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District 4’s Robert Tenney. Photo by Brent Kovacs, District 4.
Coming this summer
Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

The implementation of the new Enterprise Information Management System (EIMS) is scheduled for June 16, 2014.

“As soon as EIMS goes live, we plan to turn off the Transportation Management System (TMS) and the Equipment Management System (EMS) and turn EIMS on,” says ODOT Chief Information Officer Bill Taylor. “Instead of generating hundreds of paper forms, EIMS will be working toward a totally web-based work system.”

Taylor says the new EIMS system will allow the department to do a better job of planning, scheduling, and managing assets.

“This will allow us to optimize our resources. Reports can be generated easily and will allow us to make better decisions,” he said.

In July, one county garage in each district will spend about four weeks piloting mobile devices in the field that will be integrated with EIMS. They will then report back to the EIMS project team. The rest of the counties will receive mobile devices later in the year.

Later this year, the ODOT people in the county garages and districts will receive new, state-of-the-art Multi-Agency Radio Communications System (MARCS) radios. MARCS is a radio and data network operated by the Department of Administrative Services’ (DAS) Office of Information Technology. The system currently supports more than 47,500 voice and 1,800 mobile data units for state, local, county, and township police, as well as fire, Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Management Agencies, corrections officers from both adult and juvenile state systems, and other first response personnel.

Last year, DAS began upgrading MARCS and the standards for digital radio communication for federal, state, and local public safety agencies in North America. When completed in 2014, this upgrade will give the state an integrated system with over 220 radio towers providing the coverage and capacity needed for more than 125,000 radios for all first responders.

This past winter, Motorola began installing a consollette (radio with desk units) in each district headquarters as well as control stations at each county garage and select outposts. Some portable units will be distributed to the districts, with mobile radios for the fleet to be installed this spring and summer.

“This will put us light years beyond our current two-way radio system,” says Thomas Lyden, administrator of the Office of Maintenance Administration. “The real strength is that our managers will be able to communicate clearly to their crews with very few dead spots. Each county will have a unique talk group. Managers will be able to communicate with other state and local entities during times of emergency. Everyone will be on the same page.”

In addition to improving communications between ODOT counties and districts, MARCS will allow ODOT personnel to communicate with the Ohio Highway Patrol during emergencies, according to Lt. Anne Ralston, a spokesperson for the patrol.

“It’s safe to say that with the new radios, interoperability and communication can be made between troopers and ODOT workers to communicate hazards, coordinate resources, and ensure safety when both agencies are responding to a roadway incident,” she said.
ODOT successful in reducing vehicles
Alexandra Buerger, Central Office

Over the past year, ODOT has worked to reduce the number of vehicles on hand as part of a Fleet Management Initiative. In addition to sensibly condensing the fleet, the initiative establishes a standard cycle of buying and replacing dump trucks and creates specifications for the best dump truck possible for ODOT. Each component contributes to the goal of reducing costs associated with purchasing and maintaining equipment.

Equipment Management personnel from Central Office met with each district to establish fleet reduction goals in the spring of 2013, taking into account how often each piece of equipment was used. Now, nearly a year since those reduction goals were established, the same groups met in January 2014 to review their progress. They found that passenger vehicles had been reduced by 6.7 percent, while the medium-sized vans and trucks went down 8.4 percent. ODOT’s heavy equipment had been reduced 20.3 percent – a total of 200 pieces. This progress has been made possible through better purchasing practices as well as improved coordination between counties and districts.

“Our fleet will be optimized,” said Mark Gnatowski, administrator of the office of Equipment Management. “We have found ways to make the most of every piece of equipment we have.”

New parts company faces its first winter
By Pieter Wykoff

The Virginia-based company Mancon Inc. that was hired by ODOT to manage the supply chain for all of the department's vehicle and aviation parts seems to have weathered its first Ohio winter successfully.

Mancon was implemented by all twelve ODOT districts just before the beginning of the state fiscal year began on July 1st. According to Innovative Delivery Division Project Manager Julie Brogan, who supervised the implementation, things went well this past winter.

“Things were pretty calm, considering the winter we had. People are starting to see the benefits of the program,” she says.

Forty-four parts clerks were affected by the transition. However, Brogan says that Director Jerry Wray was adamant that there would be no layoffs.

“All of the clerks were moved to other jobs in their districts. They were moved to where they were needed,” she says.

District Three Auditor Joanna Hockenberger says five of the clerks are now working in the district office. “Some of them work in my office as account clerks. Two days a week they partner with construction to do equal opportunity compliance,” she says.

The original estimate on how much the department would save with the new program was just over $7 million. Brogan says the department has already saved $8 million with three months left in the fiscal year.

