Introducing . . . ‘Otto’

the future is now

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As I take questions during our annual meetings, and as we look at the results of our yearly Quality of Work Life Survey, there are three areas that help us better understand the internal health and culture of our organization. These categories are:

- How is the working environment?
- How satisfied are the people of ODOT?
- How do I contribute to ODOT’s strategic plan?

The strategic issues question is intended to gauge how well the people of ODOT understand our strategic plan: How familiar are they with the direction we’re moving, and what are our top priorities?

Each year when we look at the Quality of Work Life Survey results, understanding of the strategic issues is the lowest ranked. Therefore, I thought I’d address that in this column and share a little more about what is our strategy to accomplish those priorities.

It begins with ODOT’s vision statement. A vision statement is a decision that says this is what ODOT is striving to be and how we intend to get there. Our vision statement tells both our internal and external customers, this is what you can expect from the Ohio Department of Transportation.

ODOT’s vision statement says we intend to be a long-term, reliable, professional and highly productive organization. If you’re reliable and professional, you do things right and you do the right things. You do things safely. You use the right equipment and the right material. And you produce results.

ODOT’s mission statement says this is what our department is responsible for. It’s about what we do and the results we will achieve. It clearly defines our core, retail product.

Our mission statement says “To provide easy movement of people and goods from place to place, we will take care of what we have; make our system work better; improve safety; and enhance capacity.”

We also have a list of guiding principles. These represent primary values and standards that guide us as we strive to accomplish our mission while living up to our vision.

Our critical success factors are key areas where we need to perform well on a consistent basis if we’re going to be successful. These critical success factors and the measurements or indicators associated with them are focused on retail results. They gauge the condition of Ohio’s transportation network and the quality of our department. Again, they are intended to measure results. Results based on our performance, our production, and the internal health of our organization. These metrics are a scoreboard that provides an indication of efficiency and effectiveness. If we measure the right things in the right way and set positive goals and accomplish them, then we will truly be achieving “Excellence in Government.”

Each of us has an important role to play in this. For example, when we do a great job on snow and ice removal, we’re being reliable and professional. We’re improving safety and making our system work better. When we’re replacing a culvert, we’re taking care of what we have and improving safety. If you work in planning, engineering or construction, you will be working on projects that take care of what we have, make our system work better, or improve both safety and enhance capacity.

No matter what you work with ODOT, it’s easy to see how your work influences our performance and ultimately whether or not we are successful.

What is the strategic direction of ODOT? Our number one priority is safety. In everything we do, we want to make it safer than we found it. Secondly, we intend to take care of what we have and protect the investment the people of Ohio have made in their transportation system. Finally, as reliable professionals we will use our experience, knowledge, and technology to make our system work better.

As ODOT Director Jerry Wray
Off the rails on a paving train
Ashley Rittenhouse, District 10

So it’s the beginning of the 2016 paving season, and District 10 Deputy Director Steve Williams and Highway Management Administrator Jamie Hendershot are trying to guess how much asphalt the district would place this season. After some discussion, they guessed it would be somewhere around 20,000 tons.

They guessed wrong: paving crews in District 10 placed 30,000 tons of asphalt in 2016, more than any other district. Hendershot attributes the success to two paving train teams, one operating in the southern portion of the district; the other in the north. It has been done this way in District 10 for three years.

The largest amount of asphalt, 4,700 tons, was placed in Meigs County. The best single day for the district was August 8, when 465 tons were placed on State Route 339 in Washington County. District 10 worked with Central Office Technical Services to perform corrective work on the Nelsonville Bypass. All told, District 10 spent $2.3 million on asphalt. According to Hendershot, the benefits of doing it in-house were numerous.

“We have the ability to quickly react to changing conditions and the ability to change the treatment process for each individual pavement distress,” he said. “And we do better quality work.”

The future came to Ohio, and it arrived on 18 wheels . . .

along a 35-mile stretch of U.S. Route 33 from Dublin to East Liberty. Dubbed the Smart Mobility Corridor, this roadway is being transformed into a real-world proving ground for innovative technologies, such as self-driving road vehicles. On November 30, a self-driving truck operated by a leading developer in the field successfully navigated the corridor for the first time. The company later operated the truck on the Ohio Turnpike. Governor John R. Kasich announced that $15 million will be invested for testing these new concepts.

“Some of the world’s foremost automotive researchers are working here in Ohio, at both ends of this corridor,” said Kasich. “Ohio has been at the heart of automotive manufacturing and innovation since the industry’s earliest days. Those ties strengthen with each passing year, and innovations developed here will continue to build on our state’s historic role as a world leader in transportation technology.”

