PLEASE DON'T
FEED THE HOG
ASK THE DIRECTOR

Q: I’ve read that ODOT had two back-to-back record capital construction programs in state fiscal years 2014 and 2015. They were each about $2.4 billion. How does the department decide which projects are funded and which are not?

A: The department is a complex and diverse agency as are its construction jobs. With our various projects we will point and replace deficient components on a bridge, resurface roadways, build new interchanges and highways and meet many other transportation needs.

The first step at ODOT has been to decide which areas to allocate funding to. This is done through our Governance Board and the Director. The Governance Board is the group of assistant directors and the chief of staff. The Board looks at the needs of the state through various performance metrics and discussions with leadership across the state. Funding is then allocated to programs to improve and maintain our system. The programs are designed to address needs like preservation, safety, capacity additions, and others. The goal is to use the resources to provide the largest benefit or best value, with safety always being our number one priority.

A specific example of a particular program is the major new program, governed by the Transportation Review Advisory Council (TRAC). In the mid-1990s, ODOT leadership developed a strategic plan titled Vision 2000 that included a major reengineering of the Department. One of the primary goals of that plan was an open, inclusive, criteria-driven project selection process for major new projects.

That effort resulted in a change in Ohio law and created a new project selection process. Since 1997, decisions about which projects over $12 million are funded are the result of a public and competitive process. The TRAC is a nine-member council chaired by the ODOT Director. Six members are appointed by the Governor, the Ohio House Speaker and the Ohio Senate President each get one appointment. All of the gubernatorial appointees must have experience in either transportation, business, or economic development.

The council meets monthly. They work with the ODOT Division of Planning to develop a scoring system to determine the merits of a project. Factors that are evaluated include economic development, job creation and local money offered for a project. TRAC members vote on the approval of the Major New Construction Program List of funding commitments for preliminary engineering, detailed design, right-of-way and project construction. Projects receiving funding commitments are placed into three “tiers” based upon the level of project development:

• Tier I - The group of projects recommended for construction during the upcoming four-year construction period.

• Tier II - The group of projects recommended for additional environmental, design or right-of-way development activities necessary before the projects would be available for construction.

• Tier III - The group of projects with previous phases funded for construction in Tier I. Projects placed in Tier III status are part of a long range funding plan to advance multiple phase projects.

Ohio is one of the few states that has developed such a model. Some states have tried to copy it, but political reality being what it is, they were not successful. However, for nearly two decades, Ohio has had an open, inclusive, criteria driven project selection process that has survived through four gubernatorial administrations and five ODOT Directors. This objective selection process has increased our department’s professionalism and has made ODOT one of the most respected state DOTs in the nation.

ON THE COVER: Director Wray spoke to Annual Meeting attendees this fall about employees at a lumber company “feeding the hog,” which referred to the group putting good wood in the chipper to quietly retaliate against management. He encouraged ODOT employees to avoid partaking in some of the ways we can “feed the hog” here at the Department. Stickers of the cover art are available, and remember… PLEASE DON’T FEED THE HOG!

ODOT News FAST 5

Employees Can Evaluate Managers

Upward Feedback surveys were rolled out statewide to all employees not reporting to county transportation managers (these surveys were conducted last year). People can use the anonymous, optional surveys to rate their managers’ problem solving and interpersonal skills.

Annual Meetings Come to A Close

The last annual meeting took place November 18. ODOT’s positive partnerships with outside entities and a video explaining the Critical Success Factors were highlights this year.

Ohio’s Bridge Inventory Recognized

Ohio earned the number one spot in Better Roads magazine for having the lowest percentage of structurally deficient (SD) and functionally obsolete bridges among all states. The SD percentage dropped from 3 percent in 2014 to 6.3 percent in 2015.

Crews Showcase Inventive Service Account Work

Ohio legislators visited ODOT crews around the state to see the force account law changes in action. The 2013 legislation allows ODOT employees to perform work previously required of private contractors.

Statewide Safety Campaign Continued

Distracted driving and moving over for roadside workers were two of the safety messages emphasized on highway message boards this month. At press time, traffic fatalities in Ohio were up 13 percent from this time last year.

Parting with History

Nancy Burton, District 6

Imagine if this was your job for the day: dismantle an obsolete 260 foot radio tower.

To Billie Jones, District 6 radio operator, that tower was more than a communications tool—it was a landmark: “Control Delaware,” with its bright, red tower lights, guided Billie and others as they plowed and repaired roads and bridges throughout central Ohio. It had stood for 59 years.

“October 6 was kind of rough on me, because that tower served us well for more than half a century,” said Jones, who watched the dismantling piece by piece. “What was really hard on me was the next day when I pulled into the district and saw the empty spot where the tower once stood.”

Despite the loss, Jones, a 29 year ODOT employee, is a big fan of the new technology. The Multi-Agency Radio Communications System (MARC5) works much like a private cell phone network.

More than 350 MARCS radio towers stand in the state. Radios in ODOT vehicles link via fiber optic cable or microwave to these towers to transmit statewide. Communication can occur with any agency using MARCS radios.

“You can talk to District 11 in New Philadelphia or the sheriff’s office in Toledo on a MARCS radio, and it will sound like you are right next door,” said Jones. “We couldn’t do that with the old radio tower.”

