout the Project's design, emphasizing safety, connectivity, and economic opportunities, including the creation of good-paying jobs.

Mobility and Community Connectivity

Improves System-Wide Connectivity

The current state of the US 259 corridor passing through Hochatown fails to meet both present demands and the anticipated needs of a rapidly evolving area. The existing two-lane highway can barely accommodate the rising traffic volume propelled by local development and tourism. This Project aims to augment the corridor's capacity, improving safety and operational efficiency while addressing the pressing need for safe pedestrian connectivity, which is currently lacking in the area. ADT levels have risen from 3,411 in 2014 to 9,200 in 2023 and are projected to continue to rise. Improved surface transportation flows will improve overall system-wide network connectivity through reduced traffic congestion and expanded modal choices.

Removes Physical Barriers for Individuals by Reconnecting Communities to Direct, Affordable Transportation Options

In response to Hochatown's lack of sidewalks and bicycle facilities (Figure 7), ODOT plans to address these deficiencies as part of the Project. Alongside the lane expansion, the Project will involve the construction of essential sidewalks and a shared-use trail running parallel to US 259. This development aims to offer multimodal transportation options for both residents and visitors, alleviating the need for short-distance car trips between Hochatown's amenities. ODOT is committed to reconnecting

communities to both sides of US 259 to support a safe and effective transportation system that provides direct access to affordable, accessible multimodal opportunities.

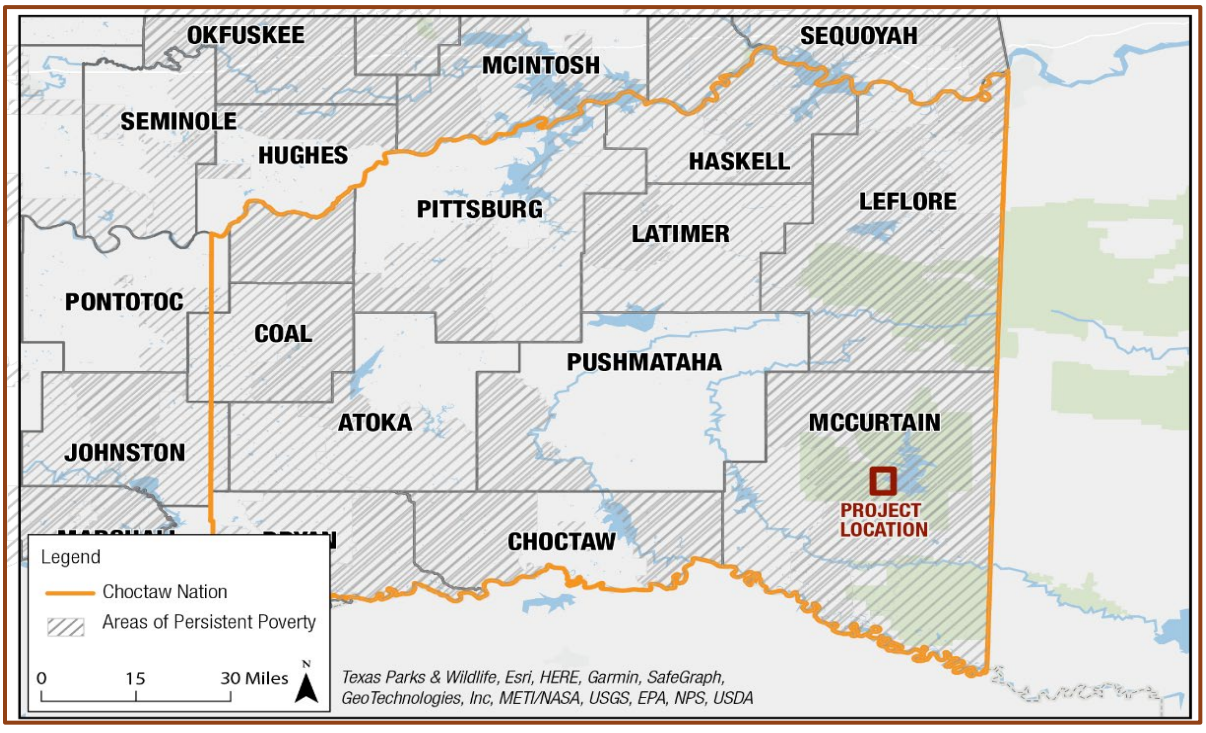
Figure 7: Cyclist Along US259

The approximately 2-mile shared-use trail will serve as a safe and accessible route for nonmotorized travel, catering to the community's needs. Beyond its recreational purposes for pedestrians and cyclists, the trail will contribute to reducing vehicular traffic on the highway, particularly for journeys between lodging areas, restaurants, breweries, wineries, and other popular destinations in Hochatown. 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.

