



## Summer Caucuses with State Lawmakers Special Districts & Authorities Caucus Meeting Notes Wednesday, August 3, 2022

**Call to Order/Welcome/Introductions** – The Special Districts & Authorities Caucus met on Wednesday, August 3, 2022, at 8:30 a.m. in Room 1307 at Penta Career Center in Perrysburg, Ohio. Allen Gallant, director of community development for Metroparks Toledo, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. Introductions were made around the room.

### **Caucus members in attendance included:**

- Joe Cappel, Vice President of Business Development, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority
- Meghan Gallagher, Regional Business Development Coordinator & Account Manager, Ohio Turnpike Commission
- Allen Gallant – Metroparks Toledo
- Rex Huffman, General Counsel, Wood County Port Authority and Attorney, Spittler Huffman LLP
- Sam Melden, Director of External Affairs & Communications, TARTA
- Theresa Pollick, Public Information Director, Northwestern Water and Sewer District
- Chris Smalley, Director, Wood County Park District
- James Rossler, Board Member, Wood County Port Authority

### **Non-caucus members in attendance included:**

- Dan Marsalek, Project Manager, The Olander Park System

### **TMACOG support staff in attendance included:**

- Lance Dasher, 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**

Lance Dasher started the conversation by updating the group about the history of the Route 23 Connect study, and he gave an update on where it stands today. The main issue is that Toledo is the only major metropolitan area in Ohio that does not have direct highway access to the state capital. There are 38 traffic lights on U.S. 23 between Waldo and the I-270 outer belt.

The caucus had an in-depth conversation regarding the study and the importance of having a direct highway connection with Columbus. Some of the discussion included the importance of direct access to Columbus for economic development, and the biggest question was, where do we go now? The caucus suggested keeping pressure on the administration to keep this project moving forward. Questions came up regarding whether

corporate support has been obtained through Kroger or Intel. Another question was whether commuter and highspeed rail would help alleviate the traffic on Route 23.

## **Topic 2 – Bipartisan Infrastructure Law**

Lance Dasher started the conversation by giving a brief overview of what had been released in terms of discretionary grants and what TMACOG was doing to help move projects forward. There was an abundance of conversation regarding the BIL.

The caucus spent time talking about the Railroad Crossing Elimination Program. Members discussed picking one location to apply for as a region to create a stronger application, since this is going to be a very competitive nationwide program. Sam Melden indicated that TARTA is looking at multiple BIL programs to replace the TARTA bus fleet with more efficient vehicles.

The conversation also had a focus on local match. Before the BIL, local sponsors were struggling to apply for federal funding because of the local match. Another focus of the conversation was working with the local media and lawmakers to explain how much effort and time it takes to get a project to construction. The general belief is that projects can be constructed relatively quickly, but the required planning is very labor and time intensive. For the McCord Road grade separation, planning started in the late 1980s, long before construction in 2015. Other projects discussed included another water intake in Lake Erie, various port infrastructure upgrades, and the NS Mainline bridge over the Maumee River.

## **Roundtable Discussion**

- Chris Smalley said Wood County Park District is moving forward and nearing construction of a bike park in Rudolph.
- Dan Marsalek said Olander Park System is working with the Lucas County Engineer and Metroparks Toledo to move forward with building the extension of the University/Parks Trail.
- Theresa Pollick said NWSD is building connections from Weston to Liberty Center and connecting to McComb. They have an open house on August 16.
- Meghan Gallagher updated the group on the Ohio Turnpike's efforts to update the Toll Collection System.
- Rex Huffman explained Wood County Port Authority's efforts with potential grade separations in rural Wood County as well as the development of State Route 795.
- Sam Melden updated the group on TARTA's expansion with micro transit in Western Lucas County. TARTA also started collecting fares again on August 1.
- Joe Cappel updated the group on the Port Authority's multiple projects and highlighted wetland projects in partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

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

1. Will the state legislature consider helping with local match for any successful BIL discretionary grant application?
2. Public input is very difficult to obtain, and it often comes after plans or project

designs have been finalized even though the local agencies request public input well prior to any deadlines. Are there any ways that the state can help local agencies obtain input from the community on plans and projects?

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