



2021 TMACOG Virtual General Assembly County Caucus Notes Wednesday, January 20, 2021

Call to Order/Welcome – The County Caucus met on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via GoToMeeting video/teleconference. Ottawa County Commissioner and TMACOG Chair Mark Stahl, the moderator of the caucus, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Commissioner Stahl explained the purpose of the caucus for those new to TMACOG.

Caucus members in attendance included:

- Carlos Baez – County Engineer, Sandusky County Engineer’s Office
- Mark Coppeler – Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners
- Don Douglas – Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners
- Theresa Garcia – County Administrator, Sandusky County Board of Commissioners
- Doris Herringshaw – Commissioner, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Andrew Kalmar – County Administrator, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Craig LaHote – Commissioner, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Ron Lajti – County Engineer, Ottawa County Engineer’s Office
- Scott Miller – Commissioner, Sandusky County Board of Commissioners
- Mike Pniewski – County Engineer, Lucas County Engineer’s Office
- Mark Stahl – Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners & Chair, TMACOG
- Carri Stanley – Assistant County Administrator, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Russ Zimmerman – Commissioner, Sandusky County Board of Commissioners

Other TMACOG members and guests in attendance included:

- Meg Adams – External Affairs, FirstEnergy/Toledo Edison
- Mike Avellano – Engineer Program Director, Woolpert, Inc.
- Lori Brodie – Northwest Ohio Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio State Auditor Keith Faber
- Dana Brown – Western Division Service Plaza Manager, Ohio Turnpike & Infrastructure Commission
- Frank Butwin – President, Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor
- Victor Coleman – External Affairs Consultant, FirstEnergy/Toledo Edison
- Patrick Etchie – Senior Project Manager, The Mannik & Smith Group, Inc.
- Teresa Fedor – State Senator, 11th District, Ohio
- Meghan Gallagher – Regional Business Development Coordinator and Account Manager, Ohio Turnpike & Infrastructure Commission
- Theresa Gavarone – State Senator, 2nd District, Ohio
- Adam Greenslade – Mayor, Village of Green Springs & Dir. of Government Affairs & Marcom, Ohio Turnpike & Infrastructure Commission
- Sara Helbig – Executive Director of Marketing, Jones & Henry Engineers
- Erica Krause – NW Ohio Regional Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown
- Michael Libben – District Program Administrator, Ottawa Soil & Water Conservation District
- R.J. Lumbrezer – Principal/Survey Manager, DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC
- Rick McGuckin – Principal, DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC
- Amanda Miller – Area Manager, External Affairs, AT&T Ohio

- Dean Niese – Principal, The Mannik & Smith Group, Inc.
- Scott Noonan – Council Member, City of Maumee
- Tim Pedro – Mayor, City of Waterville
- Todd Ritzler – SVP, Government Relationship Manager, Huntington Bank
- Sean Smith – Planner, TARTA
- Lisa Sobecki – State Representative, 44th District, Ohio
- Greg Telecky – Principal, Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc.
- Thomas Uhler – Vice Chair, Wood County Port Authority
- Kacey Young – Capital Programs Administrator, Ohio Department of Transportation

TMACOG staff members in attendance included:

- Jennifer Allen, Executive Assistant
- Marissa Bechstein, Transportation Planner
- William Best, Vice President of Finance and Administration
- Tim Brown, President
- Lance Dasher, Transportation Planner
- David Gedeon, Vice President of Transportation
- Sara Guiher, Water Quality Planner
- Lisa Householder, Transportation Planner
- Matt Kennedy, Water Quality Planner
- Mary Pat McCarthy, Public Information and Marketing Manager
- Gilda Mitchell, Director of Membership and Outreach
- Nate Reiter, Accountant
- Roger Streiffert, Transportation Planner
- Michael Tippett, Digital Communications Manager
- Marc VonDeylen, Transportation Technician

Discussion Topics – The following topics were discussed by the caucus.

- **COVID-19 Impacts, Vaccine Rollout, Best Practices, Learning Experiences, Successes, and Mistakes – Updates from Members** – The caucus discussed the discrepancies on how the COVID-19 vaccine has been distributed and administered between the counties and private organizations, like Kroger and CVS. Time was spent trying to understand the responsibilities and reporting of county health departments and the state of Ohio health department. A need was identified to determine communication regarding the distribution and amounts of vaccines available to the various organizations and responsibilities for keeping records as well as information transfer between the state and county health departments. This also relates to making sure that there is proper recording of the vaccine manufacturer and the ability of recipients to get their second vaccine dose when necessary. Some concern was also raised about how some of the county populations can fluctuate seasonally and how this may affect the levels of vaccination required for changing restrictions and vaccine distribution. Additionally, getting information to the elderly for both registration and general vaccine information was discussed with a note that anyone can call 211 for assistance. Concern was raised about getting road crews vaccinated, and it was noted that infrastructure operators should qualify for one of the earlier vaccination categories. The status of vaccine distribution is also in a state of flux as a new federal administration takes over, resulting in a potential change in the federal presence during the vaccination process. Information was presented for the State of Ohio Department of Health and contact information for the northwestern Ohio liaison.
- **COVID-19 Grants/Expense Assistance: What funds are available and who has been successful in obtaining federal assistance?** – CARES Act funding has been instrumental in

assisting local governments with financial support for staff and providing grants to small businesses. Money was able to be spent by all of the counties with limited issues in distribution. However, it was noted that there may be better ways to layout the guidelines for funding distribution, especially for small businesses.

