ODOT challenges to benefit minority businesses

IT HASN’T ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY
How a foggy morning inspired a safety innovation we now take for granted
ODOT challenge to benefit minority businesses
Joel Hunt, Central Office

The department’s Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) program is being given a shot in the arm this fiscal year. The program is required to set aside at least 15 percent of its more than $150 million of eligible expenses on minority businesses annually. ODOT’s goal for the new fiscal year will be to increase the amount of set-aside contracts by another five percent.

“We have always worked toward the 15 percent goal,” said Rich Winning, deputy director of the Division of Finance. “Going forward, we will work to surpass that number and lift up more businesses.”

The program is designed to assist minority businesses by setting aside a certain percentage of government contracts for them. The department is required to obtain quotes or bids from MBE vendors certified by the Ohio Department of Administrative Services. To qualify, a business owner must be a member of one or more of a recognized ethnic minority group.

In addition to set-asides, ODOT purchasers can boost credits by choosing MBE businesses as providers if they are the low bidder on non-set-aside expenses. ODOT obtains quotes from both MBE and non-MBE vendors. ODOT can also get credit when its non-MBE vendors and contractors purchase parts or services from third-party MBE businesses in sub-contracts.

ODOT updates Public Involvement Manual
Paul Pegher, Central Office

Of all the project manuals that guide the department’s work, only two are required by federal law: the Project Development (PDP) Manual and the Public Involvement (PI) Manual. The PDP Manual was updated three years ago, identifying the five different “paths” that ODOT projects follow. In June, an updated PI Manual received approval from the Federal Highway Administration, and it now provides better-defined standards for all participants.

The federal requirements for PI have remained largely the same since the original manual was developed in 2001. But with the advent of social media and online resources, public expectations for the exchange of information have changed.

“ODOT doesn’t make its decisions in a vacuum,” explains Tim Hill, administrator of the Office of Environmental Services (OES). “This is one of few sectors where everything we do impacts citizens. They want to know how, when and why a project is going to happen, how it will impact them, and how they can get involved.”

Among its most significant revisions, the manual now defines the minimum PI requirements for each type of project. OES Policy Supervisor Kevin Davis, who steered the nearly two-year process to research and update the manual, says the new requirements encourage ODOT staff “to incorporate PI early and often.” Staff members also have to recognize when more efforts may be needed.

“It’s crucial at the very beginning to identify stakeholders, audiences, and public reactions,” Davis said. “We’re not always going to get everyone on board and there may be some aspects of a project that public feedback won’t change. But they must be properly engaged because problems occur when they’re not.”

The OES team hopes the updated PI Manual will lead to closer collaboration between environmental specialists, project managers, public information officers, consultants and all others who interact with ODOT’s customers. The manual is available online at: transportation.ohio.gov/PIManual.

OES has conducted four PI training sessions this summer to introduce the new manual. Hill said, “Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.”

Another training session has been scheduled in November. Hill’s team now plans to develop a second course to address the many situations that might be encountered through public involvement.

ON THE COVER District 9 Bridge Inspector Jeremy Buckle stands atop the Simon Kenton Memorial Bridge that spans the Ohio River to connect Aberdeen, Ohio and Maysville, Ky. Though Kentucky-owned, ODOT partners with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to perform maintenance and inspection of the bridge via state and federal allocations. PHOTO BY KATHLEEN FULLER, DISTRICT 9
South Point Intermodal Facility ribbon cutting

Pieter Wykoff, Central Office

Ohio Department of Transportation Chief of Staff Greg Murphy joined Ohio Lt. Governor Mary Taylor and economic development officials from Lawrence County at the opening of the Port of South Point. The new intermodal facility will offer an access point for trucks, trains, and barges to and from the adjoining industrial park. The dock is the only public dock in southern Ohio.

The companies in that industrial park will now have access to the Ohio River, the Norfolk and Southern Railroad, U.S. Route 52 and Interstate 64. The project represented the culmination of a three-phase project that began some five years ago.

Phase One included a $1 million roadway project that helped to upgrade and improve access from the water and the rail lines to U.S. 52. Phase Two was a $2.3 million railway project that built rail lines and a concrete pad to help facilitate cargo transfer from the Norfolk and Southern to the highway. The cargo dock and a river boom crane will allow the transfer of bulk freight products from truck or train to barge, and vice-versa. ODOT was a partner in all three phases of the project.

Local officials say the intermodal facility could generate over 1,000 jobs in the tri-state area.

