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It’s a bird . . .
It’s a plane . . .
It’s QuickClear!
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Change without force

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

If you follow national politics at all, with all the talk of fiscal cliffs and debt limits, you might notice the absence of a certain idea from our political discussions: Compromise. One definition of the word is to make a deal between different parties, where each gives up a part of their demands for the good of all involved. Another definition of the concept is finding agreement in the course of an argument through communication — a mutual acceptance of terms often involving variations from an original goal or desire.

A LONG-STANDING DEBATE

“We’ve been fighting with ODOT over force account limits for nearly a century,” says OCA President Chris Runyan.

He’s not kidding. The proof is in a 1928 annual report published by the Ohio Department of Highways. It contains a debate on the use of day labor for projects versus contracting outside sources.

The current law limits department personnel to bridge, culvert and traffic signal projects costing less than $50,000 and road repair projects costing less than $25,000.

“The current process is very subjective, depending on how you measure labor costs and the cost of equipment and materials,” Runyan said.

“Every four years or so we have a very public battle in the Ohio Legislature with ODOT and other public entities about the force account limits and how they should be applied. Our members are tired of this fight.”

And so it was that Runyan decided to approach ODOT officials to see if both sides could negotiate a more objective process. He decided to propose a radical idea: a compromise.

“We were looking for a different paradigm,” he said, “so that both our members and ODOT could say it will be a win-win situation for everybody.”

NO! IT CAN’T BE! GASP! SHOCK!

Runyan discovered that ODOT officials were willing to talk terms as well:

“What we decided to do is to develop a set of standards based upon the scope of the project, rather than just using dollar figures,” said ODOT Assistant Director of Field Operations Mike Flynn.

They negotiated an agreement that included allowing ODOT personnel to work on a bridge project up to 700 square feet, without regard to cost. Anything larger would be contracted out. They also agreed to allow state highway technicians to pave up to 120 tons of asphalt per lane mile and
work on culverts 52 square feet and smaller, both regardless of cost.

The dollar limits on force account projects would be increased: Bridge and traffic signal projects going from the current $50,000 to $60,000. Road paving projects changing from $25,000 to $30,000. A three-percent biennial increase on the dollar amounts could also be included.

THE CUSTOMER WINS
So what excites both Flynn and Runyan the most about the agreement? ODOT has agreed to hold projects undertaken by the department to the same standards as those accomplished by private-sector contractors.

“We want to do this the right way,” offers Flynn. “I doubt that any other government entity has ever held their workforce to the same standards they hold the private sector to. We are going to document and test the projects performed by ODOT employees, just as we do with the contractors.”

ODOT would not have been able to hold its own workers to such standards had the department not invested in training highway personnel. The Highway Technician Academy has trained over 2,500 ODOT employees in the past eight years. The academy program offers more than 40 different courses and four levels of certification.

“In the past 10 years we have made an extensive investment in training our employees,” Flynn observed. “We want our employees to use their newly learned advanced skills to perform higher valued work.”

Runyan adds: “I think it’s good that ODOT has agreed to mandate such a high level. Every project that’s done should be held to the highest standards of quality for the benefit of all motorists.”

AND THERE’S THAT WORD AGAIN
The academy itself would not have been possible without an agreement—a compromise—between the department and the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA), which also supports the new proposed measures.

“The union has worked for years to raise the Force Account limit,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “It has always made sense from a good government standpoint, and will also demonstrate the value of state government to Ohio taxpayers.”

The agreement on force account limits must be approved by the Ohio General Assembly. Mabe hopes it will be approved as is, but it may take more balance, and more tolerance.

And yes, more compromise.
Seeing tomorrow today

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Imagine looking over a quarter of a century into the future and trying to predict what our customers of tomorrow will want and need from their transportation system. It seems impossible, yet that’s what President Dwight D. Eisenhower did, when he lobbied congress to pass the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, authorizing the creation of the Eisenhower Interstate Highway System.

Since the mid-1990s, ODOT has been planning for the future of our state’s transportation system with similar foresight. The plan is called Access Ohio, and currently covers the years from 2004 to 2030. The Office of Statewide Planning and Research is now updating the document to 2040.

According to Scott Phinney, administrator of the Statewide Planning and Research office, the first step in devising such a plan is to ask the department’s customers what they want and care about. His office commissioned a survey of 1,900 Ohio households.

“What we found,” said Phinney, “was that people care about both safety and congestion. They want us to invest in both the highway network and the public transit network. The survey found that 90 percent of those polled consider improving the highway network important. Over 75 percent of people in nine ODOT districts thought we should consider improving the public transit network.”

Phinney’s office was surprised by the reaction to public transit in rural areas:

“There was just as much interest in the public transit network in districts 9, 10 and 11 as there was in District 12 in the Cleveland area,” he said. “People need the network to get to work or to get medical treatment.”