- **Budget reductions and cost saving measures in the face of declining revenues, best practices to share** – Members discussed the challenges associated with revenue changes as a result of the pandemic. This impacts departments differently as local governments have seen an increase in sales tax revenues after applying sales tax to online purchases and specifically in Wood County where property taxes have seen record highs. CARES Act funding has helped to avoid revenue shortfalls, and local governments noted that they are in relatively stable financial positions. However, county engineering and transportation have been impacted by declining revenue resulting from reduced travel and gas tax revenue. The gas tax increase helped but hasn't raised as much revenue as hoped due to reductions in travel and additional funding is needed to properly address infrastructure projects throughout the region. Lucas County noted that their budget is down by about 10% with ODOT determining that the reduction will probably be permanent. In addition, issues were brought up regarding the desire of the trucking industry to increase loads and truck configurations resulting in increased costs for having to redo bridge load ratings and the potential for bridges to become unusable for certain types of new truck and load configurations.
- **Teleconference meetings to conduct public meetings are allowable by law until July 1, 2021** – This statute allows governmental bodies to conduct meeting via video teleconference through July 1st. However, TMACOG members support having permanent permissive authority. In general, caucus members and state legislators agree that the ability to conduct public meetings remotely can be beneficial in certain situations and would like to keep the option to use this method as needed in the future. Advantages of hosting teleconferences include reduced travel time for members, increases in participation in meetings and events, potential shortening of meetings, and the ability of members to have direct access to relevant information if working from their offices. However, a big drawback is the limitation of members to network and share ideas before and after meetings. The goal would be to have the majority of meetings in person, but flexibility to use this system in the future is overwhelming supported.
- **Bills addressing long term financing of H2Ohio** – Maintaining funding to effectuate Lake Erie/Watershed Algae Reductions is imperative. How it all fits with TMACOG's Agenda for Lake Erie and Ohio's stated goal of achieving a 40% Phosphorus reduction. Members are in accordance with the benefits of the H2Ohio program and the committed support of the governor. The use of the TMACOG's Agenda for Lake Erie and Ohio's stated goal of achieving a 40% Phosphorus reduction are powerful tools for legislative advocacy and practical goals for improving the state of Lake Erie. However, particular concern has been raised about large animal farming operations to be addressed, but this reflects the nature of the document to change and adapt to the concerns of all stakeholders associated with the Agenda. Additionally, Lucas and Ottawa counties have major sewer projects planned to jointly address water quality issues in a shared region between the two counties.
- **Innovations in Opiate/Heroin Drug Epidemic, Best Practices to Share** – Upticks have been seen in overdoses in both Lucas and Wood counties with continued action being taken to address this issue from both a rehabilitation standpoint and legal consequences for drug traffickers. Wood County mentioned that their jail has returned to almost pre-COVID-19 population levels mainly due to drug-related offences after some of the population was moved earlier in the year to reduce COVID-19 exposure. The county plans to expand their correction facility and renovate their medical areas.

- **Additional Issues** – Feedback was sought from members regarding what they want to hear and need from the federal government, such as infrastructure improvement assistance. The Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown has caseworkers who generally could assist with answering questions related to the federal government. Chair Mark Stahl reiterated the need for gas tax increases, partnerships, the need for broadband expansion, and other infrastructure project funding. TMACOG President Tim Brown also discussed the need for direct access from northwest Ohio to Columbus and the project currently underway to assess this possibility.

- **Legislative Priorities in Ohio**

- **Senator Theresa Gavarone:** Discussed her involvement and collaboration with local and state governments in relation to priorities such as water quality issues, infrastructure, and funding for local governments.
- **Senator Teresa Fedor:** Discussed looking forward to organizational partnerships, broadband expansion, partnerships with local, state, and federal governments as well as addressing budgetary needs.
- **Representative Lisa Sobecki:** Discussed being actively involved with infrastructure, potential establishment of a national infrastructure bank, which would include funding for broadband, low-income housing, bridges, and streets, and potential legislation giving public bodies permanent permissive authority to hold meetings via teleconference.

New Business / Next Steps – There was no other business discussed.

Adjournment – Commissioner Stahl adjourned the meeting.