The reason for the savings? Over the years, ODOT had developed such a distrustful system to pay for the parts that it became unwieldy and expensive. Practices varied from district to district. With Mancon, each district is billed for the parts they order. Central Office is billed a management fee by district based upon Mancon’s bid or based upon the awarded contract. Mancon gets bulk price savings. In some cases, they may purchase with other states to reduce the prices even further. Finally, ODOT has no more inventory costs because the department has no inventory, Mancon manages the inventory and delivers the parts on a just-in-time basis.
Summit County mechanics create new brine sprayer

Brent Kovacs, District 4

It all started in Summit County, when Highway Technician Marty Braun was approached by County Manager Frank Phillips and asked to make a more reliable brine sprayer bar. The sprayer bars being used were made out of Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) pipe which would break when the weather got cold. Braun solved this problem by using stainless steel pipes, and then went further.

After getting permission from his manager, Braun and the team of mechanics modified a new spray bar by adding ten EPOKE sprayers, which grind the salt and mix it with more brine into a product of oatmeal-like consistency. With this set up attached to the back of a 2,500 gallon brine tank on a swap loader, the system can pretreat up to three lanes of highway in one pass.

When the salt solution is applied, there is significantly decreased scatter and activation time; roads are pretreated in half the time while using 30 percent less salt than a traditional salt hopper. The system also reduces the pretreatment of bridges from 24 hours to six hours. Currently, two out of three brine tankers have been upgraded in Summit County.

“I enjoy making simple changes that save the taxpayers money, all while making the roadways safer for the motoring public,” said Braun.

Old man winter wears out welcome

Mandi Dillon, District 7

District 7 crews have not only been plowing snow, but relocating it as well. As Mother Nature continues to blast our area with blankets of snow and sheets of ice, our road crews continue to fight back with full force. Crews have been working around the clock this winter to keep District 7’s roads clear and safe.

This year, Old Man Winter has dumped so much snow on southwest Ohio that crews had to actually move it from the bridges and overpasses to make room for more! With temperatures staying below freezing, the snow from recent storms continued to pile up, slowly taking over the barrier wall with each pass of the plow. To increase driving space on bridges and avoid a large amount of melting and refreezing, crews used bobcats, plows, and snow blowers to relocate the white stuff. This just proves that even after the storm has passed, a road crew’s work is never done!
“As I wrote last month, a joint taskforce on the HT issue put together a series of recommendations, including a three-tier career path of maintenance, construction, and testing. Any changes made to the HT Series will directly impact bargaining unit members; therefore they must be negotiated by management and the union. Based on the taskforce’s work, I asked a small management team to prepare a proposal for submission to OCSEA leadership. The union was unable to entertain the proposal until the expiration of the current contract on February 28, 2015.

Making changes will require significant effort from both union and management, and both sides have agreed to begin bargaining preparations now. In collaboration with the union, we asked a group of HTs from around the state to come together so we could hear their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. The result was a frank discussion about issues, future desires, and ideas on how to make the series better. The bargaining preparations team will be taking all of these ideas into consideration when preparing for the next contract.

With this process beginning, you can be assured that between now and February, 2015 the union and management will be working hard to improve the HT Series. I look forward to seeing the finished product.”

— Director Jerry Wray

The second phase of the Interstate 75 modernization project in downtown Dayton, pictured here, was completed in 2013. The work included rebuilding the ramps as part of a goal to provide three continuous lanes of traffic through I-75. The entire project is scheduled for completion in 2017.
You’re not in Montana anymore

Kathleen Fuller, District 9

While most of us are happy to see winter come to an end, there’s at least one ODOT employee who would like to have seen just a bit more snow. Meet Robert Eick, an auto technician in District 9’s Pike County Highway Maintenance Facility who is used to somewhat harsher conditions.

“This really wasn’t that bad,” said Eick. “I was hoping for a Montana winter!”

Admittedly, Eick probably has been too busy this snow and ice season to think much about Kalispell, the small city in northwest Montana where he lived for 17 years. At home he and his wife have to keep up with their four children, ages 7 to 16. At work, he and fellow mechanic Dustin Beekman have had to keep the vehicle fleet up and running in Pike County. With a goal to have less than 10 percent of the county’s fleet down at any time, that is no small feat.

Fortunately, they have a great track record for keeping the trucks on the road year-round. On any given day, you’ll find Eick doing anything from repairing brakes to performing electronic diagnostics.

