Windstorm no match for state’s determination

September 14, 2008—the remnants of Hurricane Ike swept through the Buckeye State leaving a trail of destruction and loss that spanned multiple counties. Close to two million Ohioans had no power, major highways and roadways were shut down and more than 400 traffic signals were not functioning. ODOT forces mobilized and worked diligently and reached out to those hardest hit. It would only take a few days to get every ODOT roadway open and every traffic signal back in service. See story on page 2.

Ready, Set, Snow!

Nancy Burton, Central Office

The official start of winter may be weeks away, but try telling that to the thousands of men and women who plow snow for ODOT each year. Every October signals the start of ODOT’s Operational Readiness Events in all 88 counties. ODOT inspects every dump truck, snow plow, and loader to make sure they are road ready for the ice and snow season.

“This year, more than ever, it’s so important that this equipment be in good working order—especially our salt spreaders,” said Deputy Director of Highway Operations Keith Swearingen, P.E., P.S. “With a goal of 30 percent in increased efficiency for salt use this year, we have to make sure every component of each truck is in good working order and calibrated so that the right amount of salt is being dispensed.”

Operational readiness events can take hours. The team of inspectors, armed with flashlights and a checklist, look under the hood, in the hopper, and even kick the tires.

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**ODOT Ready Willing and Able to Respond in the Wake of Ike**

Nancy Burton, Central Office

**M**ERRIAM WEBSTER’S Dictionary defines the word *mission* as a specific task with which a person is charged, or a self-imposed objective or purpose.

On September 15, 2008, the mission for ODOT was like none other. The previous day, tropical storm-force winds had blown through Ohio, leaving a trail of destruction in their path. The hardest hit areas of Ohio included the southeast, southwest and central parts of the state.

District 7 Deputy Director Rex Dickey, P.E., P.S. couldn’t believe it. “I arrived at work at 6:00 a.m. the day after,” Dickey said, “to find the power was out and our back-up generator was not working.”

Twenty-four hours after the wind storm rolled through Ohio, the Emergency Operations Center was activated, and Governor Ted Strickland had declared a State of Emergency. Five people died as a result of the storm, more than 1.8 million people were without power, 23 roads were closed or restricted due to downed power lines and fallen trees, and 438 traffic signals statewide were dark.

Also without power were six ODOT district complexes, 30 additional county garages and outposts, and the Central Office garage, traffic sign shop, and testing laboratory.

Daily briefings from the Emergency Operations Center detailed the tasks at hand. For ODOT, opening roadways, clearing debris from state-maintained roadways, and restoring power to traffic signals, especially at key intersections, were the top priorities.

“State and county forces worked tirelessly to help each other and achieve common goals in times of need and great calamity,” said District 8 Deputy Director Hans Jindal, P.E., P.S.

Several days later, with only a smattering of state routes remaining closed and a handful of traffic signals still dark, the priority for ODOT became helping community partners. The city of Dayton made a request for 200 stop signs at intersections where traffic signals were still inoperable. The sign had them made, loaded on a palette and ready for pick-up by 11:00 a.m. While it turned out those stop signs were not needed in the Miami Valley, there were other missions where ODOT employees were pressed into service.

Acting Franklin County Manager Shawn Rostofer said that ODOT assisted on a mission for the city of Worthington.

“We cleared 68 loads of debris over a two day period,” Rostofer remembered. “Greene County personnel in District 8 responded to the Greene County EMA’s request for assistance in clearing debris from streets and neighborhoods in the village of Jamestown. Also in District 8, in the Warren County, highway technicians assisted by removing trees from the community of South Lebanon.”

Slowly, the state recovered from the damage done by the fierce winds. And everywhere it could be, ODOT was there to help citizens resume their regular routines as quickly as possible.

“It was a true example of how various agencies and local communities can be partners and work together,” said Jindel.

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**Storm ‘déjà vu’ for District 5 highway techs**

Kate Stickle, District 5

For Perry County residents and ODOT employees, the high windstorm which struck Sept. 14 was only the latest reminder that weather events are capable of threatening lives and property on a wide scale.