The survey also found that 90 percent of those surveyed consider relieving congestion to be an important topic, but only 18 percent understood how the transportation system is funded. It is clear that times have changed since the last time the department updated Access Ohio in 2004.

“We had a healthy amount of over-programming on our highway projects,” observed Phinney. “Then we ran into a huge energy crunch that drove up project costs by 60 percent since 2004. Concrete, asphalt, and steel all went up dramatically—so did transportation costs.”

Access Ohio will be used to prioritize which corridors the department should invest in. According to Phinney, the plan will divide corridors into national, state, regional and local significance.

“Our analysis will guide and inform project selecting based on available revenue. Our number one priority is maintaining the system we have, which lines up with our department’s mission,” he said.

INNOVATIVE FINANCING

ODOT Director Jerry Wray agrees, stating that ODOT needs to consider new, innovative ways to fund projects.

“The dynamics of funding have changed,” said Wray. “Revenue has leveled off. Construction inflation has gone up. The old ways of funding these major new capacity projects are no longer sustainable. We have to look at new ways of doing things.
It’s essential for our state’s economy.”

The Ohio General Assembly granted ODOT the authority to pursue public private partnerships, or P3s, for major new capacity projects in 2011. The department has created the Division for Innovative Delivery, headed by Deputy Director Jim Riley, to explore new ways to finance and support these projects.

“We are looking for projects that meet a certain criteria,” said Riley. “They must be large capital projects; they must be extremely complex; and we have to consider combining the design with the construction.”

The division conducts a value for money analysis on potential projects, comparing the traditional model of financing projects with new methods. The projects currently being considered for innovative financing include:

- The $330 million Interstate 90 Innerbelt Bridge in downtown Cleveland, including the demolition of the current eastbound bridge and building a new structure.
- The $530 million, three-phase Portsmouth Bypass project in Scioto County, creating a four-lane, limited access highway.
- The $2.5 billion construction of a new Bent Spence Bridge over the Ohio River in Cincinnati and the reconstruction of the existing facility.

**DESIGN-BID-BUILD**

According to Riley, the Cleveland Innerbelt project could move the project forward by at least two years using a design-build-finance model. The TRAC has authorized funding for the bridge in 2016. If a project team is hired that can fund the design and construction until then, construction can begin as soon as the westbound bridge is completed.

The Portsmouth Bypass is potentially even more innovative: The department has saved enough money to pay for the first of three-phases of construction. But the project is essentially worthless with no funding identified for its completion.

“What if we paid somebody to design, build and maintain all three phases at once? What if we pay them to maintain it over a set period of time? As long as they meet our performance standards over that time period and the facility is open and available to the public, everybody wins,” said Riley.

He proposes a similar initiative with the Brent Spence Bridge project. The department could consider hiring a team to design, build, finance, operate, and maintain the bridge. ODOT is currently studying the feasibility of making the bridge a toll facility.

“This project links the economies of two states in a major urban setting. Even if we do make it a toll facility that will only pay about half the cost. We will still have to come up with additional state and federal revenues,” Riley noted.

Director Wray points out the cost of just these three projects exceeds $3.6 billion - more than ODOT’s entire annual budget and more than is available for major new capacity projects.

“Yet, these communities both want and need these projects,” he said. “They are critical to our state’s recovering economy, and will help these three communities continue to create and maintain jobs, which is part of our department’s mission.”

Benjamin Franklin once said if you fail to prepare, you are preparing to fail. If so, ODOT will never fail Ohio in the foreseeable future.
Caution: Work in progress
Ron Poole, Central Office

Senator Maria Cantwell once described democracy as “the promise of everyday people working together to change our government and our institutions for the better.” This is a spirit which can often be found within this department on many occasions. It has been the moving force behind many of ODOT’s most important ideas.

This spirit was again evident at a working session for the highway management administrators and the 12 county managers sponsored by the Division of Operations in late January. Participants came in from all over the state to tackle common issues: Work Plans and what they needed to include within them; what Quality Assurance Reviews to keep and which to discard; and should winter Dry Runs be discarded in favor of spot checks conducted year round.

In short, subjects going to the very heart of maintenance operations within the department.

Sonja Simpson, deputy director of the Division of Operations and one of the facilitators of the working session, acknowledged the sheer scope of work the participants were asked to undertake.

“One challenge we face is consistency across the districts,” she observed. “People tend to see only the problems and priorities of their own area of the state, not realizing the differences in other districts. A consensus on these issues cannot be achieved in only two days, but giving different people the opportunity to look at the subjects from all sides got us moving forward.”

