

## PROJECT

# Interstate 35 Corridor

Eight consecutive I-35 bridge designs showcase Oklahoma's history

by James J. Handy Sr. and Steven Weitzman, Creative Design Resolutions Inc.

The Interstate 35 (I-35) corridor widening project in Norman, Okla., is proving to be another seminal effort in the field of aesthetic master planning because of the unusual concentrated focus on sequential bridges and highway walls within a single community. Highway travelers and pedestrians will gradually discover the history and story of the city while commuting through this north-south interstate corridor. Each bridge and highway wall tells part of the overall story of the City of Norman.

The project began when the Oklahoma Art in Public Places Division (OAIPP) engaged an aesthetic design firm to develop an aesthetic master plan for the I-35 corridor. Gary Ridley, secretary of transportation, Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) wrote of the role of the aesthetic design firm, "You have provided ODOT with initial

design concepts, helped us through the community involvement process, worked closely with our highway contractors, and provided us with a high-quality product in a timely manner that adds value to the end product that can't be achieved in any other way." The intention was to create an inventory of designs that can be incorporated throughout the greater highway system.

The introduction of aesthetics into the transportation system is an important step in enhancing the quality of life for both the community and for people visiting the city. The exploration and development of aesthetic transportation design is an increasingly essential component of successful transportation projects. In increasing numbers, departments of transportation across the country have collaborated with designers to integrate aesthetics into their transportation infrastructure.

Eight interchanges are included in the design of the I-35 corridor aesthetic master plan. The project includes aesthetics for one set of retaining walls, two bridges that will be retrofitted, and six bridges that will be demolished and rebuilt. All designs will be based on Norman, Okla., culture and aesthetics. By widening I-35, the ODOT and the city of Norman desired to

- provide additional capacity for traffic without sacrificing too much of the remaining natural environment,
- encourage safety along this highway corridor by introducing additional pedestrian amenities, and
- promote community identity through the implementation of aesthetics for a series of transportation enhancements.

The most successful transportation projects employ context-sensitive solutions during the initial aesthetic design

Bridge	Theme	Description
U.S. 77 Interchange	Prairie	Prairie lands and the natural environment before settlements
Tecumseh Street Bridge	Tecumseh the Shawnee Nation	Shawnee Nation and their renowned Chief Tecumseh, for whom the street is named
Rock Creek Road Bridge	Horses in Motion	The quarter horse industry as well as the historic cowboys' horses; Rock Creek Road leads west towards Norman horse farms.
Robinson Street Bridge	Railroad	Importance of the railroad in the City of Norman's history; Robinson Street crosses the railroad tracks and leads east towards the Santa Fe Railroad depot.
Main Street Bridge	Land Run of 1889	Historic claiming of land and settlement; this bridge leads to historic downtown Norman.
Lindsey Street Bridge	University of Oklahoma	Extension of the Cherokee Gothic style of architecture found at the university, which is accessed by Lindsey St.
SH-9 East Interchange	Lake Aquatics	This bridge draws inspiration from nearby Lake Thunderbird, which is accessed by SH-9 East.
SH-9 West Interchange	Agriculture and the Chickasaw Nation	Agriculture and ancient Chickasaw designs; agricultural fields and the Chickasaw Nation are near this bridge.

## profile

### INTERSTATE 35 CORRIDOR / NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

**CLIENT:** Oklahoma Art in Public Places Division, Norman, Okla.

**MASTER PLAN DESIGN CONSULTANT:** Creative Design Resolutions Inc., Brentwood, Md.

**SPECIALTY STAIN AND FORM-LINER FABRICATOR:** Creative Form Liners Inc., Brentwood, Md.



The aesthetics for the U.S. 77 Interchange represent the prairie lands and the natural environment before settlements. All photos: Creative Design Resolutions Inc.

phase, and throughout each step in the development process. This makes a variety of design options available right from the start. For the I-35 corridor project, the community, project team, and other interested stakeholders were assembled before any designs were implemented.

In mid-2008, the OAIPP organized a representative group of community members to serve on the aesthetic design committee and held an initial meeting to collect the community's interests, visions, and goals for the I-35 corridor. At the same time, the OAIPP contracted with an aesthetic design firm to develop the designs and serve as the liaison between the project team and the community.

Information from the committee's first meeting was combined with research data to develop potential themes for the corridor, and create conceptual designs that could be used for the individual bridges.

The following factors were taken into account in developing the overall design theme before beginning to select the various theme options for each bridge:

- General location of the bridges,
- Historical demographics of the area,

The aesthetics for the completed Rock Creek Road Bridge reference Oklahoma's quarter horse industry, as well as the historic cowboys' horses.



## OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND CITY OF NORMAN, OWNERS

**BRIDGE DESCRIPTION:** Eight bridges and one retaining wall with features based on the culture and aesthetics of Norman, Okla.



A close-up of the mural for a mechanically stabilized earth wall that will be part of the Main Street Bridge, which is under construction.



The aesthetics for the Main Street Bridge depict the historic claiming of land and settlement.

- Traffic assessment,
- Vast and deep Native American heritage,
- Past and present cultural growth and diversity, and
- Pioneer settlement implications that helped develop the culture and industry of the City of Norman.

In November 2008, the themes and designs were shared with the committee to stimulate feedback and discussion. During this meeting, the committee selected themes for each of the eight bridges listed in the table on page 30.

By the end of 2008, the committee, the project team, owners, and the aesthetic design firm had successfully developed aesthetic designs for each bridge and the retaining wall.

Currently, three of the eight bridges in the aesthetic master plan, are complete: U.S. 77 Interchange, Rock Creek Road Bridge, and SH-9 West Interchange. The Main Street Bridge is under construction, Construction on the SH-9 East Interchange is slated to begin in the fall of 2013, the Lindsey Street Bridge is set to start in 2014, and the Tecumseh Street Bridge and Robinson Street Bridge will be scheduled later.

History, culture, tradition, architecture, and various other community-oriented inspirations have guided the development of the aesthetic enhancements for the I-35 corridor project. As set forth through the supervision of the City of Norman and the ODOT, all designs originate from thorough research. This research includes studies of the region, community

suggestions and responses, as well as other published studies. By consulting published studies, transportation solutions are found that widen the highway without sacrificing too much of the natural environment, while also encouraging pedestrian safety and promoting community identity.

Through the process of developing the aesthetic solutions, it quickly became apparent that the thematic plan carried from bridge to bridge and along highway walls not only celebrates the unique value of Norman's history, but also represents the state of Oklahoma. The aesthetic solutions provide vehicular traffic and pedestrians a way to discover and visually read the story of this city and state, while making their commute a more-beautiful experience. 



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The aesthetics for the completed SH-9 West Interchange illustrate agriculture and incorporate ancient Chickasaw designs.