Just two months earlier, in the early hours of Tuesday, July 22, fierce storms hit Junction City and New Lexington. High winds removed roofs, destroyed homes and silos, and caused power outages affecting residents, the 911 center and police departments.

Perry County’s transportation managers Dan Hammer and Dean Colborn were just beginning their workdays when they each got word of the storms and began surveying the damage: “Trees and debris covered the roadways,” remembered Hammer. “Many times I had to stop and clear debris off the roadway just to get to the next call.”

Colborn and Hammer began relaying information to the rest of the

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Ohio’s travel choices underscore national transportation investment effort

Ohio’s 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force nears recommendations

Scott Varner, Central Office

Numbers for the first half of 2008 suggest that more Ohioans are choosing different ways to travel—a point underscoring a national transportation advocacy group’s call for greater targeted federal investments in public transit and rail, and new ideas on managing the nation’s aging infrastructure.

At the national level, Americans drove an estimated 53.2 billion miles less for the first six months of 2008 than they did over the same time period a year earlier, according to a news release from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Analysis by the Traffic Monitoring Section in ODOT’s Central Office Planning Division shows that Ohio motorists drove 1.1 billion miles less during that same time frame.

“That decrease in travel is equivalent to three-and-a-half day’s worth of fewer trips being made,” said ODOT Director James Beasley. “That directly translates to a decrease in state and federal motor fuel tax being collected at a time when construction costs are at record highs.”

In the search for alternatives, a growing number of Americans turned to transit, taking 2.8 billion rides on public transit in just months of April through June: up 5 percent from the year before.

In Ohio, the 59 transit systems which receive state funding serviced more than 70.6 million rides in the first six months of 2008. According to ODOT’s Office of Transit, that new figure represents an increase of 6.72 percent from the same time in 2007.

In mid-October, the Transportation for America Campaign—a national coalition of housing, environmental, public health, urban planning, and transportation organizations—talked about Ohio’s changing transportation demands.

Greater Ohio, a non-profit smart growth organization in Ohio, released the campaign’s bold economic agenda, which it says has the potential to create good, green jobs in Ohio and reduce America’s dependence on foreign oil once and for all. In part, the group calls for investment in public transit, high-speed and intercity rail, neighborhoods that are less car-dependent, more walkable and more affordable, and restoring the thousands of roads and bridges in failing condition across the United States.

The group is also calling for a new method of looking at transportation needs, including the call for a reevaluation of pending highway projects with “little economic return that could deepen Americans’ dependence on oil and gasoline.”

“I applaud the efforts of the Transportation for America Campaign to work with the next president and Congress on targeting new federal investments to fixing the thousands of roads and bridges in failing condition across our country,” added Director Beasley. “Just as important as ‘fixing it first’ is the need to modernize our multi-modal system with new investments in rail and transit.”

According to Gene Krebs, co-director of Greater Ohio, “We need to stop thinking about just moving cars, but instead think about moving people. Ohio needs to partner with the federal government to develop a transportation plan for the 21st Century, as Ohio has come together for the task force on Transportation developed by Governor Strickland.”

The group’s report is being included in research gathered by the Ohio 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force, whose recommendations to ODOT are expected by the end of this year.

Empanelled by Governor Strickland in April, the task force was charged with envisioning Ohio’s future transportation system—determining how the state can best balance the movement of people and freight, create jobs and generate economic development, and link all modes of transportation.

This task force, comprised of experts from private, governmental and public advocacy sectors, also examined new ways to finance this optimum system. Among its final recommendations, the task force is expected to detail several new funding tools for state and local governments, a call for greater investment by Ohio’s federal partners, and innovative financial options to partner with the private sector.
Technology powers electricity savings
Ron Poole, Central Office

Whether it’s using modern computer screens, installing new lighting fixtures, or just thinking more about the use of energy, the members of ODOT’s offices, outposts and garages are gradually adopting ways to conserve electricity that are cost efficient and help the environment.

