



2023 TMACOG General Assembly County Caucus Notes Friday, January 20, 2023

Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions – The County Caucus met on Friday, January 20, 2023, at 8:15 a.m. in the Ariel Boardroom at the Hilton Garden Inn in Perrysburg, Ohio. Mark Stahl, Ottawa County commissioner, and Scott Miller, Sandusky County commissioner, moderated the meeting and welcomed everyone present. Introductions were made around the room. Legislators in attendance were welcomed, and the moderators explained the purpose of the caucus for anyone new to TMACOG.

Caucus members in attendance included

- Carlos Baez, County Engineer, Sandusky County
- Mark Coppeler, Commissioner, Ottawa County
- Don Douglas, Commissioner, Ottawa County
- Ahmed Hamid, Principal, DGL Consulting Engineers
- Doris Herringshaw, Commissioner, Wood County
- Ron Lajti, County Engineer, Ottawa County
- Mike Libben, Administrator, Ottawa County Soil and Water Conservation District
- John Musteric, County Engineer, Wood County
- Mike Pniewski, County Engineer, Lucas County
- Curtis Roupe, Vice President, CT Consulting
- Dan Scherger, Assistant Administrator, Wood County
- Charlie Schwochow, Commissioner, Sandusky County
- Lisa Sobecki, Commissioner, Lucas County
- Carri Stanley, Administrator Wood County
- Mark Stahl, Commissioner, Ottawa County
- Russ Zimmerman, Commissioner, Sandusky County

Other TMACOG members and guests in attendance included:

- Erica Krause, Northwest Ohio Regional Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- Tim Brown, President
- Matt Kennedy, Water Quality Planner

Discussion Topics – Caucus members discussed the following topics.

- **U.S. 23 Corridor**
 - Toledo is the only major metropolitan area in Ohio without direct highway access to Columbus, and there is an immediate need to for a proper freight corridor. There was consensus that a bypass corridor will be needed to fix the congestion issue. Members discussed the concerns raised by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) about how all the options were too expensive, but the state spent \$1

billion in Portsmouth to create a bypass connection to facilitate freight transportation along the corridor from North Carolina. The lack of a proper freight connection between northwest Ohio and Columbus is a major arterial problem impacting business connectivity to Intel and restricting full access in Ohio. The Gordy Howe Bridge will be expanding to numerous new lanes of freight processing to better enhance commerce between the United States and Canada.

- The group encouraged one another to send letters and resolutions to both Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted calling for action.
- To accomplish this project in a timely manner, members also discussed the potential to not go through ODOT and instead use the Turnpike Commission to build the bypass. This would only need the Governor's approval. Concerns were also raised that not only is the Delaware area continuing to grow, but now there are a lot of areas being contracted for solar farms using large acreage that can limit paths for a bypass.
- Caucus members feel that if Columbus wants another outer beltway, the U.S. 23 bypass can be the lead project and also demonstrate electric vehicle (EV) charging capabilities being incorporated in the road. This is another area of EV charging that Ohio is behind in, since both Michigan and Pennsylvania are developing roadways with EV charging capacity. Pursuing EV charging as part of the road construction could lead to increased federal funding assistance.

- **Infrastructure funding**

- In recent years there has been a lot of funds made available for infrastructure through the federal government, but there are concerns regarding the matching money that is required. Further discussions will need to be held with federal legislators for adjustments to 80-20 match since many communities can't raise those funds. In addition, projected costs are rising with fewer bids coming in. As such the gas tax increase in Ohio is not keeping pace with the needs of ODOT and county engineers. The Legislature was informed when Governor DeWine first proposed the gas tax that they should not reduce the proposed gas tax to a lower amount, or we'd be right back where we are now. County engineers have been told that the Legislature won't be addressing the problem anytime soon. The group also discussed the State Infrastructure Bank, and the Safe Streets for All Grant.

- **Water quality**

- Caucus members discussed sewer services for areas with failing septic systems, like the Curtice-Williston area. A concern was raised about spending H2Ohio funds on wetland projects and the need to remain engaged with SWCD offices on H2Ohio projects and funding. Multiple communities and regional projects were encouraged. The order to Ohio to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load plan and new federal Great Lakes Research Institute funding could impact water quality initiatives.
- Concerns about CAFOs operations were raised in terms of trucks causing extensive wear and tear on county roads and bridges. The role of weight limits, the role county sheriffs can play, and private development agreements were discussed.

- **Utility services and planning**

- County engineers raised concerns regarding right of way widths where public utilities want to locate everything in one space (sewer, water, broadband). Projects end up becoming more expensive as more entities and services want things to go in. There are issues with funding and the need for utility coordination.
- There are still concerns with increases in prices for road and bridge maintenance and construction, and there is a need for more funding in Ohio's transportation budget. Members also discussed the need to have higher thresholds for bids due to inflation increases (more than current 10 percent, potentially up to 15 percent on force accounts).
- Members are interested in funds for EV charging stations. Some of these could include potential grants from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law through ODOT. Concerns were expressed about having proper regulation of charging/trickle rates for electric charging of vehicles, similar to how county auditors are responsible for ensuring weights and measures pertaining to gas being dispensed at gas stations.

Adjourn – Everyone was thanked for attending the caucus and the session was adjourned.