

Prior to statehood, a system of county-led road construction and maintenance had been established, but roads and bridges on tribal lands were controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The mostly dirt roads were only sporadically maintained. Since the Indian nations and Oklahoma Territory did not have the financial resources nor the technology to properly maintain the roads, the public found they often had to deal with washed out crossings, quicksand filled stream and river beds, and other problems. Although railroad bridges were in use, most were simple wooden structures or “straw bridges” that consisted of straw mats which were laid on the river bottom.

The national campaign known as the “Good Roads” movement was founded in St. Louis in 1893 and found a foothold in Oklahoma in 1902 after a series of disastrous floods. The movement was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Office of Road Inquiry (later Office of Public Roads) and railroad companies. The railroad had just as much of an interest in good roads as the public, since better access meant that farmers could reach rail lines and markets more easily. In fact, railroads such as the St. Louis and San Francisco even used excursion trains to showcase the demonstration roads it had helped build in the Oklahoma Territory. The movement was able to secure provisions (including the establishment of a state highway department) during the 1906 Oklahoma State Constitutional Convention.

During the early years of statehood, individual townships had the responsibility of maintaining roads and local individuals were required to maintain the section-line roads, which were often the only roads that existed in the area. By 1911, the highway department existed, but received no funding for construction or maintenance of roads, nor did they have any authority. In fact, Oklahoma claimed only 23 miles of hard surfaced roads, the fewest in the United States. Only with the passage of the 1916 Federal Aid Highway Act were matching funds provided and state legislators made funding for state roads available. Previously, funding was channeled through county road improvement districts that had been established in 1909. Between 1917 and 1919, \$690,834.00 in federal money was appropriated for Oklahoma roads, and counties matched this 50-50. Primarily due to the efforts of the Good Roads Association, rural roads continued to improve; farmers had better access to towns, railroads, and markets, which in turn improved the values of farm property and businesses.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

The turn of the twentieth century also brought advancements in bridge construction to Oklahoma. Counties increasingly purchased prefabricated, often mass-produced, metal trusses and suspension bridges (often tolled to save public money) from Midwestern bridge companies such as the Central States Bridge Company, Rochester Bridge Company, Vincennes Bridge Company of Indiana; the Canton Bridge Company of Ohio; John Gilligan Company and Monarch Engineering of Nebraska; Midland Bridge Company, Kansas City Bridge Company, and Canton Bridge Company of Kansas City, and the Missouri Valley Bridge and Iron Company of Kansas. These bridges could be transported to the site by railroad gondolas and erected by local workers supervised by a bridge company representative. This mode of bridge construction became a regular practice in the state, and several bridge companies benefited from opening an office in Oklahoma; the J. B. Klein Iron and Foundry Company (later Robberson Steel Company) and the Boardman Company both opened offices in Oklahoma City. Generally these metal truss and suspension bridges were good durable designs, and the convenience of “turnkey” service by bridge companies proved to be a successful solution for many small creeks and streams. Toll bridges lost