Central Office is leading the way in exploring greater energy efficiency in department computer use: “It is common practice in the industry to turn off computer screens after 20 minutes of non-use,” said Spencer Wood, deputy director of the Division of Information Technology (DoIT), “we just made a simple change in our computer settings so that all of our units go dark after a waiting period. And we have asked everyone to turn off their systems completely before going home.”

“It saves about $60 per unit per year. Multiplying that by the more than 5,000 units we have throughout ODOT means big savings every year,” added Wood.

Additional advances in computer technology are starting to appear at Central Office. Smaller, compact computer servers are replacing ones that used to fill a large room, while flat panel Light Crystal Display (LCD) computer monitors are becoming more common.

“The new ‘Blade’ servers use only 10 percent of the electricity of the old ones” said Jim Burns, DoIT resource manager, “and they can handle multiple systems each, so we need less of them. The LCD screens require less electricity as well.”

“Both the new servers and the new screens give off less heat when they operate,” Burns continued, “meaning it takes less energy to cool the buildings where they are housed.”

A special energy team at District 6 is looking into new lighting as a way to save energy.

“We looked into what other agencies were doing and had GE and other local energy providers do audits of some test areas to tell us how we could save electricity,” said Steve Masters, a building construction superintendent in District 6 and the leader of the energy team. “As a test, we replaced the old fixtures at the garage and a rest area in Marion County with new, compact fluorescent lights.”

According to Masters, the new bulbs cast better light, and use only a third of the electricity.

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“Over in District 5, Facilities Manager Karl Newman has been examining the lighting in use at rest areas and turning off what is not needed.

“I just looked at some of our locations and asked: ‘Do we really need to shine a light on a tree at night?’” said Newman.

A number of districts have been saving money by replacing the regular light bulbs in traffic lights with new Light-Emitting Diodes (LEDs).

“Regular traffic light bulbs usually have to be replaced every year,” said Satya Goyal, technical support engineer in Central Office. “LEDs last four to five years, and our electric bills have been cut by almost 90 percent each month at these locations.”

Staff in District 9 are also making changes to reduce their cooling bills during the summer months.

“By setting our thermostats to 74 degrees in county garages, we do not need as much electricity in the summer,” states Shaun Bennet, a building construction superintendent in District 9. “We help things further by putting in window tints and window blinds to block out the sun and keep the place cooler.”

The spirit of new ideas for conserving energy is spreading, but Lonnie Faulknor, a facilities maintenance manager with District 7, thinks the most powerful means for conserving electricity is to change peoples’ habits.

“What we try to do here is to raise personal awareness among our employees,” Faulknor reports. “If you can get someone to simply remember to turn off the lights in a room as they leave, you have accomplished a lot.”

In these two photos, ODOT Computer Operator Debra Norah is shown standing next to an old, automated tape library (left) and its replacement, a Network Attached Storage Unit (right). The newer storage unit requires less space and power to operate: just one of the Network Attached Storage Unit’s cabinets replaces the entire tape library shown.
the county garage members, and soon ODOT work crews were out in force as the sun rose that day.

“The crews wanted to provide the traveling public a safe environment,” said Perry County Manager Bert Tooms. “ODOT crews, too, had damage at home to clean up, but they still came to work.”

Local organizations and businesses, along with the Red Cross and Emergency Management Agency, joined in the community clean up efforts. Governor Strickland made an Emergency Proclamation regarding the storm.

ODOT staff came from Licking County’s Marne and Brownsville outposts, Muskingum County and District 5’s Roadway Services crew to help Perry County ODOTers remove, shred and haul debris from the storm.

Within days, all roads and streets were clear and open.

It was reported later that work crews had chipped up to 2009 cubic yards of brush, or enough to load 287 single-axle dump trucks.

“I have seen many times that ODOT is at its best when there is an emergency that must be responded to and people are in need,” said District 5’s Deputy Director William H. Lindenbaum, P.E., P.S. “The efforts of the crews from Perry, Licking and Muskingum counties, as well as the District 5 Office, are yet another example of the character and dedication of the people that work at ODOT.”