Starting in May, the Smart Mobility Corridor will be equipped by ODOT with high-capacity fiber optic cable linked to sensors that will communicate all kinds of information digitally to those researching and analyzing traffic conditions. This data will also be used to help manage traffic, maintenance and repair along the roadway.

“Data collected on this corridor will allow automotive innovators to test and refine jobs-creating technologies that are going to help move people and products more safely and efficiently than ever before,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray. ODOT’s partners in the project include the Transportation Research Center at East Liberty, The Ohio State University’s Center for Automotive Research, and local governments along the route. The project will align with work to develop the city of Columbus as a hub for intelligent transportation under the $40 million “Smart City” federal grant.

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What makes a workplace great?
What makes ODOT a great place to work?

In the coming weeks, the Division of Communications will be asking YOU these questions. Look for responses in future editions of Transcript and online in
Heroes for just one day

Liz Lyons, District 8

Getting stuff done

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Winter operations. Snow and ice control. Quality of Work Life survey results. Equipment optimization. More than 300 ODOT maintenance managers attended a three-day Maintenance Operations Workshop at Maumee Bay State Park to discuss these subjects and more.

“This is where the rubber meets the road,” said Tom Corey, ODOT’s deputy director of Operations.

“These are the people who get the job done. They manage the majority of our workforce. It’s important that we give them the tools and resources they need to be more efficient for the traveling public.”

ODOT Director Jerry Wray and Assistant Director of Field Operations Dave Coyle reported on the County Manager Chats they’ve been holding. Wray gave each of the managers a reflective jacket for road work.

Clermont County is a beautiful area, full of swaying trees, creeks and wildlife. Sometimes that nature clashes with modern construction, as when a deer was killed by traffic along a section of State Route 133. Highway technicians Ryan Ninichuck and Jeff Armstrong were dispatched to remove the carcass. But this ordinary duty turned into anything but.

Once on-site, they discovered a crashed car beyond the embankment. The 38-year-old driver was trapped inside. He had been there, alone, for nearly two days. “I called out and didn’t hear anyone,” said Armstrong, “so I went to the car, and through the window I could see a foot.”

“We finally got him to respond and it was a big relief to hear the guy mumble,” Ninichuck added.

The two stayed with the driver after calling 911. They learned he couldn’t remember what happened. Eventually, the driver was air-lifted to the hospital. The crash is currently under investigation by the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP).

“I commend these two,” said OSHP Lt. Price. “The action they took may have saved this man’s life. They’re paying attention to their surroundings; they’re looking around; they’re doing the things that you would hope people would do.”

When the Ohio School for the Blind asked ODOT if we wanted to participate in their Transportation Day for students K-12, the answer was easy.

Of course.

The only part that took more than a second to figure out was what to bring that was safe enough to touch. Since a snow plow and steel blade were out, we came up with all the other materials ODOT uses. Berm, road salt, a piece of concrete from a bridge, an asphalt core sample, an actual traffic signal, a portable road work ahead sign, the bucket our signal engineers use, and an audible pedestrian traffic signal for the blind that we borrowed from the vendor for the day.

The result? A lesson that no one—including ODOT—will ever forget.
To dance is human, Polka, divine

Rhonda Pees, District 1

Luke Rohrs stands in the center of the stage at the microphone. Throughout the night, he sings, plays trumpet and calls a square dance. Later, a rendition of “Achy Breaky Heart” with a German twang is played to which the crowd dances the electric slide.

There is no hesitation in the crowd once the music begins. They came to dance.

“You can’t help yourself from tapping your feet,” said Rohrs, an automotive technician at District 1’s Defiance County garage. He’s played polka music for more than 20 years.

He is part of the Happy Times Polka Band, which includes his father Norbert, Uncle Randy and Cousin Kyle. The band plays for festivals and at dances and nursing homes in northwest Ohio. The polka tradition is deep in the family: Rohrs’ father Norbert has played polka music since the early 1960s. As a child, Rohrs went along with his dad to gigs, often falling asleep either on a table or on the stage. His cousin, Ted Lange, is the leader of the well-known polka band, Squeezebox, which appears regularly on RFD-TV and plays throughout the country.

The Happy Times band plays German-style polka music. Due to the aging of its audience, the demand for it is dying down, and Rohrs’ face is one of the younger in the crowds where they play. However, there are still some remaining hotbeds of fandom, such as Hamler and Deshler. The music’s impact is especially evident at the nursing homes they visit.

“That’s what I enjoy seeing—the people in the nursing homes, the remembrance,” said Rohrs.

Ultimately, he enjoys playing because of what he gets from it.

“It’s the smiles, the people you meet,” he said. “That’s the fun of this—meeting people you never imagined. As long as people continue to come, we’ll keep playing.”