The Project's shared-use trail will include ADA improvements and enhance the mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown. Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and collection of feedback from the community.

The Project is geared toward improving safety and connectivity in this area of persistent poverty area (Figure 8), fostering growth within the community and potentially opening doors for new development. ODOT remains committed to addressing the needs of both the Choctaw Nation and Hochatown community members throughout the Project's design, emphasizing safety, connectivity, and economic opportunities, including the creation of good-paying jobs.

Figure 8: Areas of Persistent Poverty



Includes Transportation Features to Increase Accessibility

The Project significantly removes barriers for individuals to transportation, jobs, and businesses; increases opportunities by providing more extensive transportation choices and access to urban amenities; and reduces commute time and congestion. The Project will provide improved accessibility to many of Hochatown's most visited assets and activities, and includes the following Quality of Life elements:

Improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists are expected to generate more than 53,000 additional pedestrian trips and 41,500 cycling trips in the opening year.

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements included with the shared-use trail will enhance the mobility and connectivity throughout Hochatown. The lane expansion and shared-use trail will improve access to daily destinations, such as jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, places of worship, recreational facilities, and parks.
- Connectivity to existing trails and recreational areas will be considered throughout the design development and collection of feedback from the community.
- Lane capacity expansion on US 259 will restore the free flow of traffic, reduce travel delays, and create a safer experience for motorized and nonmotorized travelers.

Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity

Facilitates Tourism Opportunities

Tourism has emerged as the primary economic driver in the region, drawn by the scenic beauty and recreational offerings of Broken Bow Lake, the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, Beavers Bend State Park, and the surrounding Ouachita National Forest. Over the past few decades, private landowners have developed homes, luxury cabins, roads, and other infrastructure along the national forest's borders. Hochatown has evolved into a favored destination for families and friends to convene for various occasions, including holidays, weddings, and summer getaways. 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, and during popular seasons, Hochatown can have more than 30,000[1] people visiting the area. Beavers Bend State Park is a popular state park in Oklahoma with more than 2 million visitors each year, and the park is only accessible from within the Project limits. For most of its existence, 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% increase[2] in travel spending compared to 2019.

Total travel time savings for all vehicles is $19.8 million.

The Project is expected to 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

[1] Dunn, Lori. 2022. "It's official: Tourist haven Hochatown, Okla., now a city." *Texarkana Gazette*. November 28. https://www.texarkanagazette.com/news/2022/nov/28/its-official-tourist-haven-hochatown-okla-now-a/.

[2] Brandes, Heide. 2020. "Hochatown: Southeast Oklahoma's unlikely tourism hub." *NonDoc*. November 23. https://nondoc.com/2020/11/23/hochatown-southeast-oklahoma-unlikely-tourism-hub/.

destinations, local businesses, lodging areas, and planned future job opportunities, and will overall serve to stimulate growth and economic development.

Figure 9. Tourist Attractions and Businesses Line U.S. 259 in Hochatown

The Project will reduce delays for both vehicles and pedestrians and will improve system connectivity. The shared-use path for bicyclists and pedestrians may increase access to retail areas, restaurants, and saloons, and it will provide 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 quickly adjusted and adapted to the overwhelmingly positive amount of increased business performance. The community is continuing to develop and plans for future growth, such as a new Choctaw Landing development adjacent to US 259.

The Choctaw Landing resort, which opened in 2024, has generated over 400 new jobs in the area with an estimated $95 million impact just in the first year.[3] The facility features amenities such as a small market, dining options, and a fuel station. Beyond its economic impact, the development aims to educate visitors about Choctaw Nation history. The Project has boosted tourism, contributing to future job opportunities, and enhancing a crucial transportation link in the rural community.

