



Summer Caucuses with State Lawmakers Special Districts and Authorities Caucus Thursday, August 5, 2021

Call to Order/Welcome – The Special Districts and Authorities Caucus met on Thursday, August 5, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via GoToMeeting. Allen Gallant, chief of community development for Metroparks Toledo and caucus facilitator, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Laurie Adams, Managing Principal, DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC
- Meghan Gallagher, Regional Business Development Coordinator & Account Manager, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission
- Allen Gallant, Chief of Community Development, Metroparks Toledo
- Adam Greenslade, Mayor, Village of Green Springs & Dir. of Govt. Affairs & MarCom, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission
- Sarah Helbig, Executive Director of Marketing, Jones & Henry Engineers, Ltd.
- Cher Johnson, Chair, Wood County Port Authority
- Laura Koprowski, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA)
- Charles Odimgbe, Chief Operating Officer, Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA)
- Theresa Pollick, Public Information Officer, Northwestern Water & Sewer District
- Todd Ritzler, SVP, Government Relationship Manager, Huntington Bank
- Sean Smith, Development and Equity Officer, Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA)
- Mark Stahl, Commissioner, Ottawa County and Chair, TMACOG
- Tom Uhler, Vice Chair, Wood County Port Authority

Non-TMACOG members in attendance included:

- Lori Brodie – Northwest Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio Auditor Keith Faber
- Tom Galloway, Political Advisor, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen, Ohio State Legislative Board
- Ohio Sen. Theresa Gavarone, 2nd District
- Erica Krause, Northwest Ohio Regional Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown
- Christa Luttmann, Northwest Regional Liaison, Office of Ohio Governor Mike DeWine
- Tim Porter, Chair, Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association and Chair, TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- Jennifer Allen – Executive Assistant

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- Alex Aspacher – Public Information Specialist
- Marissa Bechstein – Transportation Planner
- William Best – Vice President of Finance & Administration
- Tim Brown - President
- Lance Dasher – Transportation Planner
- David Gedeon – Vice President of Transportation
- Sara Guiher – Water Quality Planner
- Lisa Householder – Transportation Planner
- Gilda Mitchell – Director of Membership & Outreach
- Nate Reiter – Accountant
- Roger Streiffert – Transportation Planner
- Mike Tippet – Director of Communications

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

- **Federal infrastructure funding**
 - The caucus discussed the bipartisan Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act, which is currently in the Senate. The legislation in its current form will invest \$550 billion in new spending on roads and bridges, water infrastructure, and access to broadband internet. It includes an emphasis on the climate crisis and additional funding to transit, passenger rail, and electric vehicles.
 - It is to be determined if there will be new opportunities for federal funds or if existing funds will be increased.
 - Senator Brown’s staff emphasized other items in this bill:
 - Bridge Investment Act – allocates \$12.5 billion to bridge repair.
 - Build America, Buy America Act – rules ensuring that American-made products such as steel and iron are used for federally-funded infrastructure projects.
 - The Senate is expected to pass this legislation before the August recess.
 - The Budget Reconciliation Bill has additional focus on social infrastructure programs and is also currently in the Senate.
 - Senator Brown’s office will provide letters of support to projects seeking federal grant money. They also assist with grant research.
 - Legislation has been introduced to Congress establishing a National Infrastructure Bank (HR 3339). Visit www.nibcoalition.com for more details.
 - RAISE Grants (formerly BUILD and TIGER) through the U.S. Department of Transportation is another funding opportunity. There is an emphasis on shovel-ready projects. Sponsors must also be mindful of the long-term maintenance associated with projects.
 - TARTA has been examining funding opportunities for new vehicles, particularly electric buses, as well as funds to upgrade their building/garage facilities. They are already pursuing electric vehicles for the TARPS fleet.
 - TARTA is working on a comprehensive operational analysis plan that will determine the best opportunities for providing services, routes, and technologies moving forward.
 - TMACOG completed the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan in June 2020. This plan will be a good guide for the region as we look for future projects. One project example discussed is the Chessie Circle Trail bridge over the Maumee

River (connecting Lucas and Wood counties). There is currently no source of funding for this type of project.

- Continued investment in bike and pedestrian projects is positive for the region, as it is tied to improved mental health among residents. Having multiple agencies be in support of a project adds value, as well.
- The Ohio Turnpike Commission is lobbying on behalf of funding for transit, toll roads, and other entities.

- **COVID-19 impacts**

- The V Project for Toledo is still providing vaccination coordination and education to the community.
 - TARTA has a mobile vaccine unit that may be extended through the end of September.
- 88 percent of TARTA riders depend on transit, so the agency is trying to bring on more service areas.
- The State Auditor's office is a great contact to determine how to appropriately spend COVID-19 relief funds. Visit www.ohioauditor.gov for more details.
 - It is suggested to run any project by your agency's legal department and pass resolutions in support of a project.
- Permissive authority in Ohio ended on June 30, so meetings must be held in person if voting is to occur. TMACOG is concerned it may struggle to hold a quorum at times but is trying to utilize larger meeting spaces. The TMACOG board is requesting permanent permissive authority to be able to conduct business via teleconference related to HB 43.
- Commercial truck traffic has increased significantly on the Ohio Turnpike, but passenger vehicles traffic is still down.

- **Equity issues in the region**

- Metroparks Toledo has updated its strategic plan and vision statement and created a new position to address equity. They have a long-term commitment to address this issue and still have a goal for a park to be available within 5 miles for every Lucas County resident. They hope to reach out to a diverse representation of the community with surveys and other public engagement.
- Member- and staff-driven efforts at TMACOG are underway to address equity. They will be looking at planning practices, public outreach, and staff trainings to determine if improvements can be made.
- TARTA is reviewing service changes with regard to Title VI. The agency had to postpone an equity analysis in 2020 due to COVID, so they are getting caught up with that currently. They are still providing fare-free rides to help low-income communities. They hope to engage more with the public as the COA gets underway. A Business Enterprise program will be getting underway with the first public meeting to be held on August 25. They reiterated the benefit of virtual meeting formats, which allow the agency to interact more directly with the general public and eliminate barriers.
- Diversity inclusion is very important to the Ohio Turnpike Commission. They are undergoing a disparity study to create more opportunities for minority

employment and contracting. There is a minority co-op program on major projects.

- Agencies can support each other to help gather feedback.

What legislative action might be helpful?

- Additional information from Senator Brown's office:
 - Child Tax Credit - \$300 per child per month through the end of 2021.
 - Emergency Rental Assistance – helps renters get caught up on rent, utilities, moving, and eviction protection. The Treasury Department has removed barriers making it easier to obtain the funds.
 - The office is always willing to help people navigate the federal government if a need arises.

Other Business/Next Steps – There was no other business or requested actions from the caucus.

Adjourn – Mr. Gallant thanked the attendees for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 9:40 a.m.