Local News

Latest ‘how-to’ video on the web

Nancy Burton, District 6

The “trench” currently under construction on the Interstate 270/U.S. Route 23 North Side Fix project in Columbus can be a challenge for motorists. But ODOT is using online video animation to help drivers travel safely through the area.

As part of the $75 million project, two new express lanes for U.S. 23 northbound traffic are being constructed in the middle of the roadway. This has formed a trench slightly more than three-quarters of a mile long, about 25 feet below the street surface, with shoulders on the sides. Drivers heading to Delaware County or points north will access the trench after they exit the I-270/U.S. 23 Interchange. This is the first highway project in central Ohio to ever build a trench, and it has generated several questions from motorists travelling through the project.

In July, District 6 posted an animated video to the website showing the trench from several viewpoints, including from behind the wheel and from the air.

“The video animation is in response to dozens of inquiries from the motoring public,” said ODOT District 6 Deputy Director Ferzan M. Ahmed. “Because the trench is a new concept for many central Ohio drivers, we felt the video animation explaining how it will work when completed was the way to go.”

To view the animation, visit the project website at www.270-23.com.
How a foggy morning led to one of transportation’s greatest safety innovations

David Rose, District 10 and Central Office

ODOT District 10 Deputy Director Steve Williams hosted a ceremony to commemorate a historical innovation to highway safety at the Interstate 77 northbound rest area in Washington County. Those who attended the event in early August came to honor the invention of the white line painted along the outer edges of roadways to help drivers stay on course. They also came to remember the inventor, John Edward White, Sr.

It started on a foggy morning in 1956. White was taking his family on a vacation to visit relatives in Detroit. The fog became so dense when they hit McConnelsville on State Route 60 that Mr. White had to stick his head out of his side window to see the road.

That day, White, a concerned father, was just trying to keep his family safe on a road trip. But when he returned to work as an employee of District 10, he realized he could do more than just worry. He went to work on an idea: adding a painted “fog” line on the edge of the pavement to help motorists see the road.

White pitched his idea to then-Deputy Director Max Farley, who gave White the go-ahead to test his creation.

White and another former employee, James Science, borrowed the route marking division’s portable paint-spraying machine. On Oct. 1, 1956, White and Science placed the first fog-line on a sharp curve on State Route 550 in Washington County. The demonstration was a success.

During the winter of 1956-1957, White removed the body of a Crosley car and built the first fog-line machine using a paint hose and spray gun. The fog-line machine was connected to the center line truck. As the truck would place the center line, the fog-line machine could simultaneously paint a solid line.

As the lines began to appear on Ohio highways in 1957, other states began to follow suit. In 1961, the American Association of Highway Officials released their updated manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. This guide illustrated and recommended the use of what was now called the edge line. No other manual had included this feature.

Today, it’s hard to imagine any American highway without these markings. The edge line has undoubtedly helped motorists stay in the right lanes through countless dark nights as well as foggy days, all thanks to an ODOT employee taking a vacation.

John Edward White, Sr. was not at the ceremony honoring him. He retired from District 10 on April 28, 1979 after 33 years of service and passed away on Halloween night in 1980. His sons, John, Jr. and David, attended in his place. David shared the story of how his father conceived the idea of the edge line. John, Jr. delivered his father’s original 1956 Chevrolet Bel-Air car to the event.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, a beautifully framed picture was unveiled that tells the story of White’s invention. This picture will travel throughout the state, from rest area to rest area, for travelers to see. After its tour, the picture will forever remain at the I-77 rest area.
As an ODOT aerial photographer, Eduardo Kroman spends much of his time in an ODOT plane photographing major new capacity highway projects being planned or under construction. He also monitors LIDAR - a remote sensing technology that measures distance by illuminating a target with a laser and analyzing the reflected light. On the ground, the digital photographs and LIDAR data are combined by computer to create a three-dimensional image of the project, used for the planning and design phase.

Weather permitting, he and his crew mostly fly from November to April, when they can get better images without tree leaves getting in the way. His hours are erratic: Some weeks he can be found in his earthbound cube full-time; other weeks, he’s in the air for 40 hours.

Kroman, who has a pilot’s license, has come a long way from his service in the Argentine Navy where he earned his degree and learned surveying and mapping skills. His wife, Susana, is also an ODOT employee who works on the data he collects.

“I love what I do,” Kroman said simply. “I’m combining what I studied for, cartography, surveying and mapping, with my two hobbies, which are flying and photography.”

“And I’m getting paid to do it,” he adds.
ODOT wins Top Honors at MaasTo Conference
The recent State Route 33 Nelsonville Bypass project won an America’s Transportation Award at July’s Mid-America Association of State Transportation Officials conference. The District 10 project earned “Best Use of Innovation” for its environmental and wildlife mitigation techniques.

