Starting from scratch

Joel Hunt, Central Office

The department’s financial guardians have begun the use of a new budgeting process which has so far uncovered millions to be redirected from operating expenses to the capital program.

It’s not a trick. Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) is a labor intensive examination of all aspects of district and Central Office operations which uncovers waste and duplication. Every official responsible for a budget starts with the idea that every activity must be justified by its cost/benefit. No present commitment is assumed; no balance is carried forward.

Although it is more time-consuming than traditional budgeting, ZBB has its advantages: it is based on needs and benefits rather than history; it drives managers to find cost effective ways to improve operations; it detects inflated budgets; it identifies and eliminates wasteful and obsolete operations; it helps identify areas of wasteful expenditure, and if desired, can also be used for suggesting alternative courses of action.

Prior to the switch, ODOT managers justified fluctuations from the previous three to five years, based on the assumption that the baseline is automatically approved. By contrast, every line item of the budget must be approved under ZBB.

“I don’t think we hurt anybody in this process,” said Mike Cope, assistant director for Business and Human Resources. “The money is still there, we just redirected it.”

According to the finance team in charge of implementing ZBB, the majority of the savings was realized by not funding vacant positions, mild winter savings in salt, overtime reductions and new equipment strategies.

Assistant Director Cope said the process ‘sweeps out old accounts to find extra money’ but doesn’t leave districts and Central Office divisions without any options. “We asked the districts and Central Office to not pad their budgets for contingencies. If something arises outside of their control, we’ll cover it,” he said.

The new operating budget is the lowest in three years.

Zero-based budgeting has dramatically changed ODOT’s budgeting process. The team who brought ZBB to ODOT includes, Rich Winning, left, John Worley, Scott Grundey and Marcie Madden.
Every success has a story; just ask Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action (HAPCAP) – administrator of the rural intercity bus line called GoBus.

In 2010, ODOT awarded the city of Athens funding for two rural intercity bus routes: Athens to Cincinnati and Athens to Columbus. Athens asked HAPCAP to administer the rural intercity program on their behalf. Dubbed GoBus, ODOT and HAPCAP worked with Lakefront Lines to provide the bus service and connection to the existing nationwide bus network.

Word quickly spread about $10 bus tickets from Athens to Cincinnati and Athens to Columbus, especially to college students at Ohio University (OU). Adding to the attractiveness for college students was the free Wi-Fi and oversized seats, making the ride comfortable and more enjoyable.

A recent ridership analysis from HAPCAP shows that more than 35 percent of GoBus passengers utilize the OU stop. Even more amazing, ridership has increased more than five-times since November 2010, its first month of operation, with 1,013 passengers to more than 5,300 passengers in May 2012.

The success of GoBus is spreading, earlier this year a route from Athens to Marietta was added, further increasing the rural to intercity connections and enhancing access to job opportunities, healthcare and education. And most recently, GoBus was selected by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) as an Economic Community Development Exemplary Practice.

“The availability of GoBus as a reliable transportation resource has increased the number of employment prospects for Ohio’s rural residents by connecting them with larger employers located in urban areas. GoBus also increases patronage for a wide variety of businesses, healthcare centers, tourist destinations, and educational institutions in rural and metro areas, as Ohio residents are now able to easily access goods and services throughout the state,” said Robin Stewart, senior project manager at the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs and lead researcher for the report.

GoBus recently asked its riders to tell them why they ride GoBus. Of the responses, one was traveling to Colorado for a new job, another was visiting a boyfriend in Columbus and another was going home to visit family and friends.

“While the need for such transportation is well-documented, no one expected the level of success this program has achieved,” said GoBus manager Carolyn Conley. “GoBus has caught on in a big way.”
Safe Routes to School contest winners
Carolyn Kirkland, Central Office

The Safe Routes to School Program is continuing to make walking and biking to school safer, this time awarding the winners of ODOT’s Statewide School Safety Contest comprised of students, classrooms, and schools.

The contest served as educational and encouragement components of the ongoing effort by the department to reduce school-related crashes throughout the state. The Safe Routes to School Program focuses on improving safety through the implementation of the 5 Es: engineering, enforcement, evaluation, education, and encouragement.

Launched in October through the “Every Move You Make, Keep It Safe” statewide educational campaign, the contest was created to ensure that students understand how to be safe when walking or riding bikes to school. Projects could vary from designing posters to making a safety video and had to be submitted by April 30.

