I’ve got to pinch myself to make sure it’s not a dream...
I agree, and we have been working on and have a plan in place to do that over the next several years. For years our full-service county maintenance facilities and outposts suffered from deferred maintenance and repair due to budget cuts and other problems. Beginning in 2011, our Facilities and Equipment Management Division began to aggressively address this issue.

We opened two new full-service facilities in Noble and Clinton counties in 2011. In 2013, we opened four facilities in Lucas, Wayne, Jefferson and Cuyahoga counties. We also replaced two outposts in Hardin and Mahoning counties. In 2014 we opened two facilities in Madison and Highland counties and replaced an outpost in Muskingum County.

Last year, facilities in Athens and Crawford counties were opened, and we’ll soon complete a new garage in Warren county as well as outposts in Cuyahoga and Morrow counties.

Between now and 2019, we plan to replace another 20 full-service maintenance facilities and four additional outposts. In all, we are spending over $200 million to replace our county facilities over an eight-year period. These critical investments allow the people of ODOT to maintain our transportation infrastructure and serve as a staging area for the best snow and ice operation in the nation.

DISTRICT 12 WINS REGIONAL AASHTO AWARD

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

The Lakefront West/73rd Street Extension Project, connecting Cleveland’s lower west side communities to West Shoreway (U.S. 6/State Route 2) and Edgewater Park, has won a regional award. The recognition came from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) 2016 America’s Transportation Awards competition in the Quality of Life/Community Development (Small Category).

The project included the construction of a new grade separation railroad bridge and the extension of West 73rd Street in a safe and efficient manner with the roadway and the multi-use path.

Forty states participated in the competition, nominating 84 projects. As a regional winner, the District 12 project will compete nationally in AASHTO’s “Top Ten Projects” later this year.

Pull on through!

Drive-through salt barns to increase safety, efficiency

Mandi Dillon, District 7

As work progresses on the new Darke County facility, Transportation Administrator Jeff Whetstone shows off the future location where trucks will enter the drive-through salt barn.

PHOTO BY MANDI DILLON, DISTRICT 7

DOT crews spend a lot of time out in the elements during snow and ice events, but one District 7 county is building a state-of-the-art salt barn that will keep them dry during reloads.

Darke County is the first in the state to build a drive-through salt barn, increasing safety and efficiency during snow and ice events. The design of the barn mirrors those that crews visited in Fort Wayne and Winchester, Indiana prior to building the structure.

One of the main advantages of the drive through barn is that it allows drivers to dismount their trucks in a safe, dry place, rather than stepping out onto icy, snow covered pavement. With the drive-through structure, drivers can pull their liquids on in one spot, get in the loader, load the dry material into the truck and exit. Everything under one roof makes for a safer, clean and efficient process.

This will make snow and ice events easier to tackle and help crews get back on the roads more quickly,” says Darke County Transportation Administrator Jeff Whetstone.

The drive-through barn is part of a new facility being built along State Route 49 near Greenville. It will include many upgrades such as a locker room, shower, larger garage area and state-of-the-art wash bays with cat walks for washing tandem trucks.

DOT crews were instrumental in the design of the new garage to make sure everyone’s needs were met. The drive through salt barn is just one of many improvements that will benefit the overall service that crews are able to provide to the motoring public.

EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT

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That question actually gets asked of me a lot. The answer is a little complicated.

The Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) hasn’t been “ODOT Rail” since 1994, when the commission was formally created. Yes, we still have offices at Central Office, and we are fortunate to have a lot of department resources available to us (HR, IT, Finance, Equipment, etc.). But we also have an executive director, and we report to a board of commissioners that includes Director Wray. And while our projects might move forward under different funding sources, there are a lot of ways ORDC and ODOT work together to improve the safety of the traveling public.

Every day we are working with companies to get them rail service; partnering with communities and railroads to upgrade crossing surfaces or warning devices; managing a statewide effort with ODOT to replace yield signs with stop signs; coordinating roadway projects that have rail impacts; and educating the public on how to safely interact with trains. And did you know that we have field staff, too? We have four full-time field managers to conduct construction inspections of federally-funded grade crossing projects. We might be small, with only 16 full-time employees, but we can assist with any railroad questions or issues you can think of. So at the end of the day, don’t worry about what to call us: just know that we are here to help.

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE

‘ODOT HAS A RAIL DIVISION?’

Julie Kaecher, Central Office

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE

In the district, it’s all about implementation. Here, it’s all about policy and planning.

You began your career 20 years ago as a highway worker and now you’re deputy director of operations. Thoughts?

“I’ve got to pinch myself to make sure it’s not a dream and that it really happened. I’ve been blessed with opportunities at ODOT that I never dreamt of when I came here as a highway worker 20 years ago. I’m very humbled and appreciative of the organization because there are a lot of people who have guided me along my career through the years. I’m very indebted to them.”

You have done all the jobs, from a highway worker to now deputy director. Do you think that gives you certain skills?

