On the go
with District 6’s
Chris Dicke

Governor signs Brent Spence legislation

DoIT sees changes ahead

‘On the go’
with District 6’s
Chris Dicke
Dissection of a winter
Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

After one of the worst winters in recent memory, Ohio was fortunate enough to host the 2014 American Public Works Association’s (APWA) North American Snow Conference recently in Cincinnati. The “Show for Snow” attracted more than 1,500 snow fighters from across the U.S. and Canada.

Perhaps the highlight of the four-day conference was the fact that 12 different ODOT staffers from districts 12, 5 and 4, along with engineers from the Division of Operations, were asked to make presentations to the conference. Deputy Director of Operations Sonja Simpson participated in a “talk show” panel session on risk, safety, and reliability of snow and ice removal and served as one of the presenters.

“The conference was huge and everyone was very attentive,” said Simpson. “They really came to hear what we had to say.”

ODOT received an Excellence in Snow and Ice Control Award. It is one of only a handful of state DOTs to ever receive such an award.

ODOT personnel made presentations on a number of topics, such as transparent district boundaries, sharing equipment with local governments, and how to use regional weather information systems to plan ahead before a storm.

Office of Traffic Engineer John MacAdam, who helped present ODOT’s in-house-developed Snow and Ice Evaluator system, said the snow fighters from other states were impressed with how ODOT handles these duties.

“We’re cutting edge. Our system is completely objective. People came to learn from us,” he said.

DoIT sees changes ahead
Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

Services that the Division of Information Technology (DoIT) provide for the department will be starting to change this summer, thanks to an initiative known as “IT Optimization.”

Put in place by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), the plan calls for computer servers residing within individual agencies to be moved to a state data center operated out of DAS. In addition, certain programs serving the same purpose at multiple agencies will be condensed into one statewide application.

This initiative was developed after the inventories and efforts of all state IT departments were evaluated last year. That report revealed that the current decentralization of IT services in Ohio had become uncontrolled – the state currently has more than 5,000 servers in more than 30 data centers, more than 1,600 applications, and 14 separate statewide networks. This consolidation will reduce the complexity of these IT services, and reduce costs by the elimination of redundant hardware and software between different agencies.

The multi-project, multi-phase initiative is expected to take anywhere from five to seven years to complete. Once finished, it will naturally lessen the need for IT jobs throughout the state. The lower levels of staff will be attained through retirements and normal attrition of workers.
Governor John Kasich recently signed House Bill 533 into law. The bi-partisan measure allows ODOT to move forward on the $2.6 billion Brent Spence Bridge replacement project in Cincinnati. The bridge carries traffic on Interstate 71 and Interstate 75 across the Ohio River to Northern Kentucky.

The legislation allows Ohio to participate in the tolling of both the new and old bridges. An all-electronic tolling system will be implemented on both structures instead of using traditional toll booths. Automatic vehicle identification systems will use electronic transponders to deduct tolls from pre-paid accounts. In addition, a video system will be implemented to capture license plates to invoice the registered vehicle owner. The law also improves ODOT’s public-private partnership statute, allowing for more innovation in funding the project.

“This is another great step toward building a new Brent Spence Bridge,” ODOT Director Jerry Wray said. “We look forward to continuing to work with our partners, both here in Ohio and in Kentucky, to move toward making a new bridge a reality.”

The 52-year-old Brent Spence Bridge not only links Ohio and Kentucky. The bridge also represents a commerce link between 13 other states, while also serving as a major thoroughfare for local and regional mobility.

The bridge was designed and built in 1963 to carry around 80,000 vehicles a day. Currently, an estimated 180,000 vehicles use the bridge each day—more than double its intended capacity.

Local News

What’s buzzing at District 9?
Kathleen Fuller, District 9

To the naked eye, a stretch of State Route 207 in Ross County may seem like a plot of scrub and dying weeds. But the grounds alongside this two-lane route are being used for much more, as the county’s maintenance forces turn it into prairie suitable for Ohio’s honeybee population.