Portage County debuts First Response truck

Paula Putnam, District 4

After 10 months of construction, Portage County maintenance and repair crews unveiled a new vehicle this spring, one equipped with everything a first responder at a highway incident needs to establish safe zones for motorists.

Called the First Response Truck, this new, all-in-one vehicle allows ODOT to get into the area, set the zones to reduce congestion, improve safety, and minimize disruption to the flow of traffic, and get out of the way while other responders do their part to help motorists.

“Instead of having two, three or even four trucks at an incident, we can get everything accomplished with just this one vehicle,” Portage County Highway Technician Alan Brown said. “This is something we have needed for a long time.”

The vehicle is equipped with over 50 grabber cones and over 50 barrels. The truck also carries 16 signs and sign stands, a chainsaw, four cases of flares and two bags of oil dry.

The truck is capable of setting two zones at one time.

Besides cutting back on vehicle use and time needed at a zone, the First Response Truck can assist with clearing any debris from the road or incident cleanup to have traffic flowing quicker.

The truck was used extensively this summer, and Portage County Maintenance and Repair Manager Bob Wisniewski says the vehicle has proved its worth.

“The time-savings and cost-efficiency benefits ODOT,” he said, “however, the most desirable result is the benefit to the thousands of travelers who would otherwise be delayed, inconvenienced or put at risk because of a blocked lane of traffic.”
Photos capture diversity of people, projects

Ron Poole, Central Office

With the summer construction season wrapping up, Transcript wanted to share with its readers some images of the many operations the department routinely undertakes in the service of transportation. From bridge inspections and paving projects to major modernization efforts and building new bridges, ODOT has a lot going on.

From the final week of August through the first week of September, the communications staff members of each district office were asked to travel out and record images of their fellow workers as they help keep Ohio connected on all fronts. Their goal was to capture the diversity that makes up ODOT: of people, functions, actions, visions.

The districts sent their best pictures to Central Office, where ODOT Director James Beasley selected his favorite, shown to the right, taken by Joyce Miller in District 3. Other staff favorites appear throughout this issue of Transcript.

The state record for the heaviest load ever moved in Ohio was recently broken by the FirstEnergy Corp. when they moved this 840,000 lb. scrubber ring (pictured left) down the southbound lanes of State Route 7 in Stratton, Jefferson County, with an oversized remote control trailer called the Goldhofer. This move was part of the three-year long, $1.6 billion environmental control retrofit construction project underway at the company’s W. H. Sammis Plant.
“We don’t want our trucks breaking down out on the road,” said District 6 Equipment Manager Bill Buffkin. “During these operational readiness events, we are another set of eyes for the county managers and county mechanics.”

If something is not working properly or not calibrated sufficiently, there is time to repair the equipment so that it is ready for ice and snow season.

Beyond the plows, ODOT will once again encourage Ohio’s motorists to be prepared. Last year, ODOT joined several other states in promoting the message of “Ice and Snow... Take It Slow.”

Part of this year’s message will be the reminder that being an informed driver is the best way motorists can travel safely, which begins with logging onto BuckeyeTraffic.org. Last winter, ODOT’s premiere website received more than 117 million hits during the winter driving season.

Across the state, ODOT will have more than 1,700 plow trucks and 3,000 drivers ready when the first storm arrives. That’s because their preparation began weeks before the first snow fall.

Like most Midwest States, Ohio has seen a dramatic increase in the price of rock salt. For ODOT, the average statewide cost is up more than $20 per ton, compared to last year’s average.

The Division of Highway Operations is fine-tuning a Smart Salt Strategy, designed to ensure that crews are as efficient as possible with salt, using the right amounts at the right times and the right locations, while still maintaining safe and passable routes. These strategic salt initiatives were outlined during four Ice and Snow regional meetings and at individual Operational Readiness Events in all 88 counties.