ODOT selected 36 winners judged on creativity, level of student participation, knowledge of walking and bicycle safety practices, and positive impact on the local school environment. Trek Bicycles of Columbus donated 12 bicycles, 1 for each ODOT district, while schools and classrooms were eligible for one of 24 $1,000 cash prizes.

The schools and classrooms that won cash prizes must somehow put the money toward bicycle and pedestrian safety. Harvard Elementary School, for instance, is putting their contest earnings towards video cameras for the production of morning announcement safety videos.

Pleased with the contest, District 6 Deputy Director Ferzan Ahmed said “As parents and as educators it is our job to inspire children, and I think it’s pretty cool when it’s our children who end up inspiring us with safety messages.”

A transportation bill — signed, sealed, delivered
Ron Poole, Central Office

The new Federal Surface Transportation Authorization bill was signed into law just after the Independence Day holiday. The bill makes $105 billion available to the states over the next two years for the repair, maintenance and expansion of the transportation infrastructure throughout the entire country.

The bill appears to move in the direction of more flexibility and control on the part of the states: It consolidates both the highway and transit programs. There are no specific earmarks for projects, allowing states to use the money allocated on projects that best meet their needs. Several transportation programs have been consolidated under a new category, “Transportation Alternatives,” with state DOTs and MPOs having the authority to decide how much funding each will get.

The new bill expands the use of toll roads to fund future projects, and potentially reduces or eliminates detailed environmental studies for projects within ODOT’s existing right-of-way. The end result is faster project delivery at a reduced cost. Overall, the funding levels for construction and maintenance will be kept about the same nationally.
In Memoriam
Jim Seney
Matt Dietrich
Ohio Rail Development Commission

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n June 2nd, Jim Seney, the former Executive Director of the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC), was sadly killed in a boating accident in Canada.

The ORDC was the last of many public positions Jim held throughout his lifetime. He was the long-time mayor of Sylvania, Ohio, worked at the Ohio Department of Development, and was northwest regional representative under Gov. Taft.

Jim had numerous accomplishments during his public service, but those of us who worked with Jim will remember him for his love of cigars, keen political insight, love of family and just being an all-around good guy. A colleague summed it up best: “Jim made a difference in our world. He will be remembered by his cowboy hat, boots, a smiling face and an outstretched hand.”

He will be greatly missed.


MEET THE DDD
Steve Williams, District 10
Brenna Slavens, District 10

District Deputy Director

Steve Williams started his career with ODOT as a summer student in the Morgan County garage in 1981. He entered the Engineer-in-Training program in 1987, then served as the District 10 assistant bridge engineer. As a project engineer, Williams worked on several projects and would be later promoted to area construction engineer and to district construction engineer.

He’s overseen nearly $856 million dollars in contracts, including some of District 10’s largest projects to date: the U.S. 33 corridor; the ER flood work of 2004-2006; the Pomeroy Mason Bridge and the Nelsonville Bypass.

Williams holds a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from Ohio University, and is a licensed professional engineer and a surveyor-in-training.

He resides on a farm near Malta with his wife, Valerie. They have seven grandchildren.

Williams enjoys golf, hunting, and bluegrass music. ☺
Curtis George, Highway Technician
Victoria Chanfrau, District 6

Originally from the island of St. Lucia in the West Indies, Highway Technician Curtis George has made ODOT his home. A 20-year veteran with District 6, he says being a highway technician has him doing different chores. “I’ve been in construction for many years; you do many things,” George reflected. “I like the challenge of the day-to-day rigors; you don’t really know what your assignment is until you get there.”

With his distinct Caribbean accent, George speaks of his thriving love for soccer: “I was playing soccer since I was very young - I am retired now,” he said. “I played as a goal keeper for five years on the national team of St. Lucia. I came to the United States in 1983 and started working in construction.”

Online clothing store offers new selections
Ron Poole, Central Office

With the coming of warmer weather, the ODOT online clothing store has expanded its offerings to include more color options among its inventory of shirts, caps, workwear, fleece jackets and outerwear. The store has also added new polo and T-shirts and new safety approved jackets.

“ODOT is proud that the company which supplies us with the merchandise, LeaderPromos.com, is a locally based and a certified women’s business enterprise,” said Jamie Kimberly, ODOT’s clothing coordinator.