ODOT is establishing a pilot program to grow native prairie plants along the highway. These plants will provide a food source for pollinating bees. Affectionately known as the 4Bs – bees, butterflies, birds and beauty – the program had Ross County’s maintenance crews prepping and planting two, one-acre plots along State Route 207 with an assortment of native plants this past spring. Their crop included little bluestem, purple and yellow coneflower, white wild indigo, goldenrod, asters and more.

Honeybees and other pollinators, crucial to the growth and development of 80 percent of vegetables and fruits, are dying at alarming rates. There are multi-
Partnering with local agencies for continuous improvement

Joyce Miller, District 3

One of the District 3 Construction Department’s core values is continuous improvement. In early April, members of District 3’s construction team continued the annual tradition of offering training in construction administration topics to local government representatives involved in the Local Public Agencies (LPA) program. To ensure that this season’s projects are even more successful than last, Construction worked with the Planning & Engineering staff to develop topics that address project scoping and design issues. District LPA staff developed an agenda based upon common opportunities for improvement. This year, a full-day session was offered to the 100 attendees - a significant increase from the 40 people who attended the first training in 2008.

The course included various subjects in construction administration, such as documentation, change order processing, materials management, and prevailing wage/EEO/disadvantaged business enterprise compliance issues.

This training was recognized by Central Office as a best practice, and representatives of District 5 attended the sessions this year to possibly implement for their use. Central Office has invited District 3 to participate in their LPA Day Committee, which is creating an agenda for a full-day outreach program to promote the program and educate the local government officials on processes and procedures.

Seth Rankin, left, of Pheasants Forever, and Ross County ODOT employees Blake Kellough and Greg Lightle examine seed mix prior to planting. Photo by Travis Crawford, District 9
Transportation manager on the go
Nancy Burton, District 6

People usually hear District 6 member Chris Dicke before they see her. It is not uncommon for this no-nonsense transportation manager to be on a cell phone call with a contractor only to have another trying to reach her before she can even hang up. Dicke has spent most of her 23 years at either a county garage or a construction project field office.

“I haven’t worked in a (standard) office at the district for years—heck no,” she said. “I’m always out in the field.”

Dicke worked on the Interstate 270/161 project near New Albany, which literally transformed the interchange between Franklin and Licking counties. She was a permanent fixture in the field office on the Interstate 270 reconstruction project on the southwest side of Franklin County. Dicke is usually assigned to big construction projects in Columbus.

“I love the challenge of seeing a big project come together,” she said. “I love working on heavy highway projects that start from nothing and end up more efficient, safe roadways. It’s learning new specifications, working with different contractors and people.”

When asked, she said her favorite project was the construction of Interstate 670 in downtown Columbus in 2002. Because the road was completely closed to traffic, there were no worries about cars, trucks and drivers. As a bonus, the work was near Goodale Park, where they could all take great lunches and be near the festivals held there during the summer. She is currently wrapping up a demanding three-year project this summer.

“We have day and night crews working due to lane restrictions,” Dicke reports. “There are a lot of long days. Yesterday, I went home at 3:30 in the afternoon, and then came back at 6:30 in the evening because it was the pavement marking company’s first night back this year. If you make an effort to get everyone off on the right foot, things seem to go a lot smoother. Everyone knows what’s expected of them.”

Dicke says she is as good at juggling projects as she is phone calls. She’s usually on to her next big project while she is still completing her current one. She strives to always be prepared.

“I think the most important part of my job is to make sure that I understand the plans, specifications, etc.,” she said, “and get as many of the inspector’s resources together or available to them (before they go out with contractors) so they are confident and prepared to deal with the items of work they are inspecting. Specifications change, forms change, designs change, contractor personnel changes . . . This ‘old dog’ is always learning something new!”