Some of ODOT’s Smart Salt Strategy includes the use of calibrated salt spreaders and infrared temperature sensors, so salt is applied only where needed; refinement of the department’s material application guidelines to provide better direction on timing of treating and pre-treating roadways; and mixing of sand or grit materials with salt, to provide better traction in snow on less travelled roadways. This Smart Salt Strategy should allow ODOT to be 30% more efficient in salt use than in typical winters.

Vehicles are inspected at the Madison County readiness event in District 6 by (left to right) Larry Davenport, Dennis Balez, Bill Buffkin, Dave Braden, and JR Maynard.
Drivers in Dayton getting ‘Ahead of the Curve’
Denise Heitkamp, District 7

The sharp curve at the interchange of Interstate 75 and State Route 4 has long been an accident-prone frustration for drivers in downtown Dayton. So last month, ODOT District 7 kicked off a campaign to help drivers get “Ahead of the Curve” — combining community and media outreach with the early deployment of an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) to keep motorists in the Miami Valley up-to-date.

Last October, ODOT broke ground on the first of a three-phase, $690 million project to upgrade and modernize the I-75 corridor through Dayton.

When complete, the project will improve a highway that handles more than 125,000 vehicles each day, removing several ramps and crossover traffic. It should reduce fatal and injury crashes by 25 percent and reduce rear-end collisions by 41 percent.

Construction of the first phase — which includes the reconfiguration of the curve at the I-75/SR 4 interchange — was on schedule, until Mother Nature showed her strength this past Spring.

“We had nearly 30 percent of Phase 1 of the project completed,” said District 7 Construction Project Manager Josh Bowman, “then heavy rains and flooding stopped us from installing bridge piers in the Great Miami River for the new SR 4 to southbound I-75 structure.”

Waiting for the flood waters to recede, and then repairing and restoring the damaged river bed where the new piers were to be constructed, caused a delay of several months to the project’s original timeline.

“We had to create a plan to gain much of that lost time back,” said District 7 Deputy Director Rex Dickey. “That plan included closing parts of the I-75/SR 4 interchange to allow the contractor to accelerate construction in that area.”

Here’s where the community outreach kicked into high gear.

Working with two local hospitals, the Dayton Museum of Art, the ballpark home of the Dayton Dragons and several other key locations near the interchange, District 7 public information team launched an impressive 10-day campaign to let motorists know of the impending closures.

The Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission partnered with ODOT on a color ad in the Dayton Daily News, and several media outlets reported on this plan to put the project back on its schedule and save the state $2 million in potential delay costs.

Proof that the outreach effort paid off, the interchange did not see any dramatic increase in congestion in the days after the closure.

The “Ahead of the Curve” effort continued with the early installation of electronic dynamic message boards, traffic cameras and speed sensors tools along the corridor, part of a planned ITS deployment in Dayton.

A new highway advisory radio system will also be implemented. According to District Deputy Director Dickey, “the Highway Advisory Radios are the final tool to help people stay Ahead of the Curve.”

10,000 Visions of Cleveland

District 12 Deputy Director Bonita G. Teeuwen, P.E. (far left) chats with participants at the 10,000 Visions of Cleveland event held September 6 at the Galleria at Erieview in Downtown Cleveland.

The event’s purpose was to provide a forum for citizens to share positive ideas on how to benefit northeast Ohio.

District 12 provided access to BuckeyeTraffic and the 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force websites to attendees, who could get information and fill out surveys regarding the future of Ohio’s transportation system.
Known as the second largest fair in the state, the Canfield Fair in Mahoning County each year offers ODOT’s District 4 team an opportunity to share updates on several projects in Northeast Ohio, including the I-80 Meander Reservoir project. During the six day event, more than four thousand people visited the booth and examined the equipment on display, according to ODOT’s Mahoning County Manager.

No ‘butts’ about it . . . cigarette litter stinks!
Sharon Smigelski, District 8

Research says that more than several trillion cigarette butts can be found among the litter in the United States and worldwide, that about 95 percent of these discarded cigarette filters are made of a plastic which does not quickly degrade, and that these filters can also pose a hazard to animals and marine life when they are mistaken for food.

