



Summer Caucuses with State Lawmakers City Caucus Notes Wednesday, August 3, 2022

Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions – The City Caucus met on Wednesday, August 3, 2022, at 8:30 a.m. in Room 1301 at Penta Career Center in Perrysburg, Ohio. Mike Aspacher, Bowling Green City mayor and chair of TMACOG, and Mike Beazley, City of Oregon administrator, co-moderated the meeting and welcomed everyone present. Introductions were made around the room. Legislators in attendance were welcomed and thanked for attending the caucus session.

Caucus members in attendance included:

- Abby Arnold, Deputy Mayor, City of Toledo
- Mike Aspacher, Mayor, City of Bowling Green
- Michael Beazley, City Administrator, City of Oregon
- Tom Mackin, Mayor, City of Perrysburg
- Ed Moore, Director of Public Utilities, City of Toledo
- Nick Rubando, Council Member, City of Bowling Green
- Angie Ruiz, Council Member, 3rd Ward, City of Fremont
- George Sarantou, Council Member At-Large, City of Toledo
- Craig Stough, Mayor, City of Sylvania

Non-caucus members in attendance included:

- Darnita Bradley, Sr. Manager Local Government Affairs, JobsOhio
- Tom Kovacik, Executive Director, TAGNO
- Craig Lyon, Senior Account Manager, Stantec
- Logan Seggaard, Marketing Specialist, DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC
- Mike Sheehy, State Representative, 46th District Ohio

TMACOG support staff in attendance included:

- David Gedeon, Vice President of Transportation
- Marissa Bechstein, Transportation Planner

Overview of Meeting & Discussion of Topics/Issues – The following topics were discussed by the caucus.

• **Topic 1 – State Route 23 Connection between Toledo and Columbus**

Caucus attendees discussed the importance of a better connection between Toledo and Columbus. Toledo is the only metropolitan area without a direct connection to Columbus. An initial study was conducted, and the results found that none of the alternatives could be reasonably implemented for a more direct connection to Columbus. This determination is not an acceptable conclusion to TMACOG and their project partners. TMACOG, TAGNO, and Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce all have been advocating for this connection and have stepped up efforts in light of the premature conclusion to the Route 23 Connect study. Support from communities is essential in order to emphasize the need. TMACOG has sample resolutions available online. Toledo City Council and several others have passed resolutions of support.

Caucus attendees feel Governor DeWine needs to show leadership and advocate for the free flow connection. Economic development would benefit from the free flow connection. In addition to an improved roadway, caucus members stated that a passenger rail connection to Columbus could assist with the issue. Parallel conversations are needed to advocate for northwest Ohio.

- **Topic 2 – ARPA funding issues or concerns**

Not discussed

- **Topic 3 – Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) project coordination**

Caucus members discussed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the importance of having combined voices to advocate for the region. Communities should complete needs assessments to determine what programs are available that fit their needs and identify what needs they have that currently do not fit within a program. Communities should also develop shovel-ready projects to streamline the grant writing process. Communities only get a brief time to get an application put together and having projects ready to go can help improve the quality of a grant application. Communities looking into a project should contact TMACOG to assist with any of the data collection, letters of support, and potential partnership on application. Resources available on what applications are currently open are on ODOT's website at <https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/working/funding/resources/bipartisan-infrastructure-law-bil> .

Currently, there are many available programs for electric vehicle charging and bike/pedestrian projects. Communities must have an eligible Action Plan to apply for the Safe Streets for All Grant. The Lucas County engineer and TMACOG are working on a grant application to fund Action Plans for Fulton, Lucas, Ottawa, Wood, and Sandusky counties. The City of Toledo is also working on a Vision Zero Plan. Communities should collaborate with regional partners and communities. Strength of the coalition and quality of application might be more important than the size of the municipality for some programs.

Water and wastewater infrastructure funding is also available through this bill. For more information, contact Kari Gerwin, TMACOG vice president of water quality. The City of Toledo estimated that 1 mile of 8-inch water line costs approximately \$100,000. The City of Toledo noticed the funding is going through the state for revolving loan funds (RLF) and they are putting caps on community size. The city wants to determine if specific sections of a city could be used to qualify for funding. Currently, big cities are being restricted in accessing these funds.

- **Topic 4 – Workforce challenge facing the governments and all major employers**

The caucus attendees discussed the workforce challenge facing the region. Over the next 5-6 years, more people will retire than join the workforce. Municipalities are finding it challenging to hire fire, police, and streets personnel. The City of Sylvania and Sylvania Township are working together to ease the issue by combining schools, recreation, and fire. They have seen success and have been able to save resources. Another change in the workforce is that individuals are moving where they want to live rather than where they want to work. Placemaking by making walkable and connected communities with affordable housing is becoming increasingly important.

Caucus members discussed the need for Congress to pass immigration reform legislation. Immigration could help this issue. Local efforts include working with employers and manufacturers to attract legal immigrants to these jobs. There is a need to create affordable spaces and be mindful of cultural diversity. State and federal governments need to help by investing in local communities.

Another challenge municipalities face is the need to be adaptive to working from home. The private sector is doing an excellent job with the transition. Young people are moving back to small

communities and working at businesses in major cities like Chicago and New York. The discussion ended with everyone agreeing that the best investment Ohio can make is in its communities and cities.

Roundtable

Caucus attendees provided community updates.

What legislative action might be helpful?

Representative Mike Sheehy encouraged attendees to make sure they are aware of the current bill going through the Ohio Legislature that would change eminent domain. Representatives pushing the bill are from rural areas and their main concerns are with bike paths.

Generate two (2) questions to present at Panel Forum with State Lawmakers

Caucus attendees discussed topics they wanted to present to the state lawmakers.

- The first topic was the connection between Toledo and Columbus. Toledo needs a direct route to Columbus for vehicle travel as well as passenger rail.
- They also wanted to ensure that large cities are not excluded from available BIL water infrastructure funding.
- Finally, they asked what assistance lawmakers could provide to assist cities with placemaking and attracting a workforce to their communities.

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