Improves Freight Mobility

The US 259 road passing through Hochatown serves as a crucial freight corridor, supporting not only tourism but also various industries like agriculture and logging. These industries contribute to the traffic load on US 259, which is the sole major highway in the region. Unfortunately, this highway is currently congested due to its two-lane configuration.

To address these challenges, an ongoing project (3433304) within the Freight Program and Oklahoma Freight Transportation Plan aims to enhance US 259's capacity. This Project focuses on alleviating congestion and improving safety. However, there are additional concerns related to access management for local businesses. Since there are no alternative roads bypassing Hochatown, all regional traffic is funneled through US 259, creating difficulties for both local businesses and the broader community.

[3] 2024. "Choctaw Landing hosts Grand Opening Celebration." *Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.* May 23. https://www.choctawnation.com/news/news-releases/choctaw-landing-hosts-grand-opening-celebration/#:~:text=The%20opening%20of%20the%20%24238,economic%20impact%20on%20the%20region.

Logging is the primary industry in this region, necessitating the use of large transport trucks on the heavily traveled highway through Hochatown. Unfortunately, the existing US 259 lacks designated turning lanes, which poses a significant challenge for large vehicles, including logging trucks and those towing trailers. Left turns become difficult or impossible, leading to traffic backups, delays, and an increased risk of rear-end collisions for motorists along US 259.

Promote Local Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

ODOT aims to expand opportunities for local businesses. The state fosters innovative ideas through a pioneering spirit and the state has created an environment where entrepreneurship is celebrated and cultivated by investing in new businesses and industries. With diverse co-working spaces, incubators and business accelerators present, the state draws in entrepreneurship activities. State, education and private organizations get entrepreneurs in front of investors to fund startups and launch new products. The state supports public and private resources to support new enterprises.

Furthermore, the opening of the Choctaw Landing resort has generated over 400 new jobs in the area and the economic impact of growing tourism numbers will continue to draw in additional businesses. Furthermore, the community has become a vacation rental boomtown, with the number of cabins growing from about 400 pre-COVID to more than 2,400 — a 413% increase in five years, according to AirDNA. Vacation rentals transform communities, bringing economic growth with increasing tourism as the demand for the service industry increases due to rising visitor numbers. An investment into transportation infrastructure will help to ensure that visitors are capable of accessing the resort and the growing number of local businesses found within the community.

State of Good Repair

Restores and Modernizes Existing Core Infrastructure Assets

The Project aims to construct within the existing footprint, minimizing the need for right-of-way (ROW) acquisition. The US 259 corridor, vital for truck traffic due to the logging industry in rural and natural areas, lacks an alternative north-south connection in the southeastern region. To enhance safe and efficient travel, support goods and services movement, and promote tourism, ODOT prioritizes investments. Currently, the US 259 corridor is a two-lane, undivided highway with varying shoulder widths, no turn lanes, and no pedestrian or bicycling facilities (refer to Figure 10). Furthermore, the pavement is currently cracking with potholes likely to develop and progress rapidly throughout the corridor, as the roadway is overdue for repaving. 90% of the roadway is in fair condition.

Figure 10. U.S. 259 North of Stevens Gap Road

The existing transportation infrastructure lacks essential amenities for communities, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities. As tourism numbers are projected to continue to grow, as indicated by the 95% tourism spending growth from 2019-2022 in McCurtain County, pedestrian and cyclist figures as well as associated infrastructure usage is projected to grow. The Project aims to rectify these deficiencies by introducing a modernized, safer, and expanded highway design with a shared-use trail.

This initiative seeks to enhance connectivity along the corridor and improve conditions for the community, which currently lacks such amenities. Without Project construction, Hochatown will continue to be negatively impacted by its transportation network deficiency, which will affect long-term economic growth, and the accessibility and mobility of residents and tourists. The Project will improve existing transportation infrastructure for the area's growing number of visitors and residents, promoting business, land investments, and future urban growth.

