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‘Putting out fires’ all in a day’s work pg 2
New meaning for ‘putting out fires’
Nancy Burton and Breanna Badanes, District 6

Wednesday, July 1 was a day that gave new meaning to “putting out fires.”

The call came in at 6 a.m. A tanker carrying 8,000 gallons of ethanol had rolled over and caught fire on the ramp from Interstate 270 south to Interstate 70 east, directly beneath the I-70 eastbound bridge on Columbus’ west side.

Franklin County maintenance crews sprang into action, setting up traffic control even as local media began broadcasting the story. The Statewide Traffic Management Center collected and disseminated closures and detours to the public. By noon, ODOT Director Jerry Wray was briefing the media. It was nearly eight hours before the scene was safe enough for ODOT to assess the damages.

“The 1,500 degree heat from the fire had literally melted the concrete and steel. We closed the eastbound bridge for repair,” said Deputy Director Ferzan Ahmed.

At District 6 and Central Office, ODOT engineers formulated plans on how to fix the bridge and get traffic moving while keeping several ramps closed. ODOT communications worked on illustrating alternate routes and detours, while the sign shop and traffic engineers handled signage and signal timing.

A designated contractor began excavating the crossover that would carry two lanes of I-70 east and westbound traffic on the westbound side as work commenced. Even with I-70 east still closed, traffic was flowing through the area as early as Thursday morning. Many motorists avoided the area, thanks to ODOT’s effective communication.

On Friday, July 3 at 11:59 a.m.—41 hours and 2,000 tons of asphalt later—I-70 eastbound opened again, ahead of schedule. Work continued on the badly damaged eastbound bridge, and, after just 21 days, it was re-opened to the public—again, nearly two weeks ahead of schedule. The ramp from southbound I-270 to eastbound I-70 was also reopened, with northbound I-270 ramp reopened soon after.

Throughout it all, ODOT was utilizing social media to update the public, sharing graphics and information online. The department reached more than a half-a-million people that week.

On the Cover: After a fiery tanker crash destroyed the Interstate 70 eastbound bridge over I-270 on the west side of Columbus, the damaged span was completely demolished just days later. Photo by Nancy Burton, District 6.
EIMS LIASONS ANNOUNCED
A person has been selected in each district to serve as the point of contact for any issues related to the Enterprise Information Management System (EIMS). Users can find their liaison on the EIMS website at http://portal.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/DoIT/SoftProd/ApplicationWebs/eims/Pages/EIMS.aspx

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND PROJECT
Officials broke ground on District 9’s Southern Ohio Veterans Memorial Highway, which will be the largest single project in ODOT’s history and its first public-private partnership.

ODOT EARNS PRAISE FOR OHIO POLLINATOR HABITAT INITIATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized ODOT’s efforts in expanding and creating pollinator habitats along right-of-ways. Planting native prairie and sunflowers by the roadside helps the bee population, which in turn contributes to crop production in Ohio.

HTs BUILD LEADERSHIP SKILLS
Highway Technicians (HTs) took Crew Leader Training in District 7 after successful similar programs in districts 1 and 3. Since crew leaders head up teams daily, training helps develop better leadership and team-building skills for the HTs.

TEAM UP ODOT IN SEPTEMBER!
ODOT’s annual gathering will take place at the Ohio State Fairgrounds on Sept. 16 this year to display innovative improvements and benchmark with others from around the state.

Q “I recently transferred from District 7 to District 2. I have noticed that some things are similar but others are very different—to the point I wonder why ODOT isn’t the same across the board. For example, why is there internal posting only for district employees and not the entire state?”

A “Districts don’t always post job opportunities from other districts because with 12 districts and Central Office, the human resources office would be awash in paper. However, as you were able to transfer from one district to another, anybody is eligible to apply for any job posting that’s open if they are qualified for the position, no matter what district it’s in. All ODOT positions are posted on the Ohio Hiring Management System, which can be accessed at: www.Careers.Ohio.Gov.

As a department, we have aggressively urged people to share information between districts and Central Office. We’ve also shared our metrics and our Critical Success Factors between districts. To our customers, ODOT and our transportation infrastructure system are one statewide system.”

— Director Jerry Wray
In the next few years, each of ODOT's 1,600 snow plow trucks will be equipped with global positioning system (GPS) devices. The devices will feed location data back to the county maintenance facility.

For several years, the Division of Operations has run three pilot programs to test the devices at the District 12 Independence Yard, the Madison County maintenance facility, and in Stark and Medina counties. Portage, Summit and Washington counties were added later to the Akron research project. In addition to location information, the pilot projects are testing additional equipment that can send more data—like road temperatures and the amounts of salt or brine used by vehicles.

“We’re testing modems, antennas, sensors, and video cameras to find the right system for us. It’s a major investment in time and money,” says ODOT Deputy Director of Operations Sonja Simpson.