Indeed, the progress sparked by the two-day work session is gaining momentum. Individual taskforces made up of the session participants will be meeting on each issue and preparing recommendations for new plans to be presented to the whole group in another gathering this spring. When that happens, HMA Scott Kasler will be an eager participant in the next gathering:

“It will be a productive meeting,” he predicted simply. “We always have good discussions when we get together.”

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Andrea Woods
Highway Technician
Ron Poole, Central Office

With an infectious smile and friendly attitude, Andrea Woods can best be described as spunky, spry and spirited. She’s youthful and energetic, and her robust approach makes it difficult to keep up with her.

As a highway technician, Andrea has made her career in transportation. She joined District 9 full time in August 2011 after working in the road construction industry for 10 years:

“I love the outdoors, and I couldn’t imagine working inside all day, every day,” she said.

Andrea volunteers in the district’s Peer-to-Peer group, working to obtain special tools and improve safety practices for coworkers. A resident of Bainbridge, in Ross County, Andrea is a married mother of two who enjoys gardening, horseback riding, hunting, and spending time with family.

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Andrea Woods
Ohio’s traffic incident SUPERHEROES

David Rose, Central Office

LIKE THE AVENGERS swooping in to defeat an evil alien nemesis and ultimately saving the world, Ohio’s super-human team of traffic incident responders, christened QuickClear, battle an enemy even greater than any extraterrestrial foe: highway incidents.

Crashes or incidents on our highways not only increase congestion but waste time, fuel and money and heighten the risk of secondary crashes. According to the Federal Highway Administration, secondary crashes are estimated to cause nearly 20 percent of all highway crashes, or nearly 60,000 crashes in Ohio.

With modern traffic incident management tools, such as the state’s Traffic Management Center and partnership between law enforcement, fire, ODOT, emergency personnel and towing and recovery, the QuickClear team can rapidly assemble to clear the highway of any incident and restore traffic flow ASAP—all the while reducing the risk of secondary crashes and saving lives.

Responsible for reviving and leading the QuickClear program is Al Phillips, ODOT’s emergency management coordinator. Since January, Phillips has been forming a super hero team devised of ODOT district coordinators who oversee the regional QuickClear committees.

“QuickClear is critical to Ohio’s economy and keeping people and goods moving,” said Phillips. “We empower responders to use any means necessary to accomplish the goal of clearing the highways and keeping motorists and themselves safe.”

www.QuickClear.ohio.gov

Able to clear a traffic incident in a single bound: mild-mannered Emergency Management Coordinator Al Phillips.

Much like being a superhero, there are dangers involved as a first responder, including one’s own life. Every year, hundreds of responders are needlessly injured or killed. According to the Ohio State Highway Patrol, in 2010 there were 275 Ohio law enforcement officers injured with one fatality during traffic-related incidents.

“Our focus on promoting interagency partnering instills a culture of ownership and safety,” explained Captain Roger Haney of the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Our goal is that every responder returns home safely to their families.”

In a world where super heroes do not exist, it’s comforting to at least know there are ordinary people, such as QuickClear responders, doing extraordinary things to ensure our highways are safe.
In DISTRICT 1, heavy January rains sent debris down the Maumee River where it lodged against the bridge pier under the State Route 15 Bridge. Members of garages in Defiance and Putnam counties devised a way to reach the debris by parking a trailer next to the bridge sidewalk, then dropping the trailer frame directly onto the bridge deck and driving the crane truck onto a low boy trailer. The crane could then reach the debris. The jam was cleared in one day.

In DISTRICT 4, Highway Technician Jim Miller and Auto Mechanic Bob Clapsaddle combined their years of snow and ice experience to modify the direct mount hopper trucks in Stark County. Now the trucks have the ability to pre-treat roads with salt brine and make brine slurries for distribution. The Stark County employees also increased the capacity of brine on each truck by from 280 to 800 gallons by fitting new tanks on the side of the hoppers.

DISTRICT 5’s Fairfield and Perry counties have combined forces to concentrate efforts on brush cutting. “Brush cutting is vital to our preventive maintenance and snow and ice operations,” said Fairfield/Perry County Manager Doug Riffle. “Vegetation shading the pavement causes longer drying times. The presence of moisture during low temperatures causes freezing and thawing action which can result in pavement surfaces deteriorating more quickly.” District 5 also shares resources on other projects such as berming and spot paving.

In DISTRICT 7, partnered with the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, the city of Dayton and the Downtown Dayton Partnership to conduct highly successful public meetings about the final phase of the I-75 Modernization. ODOT received compliments on the smooth transition of traffic onto the new construction.

In DISTRICT 11, Holmes County Highway Technician Chuck Sweeney recently created an Underbody Sprayer to remove salt off the trucks oil pans, axles, slack adjusters, and other hard to reach parts of the undercarriage.