Addresses Transportation System Vulnerabilities for Communities

ODOT is responsible for the management of 30,373 miles of roadway throughout the state, which requires a thorough maintenance plan. Furthermore, ODOT has had an established Periodic Maintenance Schedule (PMS) in place for a number of years. A key function of the PMS is to forecast pavement performance using Performance Quality Improvement, anticipated funding levels, and detailed analytical models developed based on years of historical pavement condition and treatment performance data. Additionally, ODOT routinely reviews the condition of its roadways, to ensure safe actively addressing pavement deterioration due to traffic and weather, allocating $500 million over four years, with federal and state funding, to mitigate pavement and bridge conditions statewide. Operation and maintenance costs for the next 30 years are secured within ODOT's state budget, guaranteeing dependable highway operations. Upon completion, the Project will become eligible for inclusion in ODOT's Asset Preservation Plan, which will ensure both the multi-use path and the highway are maintained in a state of good repair. Taking a preventive approach, the Project will enhance US 259 to a state of good repair as ODOT is aiming to have over 40% of roadways in a state of good repair, ensuring safety and minimizing traffic delays attributable to pavement degradation.

Prioritize Improvement of the Condition and Safety of Existing Transportation Infrastructure within the Existing Footprint

Relocations and ROW acquisitions will be minimal for the Project, reducing impact on the local community. The US 259 corridor has at least 65 feet of ROW from the roadway's centerline, with some variations in offset reaching 130 feet. This large ROW footprint minimizes the typical challenges associated with typical construction project impacts to residential and commercial property.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The Project has received a surge of support from both the local community, businesses in the region, and statewide interest groups, highlighting a collaborative effort to address pressing transportation challenges. The current two-lane roadway falls short in meeting the area's needs, particularly as the region experiences dynamic growth and evolving demands. With development and tourism fueling traffic growth, the existing highway struggles to accommodate increasing traffic volumes. Congestion detrimentally impacts local residents, tourists, and businesses reliant on the US 259 corridor. The collective recognition of these challenges underscores the importance of partnerships and collaboration in finding effective solutions.

Engaged and Will Engage Residents and Community-Based Organizations

ODOT first presented the Project at a community outreach event on October 27, 2022, at the Broken Bow Senior High School auditorium in Broken Bow. The presentation included brief background information, a description of existing conditions of the Project area, 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 delivered new data and information on the suggested safety improvements that were intended to address concerns raised at the previous meeting of the substantial growth from tourism and new developments.

On November 26, 2024, ODOT held a public walkability audit (Figure 11) throughout various portions of the US 259 corridor to engage the community and gather feedback on current issues as well as potential solutions the public feels comfortable with. The public voiced concerns over unsafe crossings due to lack of pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, and the need to reduce the vehicular speed limit. Furthermore, the public expects that pedestrian traffic will continue to increase, which will only exacerbate the conflict between vehicles and vulnerable road users further.

Figure 11: Public Walkability Audit

As Phase 1 has entered construction, ODOT has attended monthly community outreach meetings. ODOT will continue to engage with the community throughout the Project process.

Stakeholder Support

Letters of Support have been received from the Choctaw Nation, Kiamichi Economic Development District of Oklahoma (KEDDO), Oklahoma Trucking Association, Southeastern Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SERTPO), and the Oklahoma Bicycle Society. These Letters of Support are available in the appendix of this application, and a complete list of all the Letters of Support received for this Project are available on the ODOT website.

Innovation: Technology, Delivery, Financing

Innovative Technology

ODOT will enhance the environment for connected and automated vehicles to improve the detection and mitigation of safety risks. As connected and automated vehicles have the capability of communicating with traffic lights, the agency will evaluate the use of traditional and AI-improved traffic signal systems and components to mitigate safety risks. 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, including connected and automated vehicles while serving 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. Additional detection characteristics may also consist of high-speed signalized approaches and associated dilemma zones.

In addition to conventional public outreach methods, ODOT will utilize dynamic message signs to communicate information about public meetings and construction to the community. These assets will play a crucial role in informing the public and enabling users to plan alternative routes, ultimately reducing congestion during construction. This approach aims to enhance the safety and efficiency of movement through and around the work zone as an innovative project delivery method.

Innovative Financing

The Project will benefit from state funding through the RETRO Fund, which is a one-time allocation of $200 million from the Fiscal Year 2024 General Appropriations bill. The RETRO Fund has been instrumental in innovatively financing rural transportation projects in Oklahoma. In accordance with RETRO Fund provisions, these resources will help accelerate construction, repair, and maintenance of the 8-year Construction Work Plan projects in qualifying rural areas that have experienced robust economic development causing an impactful increase to traffic volumes and safety concerns.