



Summer Caucuses with State Lawmakers Non-Governmental Members Caucus Tuesday, August 3, 2021

Call to Order/Welcome – The Non-Governmental Members Caucus met virtually on Tuesday, August 3, 2021, at 10:30 a.m. via GoToMeeting. Sarah Helbig, executive director of marketing, Jones & Henry Engineers, Ltd. and caucus facilitator, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Brian Dicken, Vice President, Advocacy & Public Policy, Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Meghan Gallagher, Regional Business Development Coordinator & Account Manager, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission
- Allan Gallant, Chief of Community Development, Metroparks Toledo
- Tom Galloway, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen-Ohio State Legislative Board (BLET-OSLB)
- Sarah Helbig, Executive Director of Marketing, Jones & Henry Engineers
- Cindy Jewell, Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives, Lourdes University
- Amanda Miller, Area Manager, External Affairs, AT&T Ohio
- Dean Niese, CEO, Mannik & Smith Group, Inc.
- Hans Rosebrock, Advisor, Economic Development, FirstEnergy/Toledo Edison
- Tim Schneider, Manager, Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Rhonda Sewell, Director of Belonging & Community Engagement, Toledo Museum of Art
- Sean Smith, Development and Equity Officer, Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority
- Mark Stahl, County Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners and Chair, TMACOG
- Roberta Streiffert, Senior Rural Development Specialist, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership

Non-TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Edgar Avila, Former Executive Vice President, AAA Northwest Ohio
- Lori Brodie, Northwest Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio Auditor Keith Faber
- Wil Hemker, University of Akron Research Foundation
- Tim Porter, Chair, Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association and Chair, TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee
- Kevin Mulder, Legal Aid of Western Ohio

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- Jennifer Allen, Executive Secretary

- Alex Aspacher, Public Information Specialist
- William Best, Vice President of Finance and Administration
- Marissa Bechstein, Transportation Planner
- Tim Brown, President
- Kari Gerwin, Director of Water Quality
- David Gedeon, Vice President of Transportation
- Sara Guiher, Water Quality Planner
- Gilda Michell, Director of Membership and Outreach
- Nate Reiter, Accountant
- Roger Streiffert, Transportation Planner
- Michael Tippett, Director of Communications

Overview of Meeting – Discussion of Issues - The following topics were discussed by the caucus:

- **What are the pros/cons of an in-person vs. remote workforce? (What, if any, legislative actions might be helpful?):**

The pros or advantages to working remote included:

- An increase in attendance at TMACOG committee meetings. More TMACOG members attended meetings due to not having to drive to the TMACOG office or take as much time away from work.
- Speakers invited to meetings were more likely to accept and participate because the meeting was virtual and there was no travel involved and less time required.
- Overall people were able to juggle several meetings a day due to the meetings being virtual and not having to travel.
- Reduced cost of overhead: office space, utilities, maintenance, etc.
- Technology and software made it possible for employees to communicate and complete work virtually.
- Working virtually developed a better work-life balance for employees.
- Opened the opportunity for employers to recruit new employees from outside of their office territory.
- Flexible work schedule.
- Employers found that millennials adjusted well to a virtual workforce.
- Employers learned they had to become more of an “employer of choice.” For example, the Toledo Museum of Art now offers employees 12 weeks off paid for new parents regardless of their parental situation.
- Employers had to learn how to measure productivity while working remote. AAA conducted a study on its employees’ work and now has three options depending on the position: working from the office, working from home, and working under a hybrid model.
- Better balance working while having more time for family.

The cons or disadvantages to working remote included:

- Some people missed the opportunity to interact with others at the office or in meetings.

- Less work efficiency and not working with a team.
 - Entry-level employees struggle adjusting to the remote work environment and miss mentoring opportunities with seasoned employees.
 - Working remote can increase mental health issues due to a lack of social interaction and communication with others. It is important for employers to check on their employees who are working remotely to make sure they adjusting to the situation.
- **What are the current trends, and what may be future trends, in recruiting and retaining talent in the Toledo region? (Any legislative action?)**
 - The Toledo Museum of Art offers their employees 12 weeks of paid leave for new parents regardless of their parental situation.
 - Now jobseekers are looking at locations that fit their lifestyle instead of taking a job in any location.
 - We need to continue to make the region we serve more attractive to potential employees.
 - Look into including tax credits for students who choose to stay in the area to attend college. It was mentioned that West Virginia and Iowa give cash grants to students who choose to go to college in their states.
 - From a service-sector point of view, small businesses are having trouble finding workers. There needs to be a solution to the problem of retaining service workers.
 - Employers have included diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in their policies, which also include ADA compliance and opportunities for veterans and those with disabilities.
 - Employers need to follow the best practices to expand on diversity and belonging.
 - **How has the Lake Erie water crisis impacted you or your business? Are efforts to address the issue (for example H2Ohio) working and what else can be done by government, business and industry, or individuals? (Any legislative actions?)**
 - To help address the Lake Erie water quality issue, H2Ohio has been an additional funding source for infrastructure and other solutions, including wetland restoration.
 - Educate the community on water quality issues and how agricultural practices may affect water quality and what can be done to address the problems.
 - The H2Ohio funds have been hard for people to access.
 - TMACOG is tracking the legislative actions and can help our members with questions they may have regarding water quality issues: <https://tmacog.org/water/agenda-for-lake-erie>
 - TMACOG has established an Agriculture Committee to discuss water quality issues and what can be done to address them.
 - It was noted that we cannot ignore the issue of algae and need legislators to address the issue.
 - Need to continue to work with the community and reach out to families to educate them on how their daily activities could affect their watershed.
 - Look at more public outreach to educate the public and local communities.

- For example, TMACOG has a program called Clear Choices Clean Water: <https://toledolakeerie.clearchoicescleanwater.org/>
- **What, if any, are positive consequences of the pandemic in terms of lessons learned, business and industry procedures, technology, community focus, or other aftereffects? (Any legislative actions?)**

Positive consequences included:

- Being able to share time with family, children and take care of loved ones.
- Using video conference technology to communicate with family members and colleagues.
- Having the opportunity for people across the state and outside of the region to attend virtual meetings.
- Less time spent driving to meetings when you can attend virtually. Less time away from work.
- Businesses have learned that employees can work remotely as opposed to working in the office 5 days a week.
- Businesses are looking at hybrid in-person/remote options within their workplace.
- Businesses have saved money in their budgets due to employees working remotely.

Lessons learned

- There is a labor shortage in the workforce and employers have looked at adding additional benefits to attract employees.
- There was discussion that there are more openings than job seekers.
- The Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce is continuing to expose young students to the workforce through programs they have to offer: <https://www.toledochamber.com/workforce-development.html>

What legislative action might be helpful?

- It is important that the legislators recognize the need for the flexibility of conducting meetings virtually from a local governmental standpoint. Having permissive authority to continue to conduct meetings virtually is critical to conducting business in times of crisis, such as a pandemic.

Roundtable Discussion

- It is important for the Non-Governmental Members Caucus meetings to include a variety of topics that are of interest to not only business and industry, but also to non-profit organizations, community action groups, advocacy organizations, and the many other organizations that make up the non-governmental membership of TMACOG.

Adjourn – There was no further business, and the meeting was adjourned at noon.