“It brings the perspective of the real world. Sometimes, if you haven’t been exposed to all that we do, especially in maintenance, you might get a false perception of what really goes on. Coming from the ranks like that and actually doing the jobs and being out there for the long hours, plowing snow or dealing with disasters like floods or landslides brings a perspective to this position. It means I’m really in tune with what we need to do on the ground where the rubber meets the road.”

After having spent all those years in the district, how does it feel to be in Central Office?

“It’s given me a different perspective on it. In the district, you’re dealing with more of the here-and-now, dealing with the stuff that’s going on that day or that week. In the district, it’s all about implementation. Here, it’s all about policy and planning. It’s a different feeling coming here. The work routine is different than it is in the district.”

What are the qualities you possess that enabled you to rise through the ranks as you did?

“You have to treat every day as a job interview. I always raised my hand and volunteered for things that were out of my comfort zone. I was always looking for ways to learn new things, no matter what job I had.”

PHOTO BY PIETER WYKOFF, CENTRAL OFFICE

PROFILE

Tom Corey, Deputy Director of Operations

PHOTO BY BRUCE HULL, CENTRAL OFFICE

by Pieter Wykoff, Central Office
Roundabouts have earned the reputation as one of the most effective intersection control treatments available. Safer than a traditional intersection, roundabouts significantly reduce overall crashes and almost completely eliminate injury crashes and fatal crashes. But how?

Roundabouts have fewer conflict points, which means fewer opportunities for vehicles to intersect and cause crashes. They are designed to limit vehicle speeds to around 20 mph, and they simplify the driver’s decision-making process by eliminating all crossing maneuvers—right-in, right-out only.

In August 2015, District 3 opened its first roundabout in Medina County to address angle crashes at an intersection that did not warrant a signal. According to Julie Cicchello, District 3 traffic engineer, “You have to look at every intersection differently, the types of crashes occurring, and determine how best to address those crashes.” One year later, the improved intersection saw a decrease in overall crashes, with zero injury crashes since the roundabout opened.

District 3 recently completed construction of a second roundabout, located in Wayne County, and has a third roundabout planned to improve safety at another intersection in Medina County. “In addition to improving safety, roundabouts reduce congestion and pollution, are less expensive to maintain than a signalized intersection and they’re aesthetically pleasing,” added Cicchello.

The men and women of ODOT are the department’s greatest asset, and their safety and security is ODOT’s primary concern. “The threats we face today are far more serious than they were in the past,” said Carrie Yost, administrator of Statewide Facilities Operations. A comprehensive review of the risks facing ODOT and its employees, including active shooters, workplace violence, theft, and vandalism, was recently completed by the Ohio Department of Homeland Security. A full report is due back later this fall.

“We are in the early stages of upgrading security at existing facilities, such as Central Office, the West Broad Street Complex, district offices, full service maintenance facilities, and outposts around the state,” Yost said. “Employees and visitors will continue to see new fencing, security cameras, card readers, and interior renovations.”

“Since 2014, all new construction has included additional security enhancements, which are for the protection of ODOT’s employees and assets. They are not intended to be used for monitoring employees,” Yost said.

August 24 proved to be a hot and cloudy day of victory for ODOT’s Clermont County. Highway technicians Steve Gacek and Eric Schmidt both took first place for their garage in the truck and loader competitions, respectively. Indoor, ODOT held its 18th annual TeamUp event, featuring 68 booth and equipment displays—the most in the event’s history. Congratulations Steve and Eric!

View more photos of the 2016 Roadeo and TeamUp events at: flickr.com/photos/ohiodot/albums
Ivonory Austin, a highway technician in the Allen County garage, is truly happy to be at ODOT.

A factory worker after graduating high school, Austin would talk daily to his cousin, Peewee, who encouraged him to consider truck driving as a career. When Pewee died in a truck accident three years ago, Austin decided to pursue the profession his cousin loved. “He was like a big brother to me,” Austin recalled.

It was at a job fair at Grace Church in Lima that Austin learned about ODOT’s apprenticeship program, which gives people the opportunity to earn a commercial driver’s license (CDL) while learning basic skills useful to the department. Those who have passed the six-month training become eligible for full-time positions as highway technicians. Austin was accepted into the program last July, then hired full time at the Allen County garage. He found it a challenge to work with the new equipment.

“The whole truck thing was new,” he said. “You have to realize what you’re in. Last season’s snowless winter was disappointing. I was actually waiting for it.”

Austin quickly felt like part of the team at Allen County. Some cultural aspects, such as learning the lingo of the garage and navigating the entire county have been challenging. But he is clearly enjoying himself. “My garage is a cool environment,” he said. “Everybody’s comfortable. I love the job and have fun.”

Austin has become an advocate for the apprenticeship program. He’s organized gatherings at the local library to talk about the program and to teach others how to apply for jobs online. He posts on his personal social media about his ODOT experience and talks to people at the grocery store. He’s intent on succeeding and thriving in his new career.

“They gave me an opportunity and I’m thankful and blessed,” Austin said. “When you’re given an opportunity you must take advantage of it.”