



2022 TMACOG General Assembly County Caucus Notes Monday, April 25, 2022

Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions – The County Caucus met on Monday, April 25, 2022, at 8:15 a.m. in the Ariel Boardroom at the Hilton Garden Inn in Perrysburg, Ohio. Mark Stahl, Ottawa County commissioner and the outgoing chair of TMACOG, called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone present, and explained the purpose of the caucus for anyone new to TMACOG.

Caucus members in attendance included:

- Julie Allison, Chief Deputy, Wood County Auditor's Office
- Carlos Baez, County Engineer, Sandusky County Engineer's Office
- Ted Bowlus, County Commissioner, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Don Douglas, County Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners
- Haraz Ghanbari, State Representative, 3rd District, Ohio House of Representatives
- Erica Krause, NWO Regional Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown
- Craig LaHote, County Commissioner, Wood County Board of Commissioners
- Ron Lajti, County Engineer, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners
- Scott Miller, County Commissioner, Sandusky County Board of Commissioners
- Greg Moore Jr., County Commissioner, Monroe County Board of Commissioners
- Matt Oestreich, County Auditor, Wood County Auditor's Office
- Mark Stahl, County Commissioner, Ottawa County Board of Commissioners
- Greg Telecky, Principal, Poggemeyer Design Group, Inc.

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- Tim Brown, President, TMACOG
- Matthew Kennedy, Water Quality Planner, TMACOG

Discussion Topics – A wide range of topics was covered, and the group was very conversational.

- **Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl:**
 - Thanks for past years of state and county partnerships
 - Discussed funding for a wide range of projects
 - The chair listed out a range of concerns from members. Among them were:
 - Preserving the sales tax base
 - Noting that \$6 billion in state tax collections are lost based on 62 exceptions; however, remote tax collection helped
 - Major financial contributions to county jails
 - The county boards of elections process should be funded by the state for statewide elections
 - Request full state funding for indigent defense

- **State Rep. Haraz Ghanbari:**

- The state didn't want to have bifurcated primaries, but rulings from the Supreme Court about constitutionality of the maps produced by the legislature necessitated it.
- Ballots must be sent to overseas military personnel and some other issues necessitated having to go with a split primary. The state has had four unconstitutional maps. A federal court has ruled that if the Legislature does not produce another map by the end of May, the 3rd map will be used. The maps will last for ten years if agreed to by a bi-partisan majority, if not they will be in place for four years. This split process of conducting elections in Ohio this year is expected to cost \$20 million.
- Working with some legislative colleagues on a bill to act as a holding place to get an established funding structure for county jails and to get Governor DeWine and county sheriffs to meet and tour facilities to assist in getting funding. He would like to see increased regionalization and collaboration between the counties.
- The group also talked about the indigent defense fund.

- **TMACOG President Tim Brown:**

- Engineers and most local officials are against the bill pending in the Legislature to suspend collection of the gas tax.
 - State Rep. Ghanbari stated he is not in favor of rollback.
 - May projects are already moving and can't sustain a suspension of gas tax collection.
- Much of the federal investment in infrastructure from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will require state and local dollars to match. Suspending Ohio's gas tax collections will likely result in less dollars being drawn down from the federal investment.

- **Ottawa County Engineer Ron Lajti, Sandusky County Commissioner Scott Miller, and Sandusky County Engineer Carlos Baez:**

- All echoed concerns with a gas tax suspension and advocated for keeping what Ohio presently has in place. There were numerous reasons stated for not going back on Ohio's infrastructure investment: a back log of local projects, matching federal infrastructure dollars with state and local matching funds.

- **Wood County Commissioner Craig LaHote:**

- Asked about the prospects of the Legislature voting for the gas tax suspension.

- **State Representative Haraz Ghanbari:**

- Indicated that there are lots of potential outcomes, but he remains opposed regardless
- Talked about economic development and his appointment to the Ohio Turnpike Commission

- **Erica Krause, NWO regional representative, Office of U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown:**

- Provided an update on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the OEPA revolving loan funds, and yearly project budgets. She addressed Senator Brown's belief in equal distribution, addressing concerns raised about it only benefitting metro areas

- **Jails:**
 - The group discussed numerous issues impacting jails, their condition, and the costs to update or build new.
- **State Representative Haraz Ghanbari:**
 - Discussed bills dealing with bail and bond reform, decriminalization, mental health issues impacting jail populations, and the use of direct indictments resulting in setting suspected criminal offenders free
- **Poggemeyer Design Group Principal Greg Telecky:**
 - Continued the discussion on jails and the need for consensus of price tag to fix problems vs. build new ones. He also noted that jails face a number of specific challenges such as 24-hour operation, the high costs of housing inmates, and changes in prison demographics since the jails were originally built." There is potential to use HB 131 modeled after school funding, but difficulty in getting people to vote to pay for the huge price tags.
- **Sandusky County Commissioner Scott Miller:**
 - Talked about the local cost to remodel vs. build new ones, as well as the challenges of 50/50 populations of female/male inmates.
- **TMACOG President Tim Brown:**
 - Provided an update on infrastructure improvements in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan. I-75 through Monroe County is being improved, Gordy-Howe bridge construction, I-280 bridge, 4-lane highway connection to Fort Wayne
 - Gateway to the islands project in Ottaway County, improving safety on U.S. 20 in Sandusky County
 - The only major project need is improving the region's connection to Columbus on U.S. 23.
- **Sandusky County Commissioner Scott Miller:**
 - Talked about water quality issues and needing to maintain and protect watersheds of Lake Erie and rivers
 - Working with farmers who remain in a challenging industry and may need help with best management practices
- **State Representative Haraz Ghanbari:**
 - Talked about more precise monitoring of sources throughout the watershed.
- **Erica Krause, NWO regional representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown:**
 - The City of Defiance just put in a measuring station at its river confluence.
 - UT, OSU, BGSU remain great water quality partners.
 - Talked about farm issues impacting farm owners and renters
- **Wood County Auditor Matthew Oestreich:**
 - Talked about grain prices for farmers and the need to study animal waste vs. fertilizer impacts on water quality
 - Encouraged finding ways to make manure a valuable commodity

- **Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Coppeler:**
 - Things like dewatering liquid manure can create focus on research for additional technologies and equipment.
 - Example of TMACOG Ag Committee's biosolids trip for human waste transfer and application
- **Ottawa County Engineer Ron Lajti:**
 - Talked about agriculture issues:
 - In wet years, more runoff must be released
 - Some of the best farmland is being developed
 - Other challenges farmers face
- **State Representative Haraz Ghanbari:**
 - There has been a reduction in generational farming.
 - New farmers have trouble getting land, and prices lead some of them to sell.
- **Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl:**
 - Resources of soil and water conservation districts as liaisons can help farmers.
- **Erica Krause, NWO regional representative, Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown:**
 - Sen. Brown is always happy to aid in applying for grants and assistance.

New Business / Next Steps – No other business was discussed.

Adjournment – Mark Stahl adjourned the meeting.