

INFORMATION RELEASE



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AHTD RESEARCH GRANT TO HELP FUND ARKANSAS RIVER STUDY AT UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

LITTLE ROCK (10-22) – The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) is providing \$45,000 to the Mack-Blackwell National Rural Transportation Study Center at the University of Arkansas (UA) to help fund an Economic Impact Study for the Arkansas River.

The study will look at the impact and value of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System on the economies of the States of Arkansas and Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation is also contributing to the study, and the Arkansas Waterways Commission will coordinate and provide oversight for the bi-state effort.

It may sound odd that two agencies traditionally focused on highways are participating in this study,” stated AHTD Director Scott Bennett. “But the Arkansas River is a major contributor to the economies and transportation networks of both states. We need to determine the best use of the river and how that relates to other modes of transportation. We need to know how river travel, or the lack thereof, affects the highway systems in both States; and we need to know how many jobs are supported by river shipping.”

The Arkansas River study, to be conducted by the Mack-Blackwell Center, is in addition to four research grants totaling over \$900,000 that were awarded to the UA by the AHTD earlier this summer.

Those projects are being undertaken by the UA College of Engineering utilizing the University South research and technology park and include:

- A \$367,000, 36-month project to test various types of cement/aggregate combinations to determine if Arkansas materials are more susceptible to certain types of failures over time;
- A \$156,000, 24-month project to investigate the use of Polyacrylamide (PAM) as a treatment to meet EPA clean water runoff standards;
- A \$219,000, 24-month project to evaluate asphalt properties of older Interstate pavements to determine why some perform better than others; and,
- A \$188,000, 18-month project to evaluate various methods of reconstructing low-volume highways using reclaimed materials.

The UA is also subcontracting on a \$179,000, 24-month project led by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to study the efficiency and economic feasibility of using arch culverts instead of box culverts in certain locations.

The river study and research grants are the most recent in a long history of collaboration between the AHTD and the UA, Bennett noted. “Since 1993, we’ve provided the University with over \$20 million in research contracts and operating costs for the Mack-Blackwell Study Center and the Center for Training Transportation Professionals,” Bennett said. “Additionally, we’ve provided about \$15 million in State funds for Razorback Transit, and over \$50 million in Federal and State discretionary funds for roadway improvements on and around the UA campus.* And in just the past 10 years, we’ve helped fund over \$100,000 in scholarships to engineering students at the UA. That’s nearly \$90 million invested by the AHTD at the UA in the past 20 years. We believe these are worthwhile investments that benefit the University, the AHTD, the transportation industry, and our citizens greatly,” Bennett added.

Chancellor David Gearhart acknowledged, “The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department has been a long-term supporter of transportation research and education programs at the University of Arkansas. AHTD’s most recent investment in studying economic impacts of Arkansas River transportation is well-timed with the U of A’s recently awarded Maritime Transportation Research and Education Center, a U.S. Department of Transportation University Transportation Center.”

“We are fortunate to have universities here in Arkansas that are capable of performing research such as this,” Bennett said. “The research is very important to helping us provide quality, cost-efficient transportation, and it helps the students gain valuable, real-world experience. It’s really a win-win for the UA and the AHTD, and ultimately, for our State.”

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* The roadway work referenced by Bennett includes the widening of Razorback Road (Highway 112) from I-540 to the campus, and the widening of Wedington and Garland Avenues (Highways 112S and 112) also from I-540 to the campus. The UA and the AHTD are currently developing a project to complete the widening of Razorback Road (Highway 112) through the campus to connect the previously widened sections of Highway 112 (Razorback and Garland). Other roadway improvements included in the 20-year total include widening and interchange work on I-540 as well as various projects on Institutional Drives on campus.