Office of Maintenance Administrator Thomas Lyden says the GPS devices will be phased into ODOT’s fleet over several seasons. Once fully implemented, he expects the devices will improve the department’s performance during the snow and ice season, while saving ODOT money.

“If we calibrate the trucks and measure how much product we’re putting out where, our drivers will be able to do a more effective job,” Lyden said.

Lyden says the department will begin implementing the GPS system at the end of the coming snow and ice season.

The District 7 staff from Planning & Engineering, Real Estate, Environmental and Construction traveled to Columbus to meet with the Ohio Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) this spring. Their goal was to meet with their counterparts and learn more about how their roles support each other. Their federal hosts treated the ODOT visitors to a personal tour of their newly acquired offices while discussing the duties of both offices. It is hoped this is the start of a practice that will continue with other districts in the future.

“We all need to understand that the agencies we work with, such as FHWA, are not obstacles in the process, but partners in accomplishing our goals,” said District 7 Deputy Director Randy Chevalley.

A ground-breaking ceremony for the beginning of the $91.5 million Interstate 80 widening project in Mahoning and Trumbull counties was held in June. The project will widen the interstate from four to six lanes to accommodate more than 60,000 vehicles expected to travel its length.

Work on six bridges is included, along with the installation of noise walls and a cable median barrier. ODOT Assistant Director James Barna spoke at the ground-breaking about Governor Kasich’s Jobs and Transportation plan which moved funding up for this project by an estimated five years.
No doubt about it: Victoria “Vikki” Daas is a pioneer. She was one of the first female highway workers at ODOT, hired as part of a statewide initiative to include more women in careers traditionally dominated by men. She stepped through the door of the Marion County garage on January 7, 1985, armed only with a CDL and a whole lot of determination.

Daas was determined to forward her career, and even though she helped pave the way for women at the agency, her career choice wasn’t driven by ideology. “When I came to ODOT,” she recalled, “I was a single mother who was just trying to provide for my child.”

Daas worked hard to maintain her role as a member of the team, as her mere presence challenged the status quo. And she had to work smart—like learning to get 65-pound bags of aggregate into her truck when help was not available. But Daas’ natural curiosity made it easy for her to gain the skills of her trade and advance at ODOT.

“I was one of the first female inspectors in construction,” said Daas. “I always carried the spec book with me. Contractors knew if I had that spec book in hand, there was no room for error.”

Daas expressed pride in having been part of the all-female team that worked on the construction of the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP) project on U.S. Route 23 just north of Delaware. This test-and-research pavement is still in use today.

Although she felt too young to retire, Daas enjoyed her last day at ODOT at the end of May. Her retirement plans include caring for her American Quarter horse, Hannah, spending time with family and leading tours through the Great Smoky Mountains.

She attributes her career success to a commitment that she made to herself 30 years ago. A promise that helped her through some tough times, and one she hopes others will follow: “Stay professional and dedicated,” Daas said, “no matter what obstacles are in your way.”
As it is, ODOT’s 12 districts each have their own unique strategy for both their capital planning and their maintenance programs. But while the Planning Division tends to look at the long-term needs of a highway or bridge, the Maintenance Division focuses on the immediate needs of these same assets. These differing perspectives have caused some conflict in the planning process.

But a new statewide approach—the Asset Management Plan—is being implemented by ODOT in the coming year. Its goal is to better align the two views.

ODOT was required to develop an asset management plan under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, or MAP-21, according to Deputy Director for Operations Sonja Simpson.

“There is a federal mandate to implement this program under MAP-21,” she said. “We have to remove the artificial distinctions between capital projects and maintenance activities. We need to coordinate preservation activities using performance data through planning.”

The department convened a Pavement and Bridge Preservation Strategy Meeting to create its new plan. Attendees included a panel of national experts on bridge and pavement preservation.

“Our goal was twofold. First, combine the best approaches from planning and operations to manage our bridge and pavement assets. Second, utilize in-house bridge and pavement expertise to identify high value maintenance efforts,” said Assistant Director of Field Operations Mike Flynn.

“This way, we can become consistent from division to division, district to district and county to county.”

The panel discussed low-cost ways to maintain roadway assets using chip sealing, crack sealing and underdrain cleaning. Bridge assets will benefit from focused efforts toward deck sealing, washing and cleaning. The result is a new program and a new direction.

The Central Office Division of Planning will now identify candidate pavement, bridge and culvert needs. These projects will then be given to the districts for evaluation. They will coordinate them with existing tasks and scheduling concerns. Once they revise the project list, the districts will then negotiate with Central Office on the final list. Above all, the planning and maintenance divisions in each district will be expected to work together to marry their approaches to these tasks.

“As we develop a statewide asset management plan that connects the two programs,” said Andrew Williams, administrator of the Planning Division’s Office of Technical Services, “we will be able to plan holistically, which will allow us to lower the life cycle cost of maintaining the asset.”

According to Williams, taking a statewide approach to maintain ODOT-controlled assets could save the department $50 million annually in bridge preservation, and $75 to $121 million a year in pavement preservation.