In an effort to reduce the impact of this most-littered item and to better educate the public on its impact to the environment, the volunteer Keep America Beautiful (KAB) organization implemented a Cigarette Litter Prevention Program this summer, and ODOT was one of several state agencies on hand to help with its launch.

The KAB program included field research to assess the impact of several strategies designed to reduce cigarette litter: Public service announcements, the placement of ash receptacles in key locations and the distribution of portable automobile ashtrays to adult smokers. The goal is to make smokers more aware of how they dispose of their cigarette litter while providing environmentally-sound ways to do so.

Special standing ash receptacles for the disposal of cigarette butts were placed at six of ODOT’s Travel Information Centers (TICs): Interstate 71 in Warren County, Interstate 70 in Belmont County, and Interstate 75 in Wood County. Field researchers also provided information on cigarette litter and conducted preliminary and follow-up litter scans at the Warren County TICs to determine if smokers are putting the new receptacles to use.

KAB volunteers also used ODOT locations to distribute a new kind of portable ashtray. Designed to conveniently fit inside an automobile cup holder, about 400 of these ashtrays were distributed to adult smokers at both Warren County TICs in early September.

“People were receptive to getting the ashtrays,” said Kerry Krosson, executive director of the state affiliate of Keep Ohio Beautiful, “and most were receptive to answering the survey questions on how they dispose of cigarette butts.”

Follow-up studies indicate these efforts are starting to have an effect: at the southbound Warren TIC, a preliminary scan counted approximately 175 cigarette butts on the sidewalk and alongside the curb of the parking lot. After the strategic placement of an ash receptacle alongside the sidewalk, a follow-up scan conducted 30 days later revealed there were fewer than 100 butts at the same location.

Shawn Baker, a District 8 maintenance repair worker who performs grounds-keeping duties at the TICs, sees the difference.

“People are more aware of how they dispose of their cigarette litter,” he said, “and more people are going to use them.”
Looking out for two-wheelers, too
Ron Poole, Central Office

More motorcycles, motor-scooters and bicycles are claiming a place on Ohio roads, and ODOT wants to make the highways a safer and more accommodating means for them to travel through improved design, maintenance and signaling.

This year, ODOT’s Safety Program and Office of Traffic have been working extensively with motorcycle and bicycle rider groups to address their travel concerns. For years, rider groups have complained that roads are designed and maintained for cars and trucks, with less thought given to how roads can be built and operated for maximum two-wheeled safety.

“For example, although motorcycles account for only 1.5 percent of all crashes each year in Ohio” said David Holstein, P.E., administrator for the Office of Traffic Engineering in Central Office, “these collisions tend to be severe when they do happen. Motorcycle riders and passengers are more than 29 times more likely to die from a crash than drivers and passengers in other motorized vehicles.”

Last year, there were 328,742 crashes in Ohio—4,982 involved motorcycles and 2,051 involved bicycles.

Ohio is one of the top five states in the nation for motorcycle riders in the country, with about 374,275 motorcycle registrations in Ohio last year and sales for cycles growing in the state by about 16 percent annually. National news sources report increases in motor scooter and bicycle sales across the country, due in part to higher fuel prices.

ODOT has made motorcycle and bicycle safety a centerpiece of Ohio’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The department is currently working on several new initiatives to address rider safety concerns and vulnerability on the road.

ODOT representatives have begun meeting with bike and motorcycle groups to identify areas with heavy two-wheeled travel, so state, city and county crews can review these roads for safety improvements and be proactive in addressing safety concerns throughout the year.

The department has already run the crash data and provided the district offices with a list of top motorcycle crash locations in Ohio. Each district has been asked to review the top locations and develop plans for improving the ones with the highest number of crashes.

