

Ohio's Research Initiative for Locals (ORIL)

Strategic Research Plan for SFY2026

Introduction

Maintaining Ohio's transportation system is no easy task. While ODOT cares for the infrastructure along Interstate, U.S. and state routes, the responsibility for management and upkeep of local roadways – which comprise 84% of the state's centerline miles¹ – is carried by Ohio's counties, cities, villages and townships.

Ohio's Research Initiative for Locals (ORIL) is a program established in 2013 to provide research support for Ohio's local jurisdictions, in order to address problems and challenges specific to the local roadway system. ODOT and FHWA are providing initial funding for the program. ORIL's long-term goal would be to have the program eventually establish a basis for self-sustaining funding.



Mission

ORIL develops, funds, and oversees transportation research projects to meet the needs of local agencies for the safety and economic well-being of the traveling public and Ohio.

Vision

ORIL, with self-sustaining funding, identifies, manages, and facilitates strategic research that solves local transportation challenges with implementable and cost-effective solutions.

Program Overview

The ORIL program is directed by a Board of fifteen voting members, and three non-voting/supporting members. The membership is diverse to provide representation of the various types of local agencies in Ohio.

The overall programmatic process for ORIL consists of four phases: Idea Generation, Project Execution, Results Implementation, and Program Assessment. The ORIL Board has established a [schedule](#) of annual timeframes for program activities. Target dates for each year include: August/September Research Idea Submission by local agencies; December/January – development and posting of Requests for Proposals by the ORIL Board; and March – Research Proposal Submission by researchers. Please refer to the [ORIL Website](#) and [ORIL Guidebook](#) for detailed information regarding the program's development, processes, procedures and resource documents/forms.

¹ Source: *System Mileage by Functional Class as of 4/16/2025* (Ohio Department of Transportation – Office of Technical Services)
<https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/programs/technical-services/tech-services-card-catalog/08-ri-339>

Local Research Focus Areas

The ORIL Board has established the following strategic focus areas to assist with generating research topics/ideas that address the needs of Ohio's local agencies.

- **Safety**

Ensuring the safety of those utilizing and maintaining our transportation system is a priority for all transportation agencies. The traveling public expects the system to meet their individual needs in a manner that is safe, convenient, economic, and efficient with minimal disruption to their daily routines. In addition, protection for roadway crews working on-location is a prominent concern. Identifying, developing and implementing corrective strategies before hazardous events occur is key to advancing a safe and reliable transportation system. For local agencies the identification of cost appropriate, yet effective, safety measures can often be a challenge.

- **Infrastructure Preservation**

Without meeting basic maintenance needs, pavements, bridges, signs, guardrail, pavement markings and other roadway features would degrade to the point of being hazardous. The major challenge is to sustain these conditions in a time of declining resources. As our infrastructure ages, it is important to find ways to preserve existing facilities, especially pavements and bridges, while improving design and construction methods which produce reliable, long-lasting facilities.

- **Operations & Business Practices**

Local transportation agencies face a variety of challenges based on their geography, traffic, population density, funding, equipment, staffing, local expectations, governmental structure and history. The identification and evaluation of best practices can be difficult, given the uniqueness of individual organizations. The ability to be aware of existing research and its local applicability can be a challenge for local agencies.

Next Steps

This Strategic Plan will play a vital role as viable research ideas are identified and developed into active research projects. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the ORIL program is being developed and implemented through a dynamic and evolving process. Accordingly, the ORIL Board may choose to review and update this document in the future as needed. Current research activities of the ORIL program are detailed in the [ORIL Fiscal Year 2026 Research Program Book](#).

Contact Information

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