“We have to lower the life cycle costs of preserving our assets by being more efficient,” said Deputy Director of Planning Jennifer Townley. “There’s a gap between the needs and the resources. What cost a dollar in 2004 is only worth 60 cents today.”

Chief Engineer and Assistant Director for Transportation Policy Jim Barna noted: “The ultimate goal is improved consistency in practices across districts, an increased use of preservation treatments, and more cost-effective use of available funds. Although it will take time to develop this new partnership, its rewards will be evident to ODOT customers.”
ODOT People are Amazing . . . at Work
Two new facilities for two incredible crews
David Rose, District 10 and Becky Giauque, District 11

FIRST CAME THE OPEN house for the new, $8.3 million, full-service maintenance facility in Athens County in late May. ODOT staff hosted a stream of well-wishers who came to tour the layout. Then, just a few days later and several counties north, another new facility, another celebration—this one a little less low key. The Columbiana County team launched balloons to celebrate the completion of their new, $10 million facility outside of Lisbon.

Initially, both Athens and Columbiana were thrilled to learn they would each get a new maintenance facility last year. But their construction meant the existing buildings would be shut down during the snow and ice season. They would be facing the elements without adequate shelter for their trucks and equipment.

According to Columbiana County Transportation Administrator Darcy Stitt, most of their trucks stood out in the cold. It once took employees four hours just to get their vehicles started, using torpedo heaters, tarps and battery chargers.

“And to make matters worse,” recalled Stitt, “we only had one mechanic for most of the winter. But even so, we maintained 90 percent readiness of our fleet.”

In Athens, the crews resorted to parking in the newly built salt barn: it became business as usual for them. The Athens work crews kept going, kept clearing snow and ice no matter what.

“Logistically, we knew it would be difficult to perform our snow and ice operations at a high level without a facility,” said Athens County Highway Technician and Account Clerk Tim Brown. “We would have to work together, adapt, and get done what we needed to do.”

Now both crews are ready for the next winter season. Constructed on ODOT’s existing property along U.S. 30, the new Columbiana complex has new buildings for salt, equipment, and truck storage. It also has a mechanical service area, a two-truck wash bay, a fuel station, and a main garage building with offices.

The new ODOT Athens County Maintenance Facility comes equipped with two new maintenance bays, a brine making system, new offices, and a new break room doubling as a training area. They have more security cameras, an electronic gate, and like Columbiana, more storage space for salt, equipment and trucks. It’s a long way from the original digs built in more than 50 years ago.

“It’s the ODOT worker,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray, “who opens the road after a rockslide, fills the pothole, and plows the snow which makes our travels much easier. This new facility will help accomplish all of those tasks.”

The department is in the midst of an initiative to replace outdated facilities, and more are coming. ODOT will break ground on a new Tuscarawas County facility this fall. New buildings and equipment will undoubtedly improve work efficiency and effectiveness. But what the good people in Athens and Columbiana counties have already proven is that there is no upgrading ODOT’s workforce; they are already the best.
Life’s a journey . . . enjoy the ride
Becky Giauque, District 11

In late 2013, District 11 Highway Management Administrator Tom Corey quit smoking and quickly experienced what many ex-smokers do: he gained weight. In 2014, when he successfully dropped 30 pounds during an office weight-loss challenge, Corey turned his focus to finding a way to keep off that weight. He found it by returning to an activity he’d enjoyed as a teenager: bicycling.

Bicycling not only helped him keep off the pounds, but it improved his fitness level, making him feel better overall. So much better, in fact, that he decided to up his game. On May 1, the 52-year-old Corey packed up his bike and headed off for a two-week vacation, bicycling from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C.

“Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving.” — Albert Einstein

Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. “We live in a great area for biking,” he said. “One of the longest continuous bike trails in the United States begins just over the state line in Pittsburgh.”

That trail is the Great Allegheny Passage, which follows old rail lines from Point State Park in Pittsburgh, to Cumberland, Md., where it joins the historic Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O) Trail that continues another 185 miles to Washington.

“‘The highlight of the C&O was the Paw Paw Tunnel,’ said Corey, adding ‘It’s 3,200 feet long. You have to have a light to navigate the narrow, three-foot path.’

His 11-day, 600-mile ride was quite an adventure and he saw some amazing sites, like the Big Savage Tunnel and the Salisbury Viaduct. But the C&O Trail between Fort Fredrick, Md., and Harpers Ferry, W.Va., provided some of the best scenery.

Over the course of the trip, Corey camped seven nights in a tent—“Don’t believe the manufacturer’s recommended temperature rating on sleeping bags!” he exclaimed—spent two nights in hotels, one night in a hostel, and enjoyed one day of rest and relaxation at his sister’s.

So what’s next? Corey is already planning to tackle Missouri’s 285-mile Katy Trail in September, then in May 2016 the Ohio-to-Erie Trail from Cleveland to Cincinnati. He summed up the experience of this first long-distance journey by quoting Albert Einstein: “Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving.”