Dicke knows that you have to communicate often, clearly, and directly in her work. She will be the first to say some of her co-workers and many contractors don’t necessarily agree with her style. But it is clear when you work with Dicke on a project, safety and ODOT always come first.
“THE NEPOTISM RULE IS STUPID. Not allowing family members to work in any part of ODOT doesn’t make sense. As a result, we are not hiring the capable people we otherwise would. Will you reconsider this rule?”

“I’M AWARE THE NEPOTISM POLICY is a subject of concern for some people. We’ve had several inquiries about hiring practices. There are a lot of people interested in getting members of their family jobs at ODOT.

That said, when I first became director in 1991, I found we had hiring practices that amounted to a “closed system.” It seemed most people relied on connections, family, friends, or politics to get hired here. I believed this closed system limited our ability to get the best people possible and created the perception that you have to know someone to get a job at ODOT. Just as importantly, it also made it more difficult for the department to diversify our workforce.

Our intention is to create a more open system, where you don’t have to “know” someone. The nepotism policy is a part of that change and I am responsible for it. We have provided a process that allows waivers, or exceptions, to the policy based on operational needs and the best interest of the department.

I understand this causes hardship for some people and some disagree with the policy. However, I believe the good outweighs the bad as we strive for a diverse and capable, productive workforce.” — Director Jerry Wray
**THE ODOT NEWS**

**FAST FIVE**

1 **EIMS GOES LIVE!**
ODOT’s new and improved system to track materials and equipment used, inventory on hand, and labor hours worked went live on June 16.

2 **WORKERS BEGIN ORDERING NEW BOOTS**
The inaugural boot-ordering program took place in June – employees who qualify for the program can receive new work boots paid for by ODOT to improve personal safety.

3 **FREEWAY PATROL GETS SPONSORED**
State Farm Insurance Company will now pay ODOT $850,000 per year to sponsor the vehicles that patrol Ohio’s freeways and assist motorists in need.

4 **TEAM UP ODOT ANNOUNCED**
ODOT’s annual employee gathering at the State Fairgrounds will be held on September 4. People can register to show off their innovations from the past year and benchmark with colleagues from other districts and divisions.

5 **TOLLING BILL SIGNED INTO LAW**
The future new Brent Spence Bridge in District 8 may utilize electronic tolling once completed as a result of a new law signed by Governor Kasich in June. The Commonwealth of Kentucky will need to pass similar legislation to move forward with tolls on the connecting bridge.

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**ODOT PEOPLE ARE AMAZING . . .**

**. . . AT WORK**

**Technology Council**

Joel Hunt, Central Office

Technology Council

The Central Office Division of Information Technology (DoIT) is handing over its purchasing decisions to a neutral third-party charged with funding projects that are scored, weighted, and based on need. The group is known as the Technology Council, and its members come from a variety of backgrounds.

“This has never been done before,” said Missy Anverse, project manager in DoIT. “Our 11-member council is made up of people from finance, planning and engineering, district information technology, county managers, and project engineers.”

The council also includes ad hoc members, chairs, and a governance board.

Bill Taylor, deputy director of DoIT, said all future projects will go through an intake process before reaching the Technology Council. “There is no limit to the number of applications the council will take, but the number of projects that will receive funding is limited by the budget and DoIT’s capacity to deliver.”

Frank Phillips, Jr., a District 4 county manager and voting member of the council, brings to the table his experiences as end user of DoIT’s products:

“I share the frustrations of highway technicians and mechanics who get tools that are supposed to work but don’t,” he said. “I intend to be a voice for them and give them technology that works.”

The council is currently testing its scoring criteria on three “real-life” projects: the Roadway Information Management System; “OhGo.com” to be used for iOS and Android mobile devices; and the Consultant Services Capital Project Delivery System.

“It’s our hope the council will save the department money and improve efficiency, quality, and effectiveness,” Anverse said.
ODOT CENTRAL OFFICE hosted “Bring Your Child to Work Day” on May 30 this year. Featured here are some selected photos from the event.