Born in southern Ohio, Eick grew up primarily in Scioto County and graduated from Minford High School. As part of a military family, he moved back and forth between Ohio and other parts of the country. Eick joined the U.S. Army after graduation and lived all over the United States before settling down a while in Montana. He worked there as a mechanic and driver for a recycling, sanitation, and industrial storage company. Returning to southern Ohio in 2010, Eick began working for Conley Trucking as a mechanic and later for an auto dealership. He has only been with ODOT for about a year, but he’s glad he joined:

“ODOT is such a different environment from the other places I’ve worked since coming back to Ohio,” said Eick. “I love working here.”

Like ODOT’s many auto techs, Eick performs the general preventive maintenance needed for all vehicles, not only during snow and ice, but for all the crews’ maintenance work. He must be ready to roll up his sleeves and tackle the major repairs that come about without warning and need immediate attention. Hydraulics, transmissions, hoses, clutches and more, he does it all. And while his skills in the garage are key to the success of the highway technicians on the road, Eick doesn’t see his contribution as anything special.

“It’s work . . . it’s just what I do, and I enjoy doing it,” he said.
It’s a well-known fact that highway construction work is dangerous. But those with proper training and safety equipment in good working order have a better chance of escaping job-related injuries.

However, workers will sometimes face hazards that pose unique challenges. That’s why ODOT’s Office of Employee Health and Safety has been hard at work creating two new training programs for lead workers, transportation managers, and transportation administrators known as the Competent Person Program and Safety Academy.

According to Shannon Slavin, safety program manager and co-creator of the two programs, the goal of the Competent Person training will be to give those in leadership roles the ability to be more than simply good at their jobs, as defined by the Public Employment Risk Reduction Program (PERRP):

“PERRP uses standards from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) which ODOT doesn’t always have,” said Slavin. “To PERRP, a ‘competent person’ is someone who can recognize hazards, has the ability to correct them, and can stop the job if necessary. We want a ‘competent person’ to be at each job site.”

Slavin says the office hopes to have the first class started this month. The Competent Person course will likely be a 3-4 day training.

“Lead workers from each county would be included, and would be bargaining unit employees,” Slavin added.

Marcia Disinger, safety program manager and Slavin’s co-creator in the new training, says the Safety Academy program will focus on four areas identified by PERRP of major concern at ODOT: trenching and excavation, confined spaces, fall protection, and work zones. Employees who encounter these situations regularly require a greater level of training and experience than normal because of their highly technical nature and inherent hazards.

“ODOT has many training programs, but Safety Academy will be the first of its kind,” said Disinger. “It will solely focus on employee safety. From a practical standpoint, I think that all of the participants will have some great take-aways—things that can be used daily to improve safe work practices.”

The Safety Academy course will last three months, and will take 36 to 40 hours of classroom time to complete. The Academy will be interactive, and will include homework and tests. According to Disinger, private industry wants workers to have 30 hours of OSHA training, and this program is putting the ODOT workforce more in line with the same standards.

“At the end of the three-month Safety Academy, the managers will come away with an OSHA 30-hour Construction Card and a greater understanding of OSHA regulations, along with ways to prevent injuries and accidents,” she said.
Dedicated service not unnoticed
Brittany Holland, District 1

Snow crews have a unique type of responsibility. Snow plow drivers throughout the state take to the highways during winter to make the roads safer for the traveling public, whether it is a simple dusting or level three conditions. Garage mechanics and support crews tirelessly aid them. It’s not always appreciated, but sometimes it is:

“My hat goes off to Ohio Department of Transportation workers who tirelessly worked 12- to 16-hour shifts understaffed to keep us safe while traveling,” wrote Sandee Bishman in a recent letter to the Athens News.

Indeed, the record-setting temperatures and fierce storms made these kinds of shifts common, taxing the reserves of both people and salt supplies alike.

Some had to do even more. District 1’s Todd Noirot is a pretty good example.

In early February, Noirot, a plow driver in Putnam County, was clearing U.S. Route 224 and State Route 190. It was early morning and the snow, combined with a 30-below-zero wind chill factor, had the county under a level three snow emergency. Noticing an odd shining light from the snow, Noirot investigated and discovered a buried snowmobile that had rolled on top of its driver and pinned him to the ground. Working with the still-conscious driver, Noirot pulled the snowmobile and helped free him.

“Normally, it would not have been a bad spot for [the driver] to go through,” said Noirot. “But the snow was so deep, I think he got the back end of the sled into it, and it tilted sideways.”

There is little doubt that without Noirot’s keen eyes and quick action, the rider might not have been discovered in time to prevent hypothermia or worse, just as there is little doubt of the good all ODOT maintenance crews did this winter through their work.

So, as Sandee wrote, “hats off” to Noirot, and to all of them.

Todd Noirot’s keen eye and quick action freed a driver pinned beneath an overturned snowmobile in life-threatening winter conditions.