While Jones has embraced this new technology, he is still hanging on, literally, to the past. There may not be a tall tower to mark Jones’ work site, but there is one at home. In his backyard, he has a 100-foot radio tower.
ODOT received the American Public Works Association’s “Excellence in Snow and Ice” award in 2013 for good reason. By continually adopting new technologies and safety practices, building world-class facilities and using the latest equipment, ODOT has become second to none in snow and ice control.

Following two record-breaking winters, ODOT is winter-ready with 1,800 snow plows, 3,000 operators and 700,000 tons of salt stored in 227 locations around the state.

ODOT measures its success with snow and ice control on how quickly it restores traffic to expected speeds following a storm; two hours is the goal. “We couldn’t meet our goal without having the right people using the latest equipment and materials armed with the most accurate weather forecasts,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray.

This information highlights what the department is doing this year to maintain its Excellence in Snow and Ice status.

### People
- Regional snow and ice meetings between districts to share best practices
- Annual snow and ice refresher classes to update drivers on latest safety practices, plowing techniques, material application and other operational activities
- Equipment training program for new operators
- District and statewide Roadeo to sharpen equipment skills
- Live storm updates via social media and email from district communications office
- Central Office and district support staff to manage data and financing of winter operations

### Equipment
- Expanded GPS and video use on plow trucks to improve management decision making
- Increased use of automated brine blending stations
- Use of innovative plow designs and longer-lasting blades
- Dimmer switches on strobe lights to reduce night time glare for motorists
- First use of recommendations from the Perfect Truck task force
- Construction of new full service maintenance facilities and outposts statewide

### Materials
- Extended routes through district and county borders to refill material at nearest location and provide a more consistent level of service
- Increased use of liquid deicers throughout the state, including brine, calcium chloride, Beet Heet, and AquaSalina
- Expanded practice of pre-wetting salt to help salt better stick to pavement
- Use of liquid anti-icing and de-icing before and after storms – districts purchasing larger capacity tanker trucks for more efficient application of deicer
- Construction of larger storage facilities and use of conveyors to stack salt cheaper

### WEATHER
- 179 Roadway Weather Information System (RWIS) stations – most dense of any state
- Full-time Statewide RWIS Coordinator, Tim Boyer, on staff
- Integrated system that brings together weather forecasting and RWIS data to help districts make better informed decisions
- TMC to post snow squall alerts from National Weather Service on digital message signs throughout the state
Don’t cry over spilled milk
Ericka Pfeifer, District 5

ODOT employees almost never know what to expect when called to an accident scene. An October crash involving a 6,000-gallon tanker full of milk was no exception. In this case, Guernsey County crews could have used the help of a few feline friends.

Crews arrived on the scene of an accident on Interstate 70, which closed a major intersection for the rural county; I-70, as well as access to I-77, was cut off.

As with any scene, they prioritized traffic control and diverted traffic to assigned detour routes. When crews discovered the tanker contained milk—a hazardous material—the EPA was consulted and ODOT crews quickly built a ditch to stop the milk from entering a nearby creek.

A loader was brought in to the site, and a sump and dike were built to stop the milk further. A hole was torn into the side of the truck to help the two vacuum trucks pump out the remaining milk while a hazardous materials company cleaned up the rest.

Thank you Guernsey County for a great job – a messy situation was handled quickly and efficiently, and no tears were cried over this spilled milk.

Now, where did I leave that bag of Oreos?
For District 12 Bridge Maintenance Engineer Joseph Seif, it’s all about serving the public. A native of Cairo, Egypt, he moved to Ohio at the age of 26 to pursue a doctorate in engineering at the University of Akron. Seif earned a Bachelor of Science in 1986, a Master of Science in 1989, a doctorate in 1994, and a P.E. License in 1995. He still has a passion for learning more in engineering. He has been in practice as a structural engineer since 1986. After spending seven years working in the private sector at both large and small engineering firms in Ohio, he has spent the past 14 years working for ODOT. We were curious as to how he discovered his calling and his home here in Ohio.

“I sent applications all over the world. I got the best response from the University of Akron. Before that, I didn’t really know that much about Akron or Ohio.

My plan was to earn the Ph.D. and return home. But I began going to St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Seven Hills. I met my future wife, Dalia, at church. Although she offered to move to Egypt, we ended up staying here.

I have been interested in structures since I was young. Bridges in the states are probably the one type of structure that is continually in demand. A bridge is always underestimated in value and is taken for granted: When a bridge is out, the road is closed. It is not just a traffic delay, a bump on the road, or a flooded segment of the freeway. When a critical bridge is out, it means people can’t get to work.

My goal is to make people’s lives better by ensuring the safety and integrity of the bridges they drive on every day.

In the private sector, I worked on multiple projects for ODOT. I got to work and learn from outstanding ODOT engineers who reviewed my projects and trained our staff.

At ODOT the level of expertise, the available resources, and the training programs are hard to match.

This country is very interesting. There are lots of possibilities here. I do not have any regrets about spending nearly half my life in the United States.

I would do it all again.”

Seif and his wife have two children and live in Independence. He enjoys listening to music and playing racquetball, soccer, and volleyball. He still coaches volleyball at the church where he and Dalia met.