“We are pleased with the response we continued on page 11
To save lives: awareness, coordination, effort

Ron Poole, Central Office

WhiLe Ohio has one of the lowest highway accident rates in the nation, ODOT and other state partners joined in a national effort this October to help prevent motorists of all ages from being injured or killed in preventable motor vehicle collisions.

ODOT, along with the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) and other local agencies were joined in promoting “Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day” this Oct. 10, a national awareness campaign aimed at encouraging safer driver behavior, especially with young drivers between the ages of 15 and 25. It is an effort ODOT has already strongly embraced.

“Ohio has become a national leader in combating highway fatalities and crashes,” said Jennifer Townley administrator for ODOT’s Highway Safety Program. “The state has the seventh largest highway network and the fifth highest traffic volume, yet it has one of the lowest fatality rates in the nation.”

Over the past five years 653 young drivers were killed at Ohio intersections, with 638 deaths resulting from failure to yield.

To lower these numbers, ODOT has worked with ODPS and other agencies as part of a coordinated Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan to identify causes specific to Ohio’s fatal crashes, and proactively targets those areas posing a growing threat to highway safety.

Ohio agencies study high-risk drivers, such as the very young or those driving while impaired, and highway locations where accidents are most likely to occur. Wherever possible, ODOT makes these locations a priority for design and physical improvements which will reduce the occurrence of such incidents.

“We recognize that we have to continue to make the roadway safer and improve the quality of the driver using the road,” Townley stated. “Many high crash locations are being targeted for driver education, law enforcement as well as roadway improvements—all to save lives.”

Encouraging motorist responsibility is central to highway safety, and roadway design is only part of an effort which must include increased law enforcement to target seat belt use, crackdowns on alcohol impaired drivers and the expansion of educational programs targeting teen drivers.

“Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day” is a reminder of what coordinated efforts using multiple approaches can and does achieve: “Whether as a driver, passenger, pedestrian, or cyclist, we can reduce the number of fatalities on our roads if we work together in a concerted effort,” said ODOT Director James Beasley, P.E. P.S. “Motor vehicle fatalities should not be the leading cause of death for Americans from 2 to 34 years old.”

have received from ODOT with regard to motorcycle safety,” states Imre Szauter, government affairs manager with the American Motorcyclist Association. “We have had several face to face meetings with members of the engineering community to address our concerns, and support ODOT’s approach to these issues.”

ODOT is also developing a training program that would make state and local construction and maintenance crews aware of common rider concerns, such as excessive gravel, grooved pavement, drop offs, and steel plates in construction zones.

“Making maintenance and construction crews aware of these potential concerns,” said Jennifer Gallagher, P.E., a work zone and safety engineer with the Office of Traffic Engineering, “and suggesting alternative treatments or additional signing can make things safer for riders.”

Recently, ODOT has been taking steps to improve traffic signals that don’t recognize smaller profile motorcycles and bicycles at intersections. Some riders complain they either wait at a signal for another vehicle to trigger the signal change, or they proceed on their own through a red light. ODOT has traveled out with riders to locate these signals and is now working to adjust them where needed.

But rider safety in Ohio has to be about more than physical changes to the highway: it must include an emphasis on rider behavior through awareness and proper training. Motorcycle Ohio Coordinator Bob Secrest with Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) says his department has been working on a public outreach program for motorcycle riders, “RIDE SMART,” which will target rider groups and the places they most often congregate.

“We are emphasizing the need for riders to be sober, alert and trained when operating a motorcycle,” said Secrest, “and to have the right gear to protect them in crashes. We will be sending out all kinds of information to area clubs and biker meeting places.”

Secrest added that while ODPS has already been getting the word out, they will fully kick the program off next spring, when riders will begin taking to the roads in full force.
The modernization of State Route 8 in northern Summit County includes construction of this bridge, one of two new bridges connecting northbound SR 8 to I-271. The $110 million project is the largest in District 4. With its close proximity to Akron and Cleveland, the SR 8 corridor has seen major economic growth, requiring this once rural roadway to undergo significant improvements to meet growing traffic needs. Photo by Justin Chesnic, District 4.