Technology Council Opens for Business!
ODOT’s first Technology Council began accepting new technology project requests. The 11-member group chooses future technology investments according to core business functions.

Districts upgrade ‘Move Over’ signs
All roadside signs reflecting the new “Move Over” law were erected statewide, meeting executive leadership’s goal of August 1. The new signs display the text “Move Over for Stopped Vehicle with Flashing Lights.”

Annual Meetings Continue
Annual Meetings statewide took place in August and will continue into September. Noteworthy features of completed events include motivational speakers, district expos, tributes to District military personnel, live singers, and more.

District begins QWLS Communication
District 7 began responding directly to results and comments from the 2013 Quality of Work Life survey. Employees receive a “Feedback Bulletin” every two weeks, and leadership will respond to the 270 comments from District 7 employees.
DOT was recognized at the Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials (MAAS-TO) annual meeting for the work done on the U.S. Route 33 Nelsonville Bypass project. Word of the award came just before the August 2014 Transcript had to go to press.

The Nelsonville Bypass was one of three projects to receive America’s Best Use of Innovation Award. The program is sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the American Automobile Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

“I’m proud that this important project has been recognized by our peers,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray. “The Nelsonville Bypass will help bring new jobs and additional tourism to southeast Ohio.”

The three-phase, 8.5-mile, $160 million Nelsonville Bypass project is the largest highway construction project in southeast Ohio’s history. The original U.S. Route 33 through Nelsonville was heavily congested and had a history of crashes and injuries.

The bypass consists of two interchanges into historic Nelsonville by way of Athens and Hocking counties, and includes several overpasses and local road improvements. It is expected the new bypass will open up commerce and economic development opportunities to the region. Motorists can now travel more safely and efficiently to southeast Ohio. The project has cut nearly 50 miles off the trip from Columbus to Charleston, West Virginia.

“Winning the award helps put southeastern Ohio and the entire Appalachian region in the national spotlight—a wonderful thing for the area,” said District 10 Deputy Director Steve Williams. “This award is dedicated not only to southeast Ohioans, but to the ODOT employees who spent countless hours on planning, designing and building the Nelsonville Bypass.”

One of the reasons the project was recognized by MAAS-TO was because nearly five miles of the bypass bisects Wayne National Forest. Constructing a new highway through a national forest required collaboration and oversight by numerous agencies, including ODOT, the National Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, wildlife specialists and others.

The project’s unique alignment prompted ODOT to implement several wildlife and environmental mitigation techniques. The department invested more than $10 million protecting natural habitat and endangered species of the forest, and actually increased its size thanks to land donated by ODOT. The department also spent nearly $30 million on mitigating century-old mines under the roadway.

The project is now eligible to compete for the National Grand Prize and People’s Choice Award. The Grand Prize winner is selected by a panel of transportation experts. The People’s Choice Award is presented to the transportation project that receives the most online votes from the public. The America’s Transportation Awards Top 10 will be announced on September 8, when the online voting will also begin. The winners of both national awards will be announced at the AASHTO Annual Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina in November.
Sharing a legacy of stories
By Rhonda Pees, District 1

Karen Applegate of District 1 displays a fair bit of shyness when she’s asked about being a published author.

Applegate, who works as an account clerk for the district, first noticed a children’s magazine was requesting Bible stories. Applegate decided to put her own special touches on two of her favorite stories featured in the New Testament. Both stories were chosen and published in back-to-back issues in 2002.

She chose one tale about Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector of biblical times who had Jesus as a guest in his home. Because he was so small in stature, Zacchaeus had to climb up a Sycamore tree to first view the visiting Jesus over a large crowd. The tax collector was so moved by being accepted by Jesus, he gave generously to the poor and promised to make any restitution to those he had wronged.

“When I was a kid, I always liked the story,” recalled Applegate. “I think little kids can relate to his being so short compared to the rest of the world.”

Applegate also chose a story about Jairus, a father who had just lost his young daughter.

“Jesus came to him and said, ‘She’s not dead, she’s sleeping,’” said Applegate. “Then Jesus went over to the little girl, told her get up, and she did.”

Her writing was put aside when she decided to go back to school. She earned a degree in English from Ohio State University in 2005 and now writes articles for the district newsletter. She would like to resume professional writing, and may do so when she retires in November.

“I’ve got so many ideas,” she said.

Teaching children through church is an outlet for her to continue to hear the stories she enjoyed as a child.

“I’m a big kid myself,” said Applegate. “I think I have more fun than they do.”

Karen Applegate