The online store began operation earlier this year, featuring items with the ODOT name and symbol. According to Kimberly, the inventory will expand seasonally, based on employee feedback and sales:

“The store has been very successful,” she said. We have seen a lot of interest from our fellow employees and hope they will like our new items.”

Visit the online store by following the link on ODOT’s intranet page.
The severe weather of June 29 affected nearly two-thirds of Ohio residents, leaving many homes and businesses without power, and countless motorists searching for alternate routes.

It has been a few weeks since those violent storms hit, but the clean-up efforts continue in District 5.

No surprise, ODOT employees recognized the need for quick response and acted accordingly. Opening roadways was priority one, and clean-up efforts began in earnest. Initially, Perry County had six routes either restricted or closed. By Monday, July 2, all state routes were open for safe travel.

Perry County Transportation Manager Dan Hammer made a call to the Southeast Correctional Institution, in Lancaster, and a team of one sergeant, one officer and ten inmates were receiving work direction and safety equipment.

“We’ve been working with Southeast for nearly 17 years,” said Hammer. “For this work, the extra sets of hands will allow us to cover a lot more routes.”

ODOT highway technicians used chain saws to cut downed trees, low-hanging limbs, and brush into manageable pieces for their coworkers and inmates to feed into the chipper. The sweltering temperature didn’t seem to bother the crews, though frequent water breaks were a necessity.

“We’ve done everything from helping clean ODOT trucks during the winter to picking up litter along the interstate,” said Sergeant Dan Kinsel, who’s been a part of this state collaboration for more than 20 years. “We didn’t hesitate to respond when ODOT asked for assistance, as the need for help clearly exists.”

The majority of participating inmates like the arrangement, even when it means working in 90-degree heat. One inmate said it made him feel good knowing that he was helping clear the roads that his family actually drives on. Many others welcomed the opportunity to get out of the Southeast Facility and have a change of scenery.

With the assistance of Southeast Correctional Institution, Perry County crews were able to clear a tremendous amount of trees and brush along nearly all state routes within the county.
Health and Wellness Corner

Food safety in summer heat
Carolyn Kirkland, Central Office

Summer is a great time to fire up the grill, get together with friends and family, and make some great food. But those meals may not be so great if hosts forget to practice safe grilling habits. The FDA has set out some important tips to ensure that grilled food reaches the table safely.

Marinate Marinate foods in the refrigerator instead of the counter top. Also, if you plan to use some of the marinade on the cooked food, reserve a portion separately before adding the raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Don’t reuse marinade.

Cook thoroughly If you cook food partially to reduce grilling time, make sure it finishes immediately on a prepared grill.

Using a food thermometer is the only way to be certain meats are cooked thoroughly. The FDA recommends cooking poultry to at least 165 degrees, ground beef and pork to 160 degrees, and steaks, roasts, and fish to 145 degrees.

Serve Use separate platters for transporting food to and from the grill; Never place cooked food on platters that held raw meat.
Deputy Director of Operations Sonja Simpson is someone to watch: Columbus Business First, a bi-weekly newspaper, selected her as one of their “Forty under 40” central Ohio residents for 2012. This annual honor is bestowed upon those who have achieved places of distinction in their careers and communities while still less than 40 years of age.

“It is very nice to be recognized in this group of professionals,” she reflected, “especially since I am in the public sector.”

A former project coordinator at MORPC, and operations coordinator with the city of Columbus before coming to ODOT, Simpson holds a masters degree in geography and regional planning. A married mother of three, she is a member of several community organizations. She and her family are enthusiastic students of the martial art Taekwondo.

Call in the Reserves
Rhonda Pees, District 1

Jan Ardner of the Hancock County garage answered the call to duty last March from his United States Coast Guard Reserve unit. He became the only known District 1 member to serve in an active-duty status while still employed with the office.

Following pre-deployment exercises at a California naval base and training with the U.S. Army, Ardner is now serving a six-month tour, providing port security in the Middle East.

Ardner came to ODOT as a winter seasonal in 2010 and became full-time in March the next year. As the father of two, Ardner was reluctant to leave his family, but looked forward to his tour.

“He wants to serve,” said Darryl August, one of Ardner’s coworkers. “He’s a good worker. He stays on task. He’s proud of what he does.”