



# Transcript

The Ohio Department of Transportation Employee Newsletter

November 2001

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# ODOT Program Improves Safety at Railroad Crossings

**John Hackley**  
Central Office

ODOT Director Gordon Proctor and state Rep. Steven Buehrer (R-Delta) announced a program this fall that will bolster safety at Ohio's rail crossings.

During an event at a rail crossing in Fulton County between Wauseon and Pettisville, they announced the availability of funding for local governments to install rumble strips or other safety features at Ohio's crossings without gates or lights has been expanded to include any unprotected crossing. ODOT will grant \$1,500 per crossing to all local jurisdictions requesting the installation of rumble strips.

According to statistics from the Ohio Rail Development Commission, 15 people were killed and 39 injured at Ohio highway-rail crossings in 2000. "This program is a partnership between federal, state, and local government that exemplifies the work that needs to be done to address rail crossing accidents in Ohio," said Buehrer. "What we are confronting is a series of accidents that can be prevented. Our hope for preventing them lies in meeting the needs of each locality, one community at a time."

Proctor also stressed the importance of the program. "There should never be a conflict of interest between the mobility we require for our every day existence and safety," he said. "Safety is our top priority; always."

Buehrer introduced legislation that provides \$1.2 million in the ODOT budget during fiscal years 2001 and 2002 to improve safety at railroad crossings. The legislation requires rumble strips be installed at active railroad crossings without gates or lights that have a daily traffic count of 500 or more vehicles and at least six trains per day.

"Many people are simply not aware of the dangers of railroad crossings, and they often ignore them and fail to stop," said Buehrer. "By raising awareness of this problem and implementing safety measures fatal injuries will be prevented."

If the community believes rumble strips would be inappropriate for a particular area, they can apply for up to \$1,500 toward some other crossing safety improvement, such as crossing lights, raised pavement markers, or flashing lights on warning signs.

Buehrer said the program is a good example of the leaders of Ohio and its communities working together to establish policies to remove obstacles to individual and community safety. "We carry out the strategies and policies designed to address these issues and confront problems at the local level," he said. "The effectiveness of these strategies relies on how well they address the unique problems of each community."

He said the state of Ohio will continue to invest in efforts to reduce rail crossing accidents. "I welcome the funding of rail crossing safety efforts in Ohio and offer my appreciation for work being done in Fulton County and around the state to increase rail safety," he said.



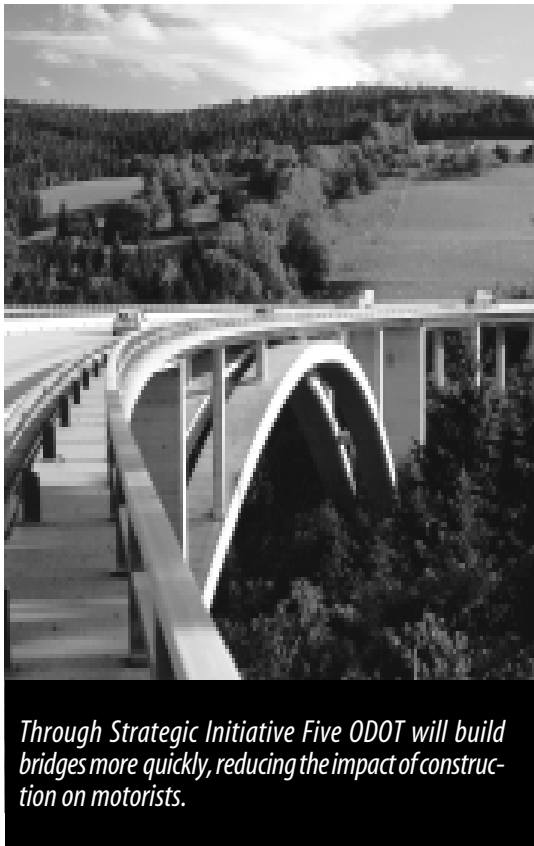
Photo/Meghan Martindale

State Rep. Steven Buehrer looks on as Director Gordon Proctor discusses rail safety issues for the State of Ohio at a news conference in Fulton County.

# Strategic Initiative Five

## Build Bridges Faster, Smarter, Better

**Lora Young**  
Central Office



File Photo

*Through Strategic Initiative Five ODOT will build bridges more quickly, reducing the impact of construction on motorists.*

ODOT's commitment to continued excellence is seen through the department's mission, vision, values and goals. ODOT adopts annual strategic initiatives, measurable goals that highlight areas of operations which need updating, improvement or creation.

With the start of the fiscal year, ODOT adopted new strategic initiatives meant to give measurable goals for the department to focus on in the coming year.

Maintaining the safety and mobility of Ohio's highway network in a cost-effective manner is one of ODOT's highest priorities, as seen by the adoption of this year's Strategic Initiative Five – Build Bridges Faster, Smarter, Better. This initiative is a result of ODOT's on-going focus of improving maintenance of traffic practices to lessen the negative impact construction activities – specifically bridge construction – can have upon ODOT's customers.

tomers.

"The impact of bridge construction or repair is particularly significant because of width limitations. Where pavement can be temporarily widened to maintain traffic in work zones, often times bridge widening is too costly or even impossible without reducing the roadway to a single travelled lane," said Bill Lozier, deputy director of the Division of Highway Operations.

Bridge construction and repair are a delaying factor in construction projects because of the additional time they demand. As a result, identifying methods to accelerate bridge construction is beneficial to both the department and ODOT's customers.

Bridge technology has advanced in the last few years and the main focus of Strategic

Initiative Five is to identify those technologies that will allow ODOT to build bridges as quickly as possible. The Strategic Initiative Five executive and main committees are gathering information relating to new technologies and methods of construction. Criteria have been set so teams assigned to research new techniques can easily identify technologies that may benefit ODOT.

"The goal is to create a toolbox of innovative bridge techniques our engineers can choose from when starting a new bridge construction project – a pool of proven techniques that will save time and money," said Brad Fagrell, administrator, Office of Structural Engineering.

Examples of new methods or options for building bridges faster and better include prefabricated bridges, prefabricated bridge decks, stay in place forms, use of new high-performance materials and utilization of innovative construction techniques and materials.

Currently, the Strategic Initiative Five committees are seeking five bridge projects around the state to be pilot programs for the new techniques being identified. There will be five types of common bridge construction included in the pilot program:

- i New deck, abutment backwalls and superstructure painting
- i Widening
- i Superstructure replacement
- i Bridge deck overlay
- i Bridge replacement on a rural two-lane project

# Hobby Shoppe

## For the Love *of the Game*

**Sara Davis**

*Central Office*

ODOT's Mitch Alderman, an auto-body technician for Central Office's Garage, has been working for the department for 12 years, but has loved football his entire life. At the age of 7, Alderman began playing the sport, and now enjoys it as a coach.

Alderman grew up and played football in the Columbus suburb of Grandview. After graduating from Grandview Heights High School, he noticed the quality of the football program deteriorating and felt the athletes needed to learn the game at a younger age.

Last summer, Alderman and other football enthusiasts, including Bob Mapien, president and founder and Tom Brammell of Central Office, took it upon themselves to start the Grandview Youth Football Association. "The response from the community was encouraging," said Alderman. "Many parents, children and local businesses were interested in getting involved."

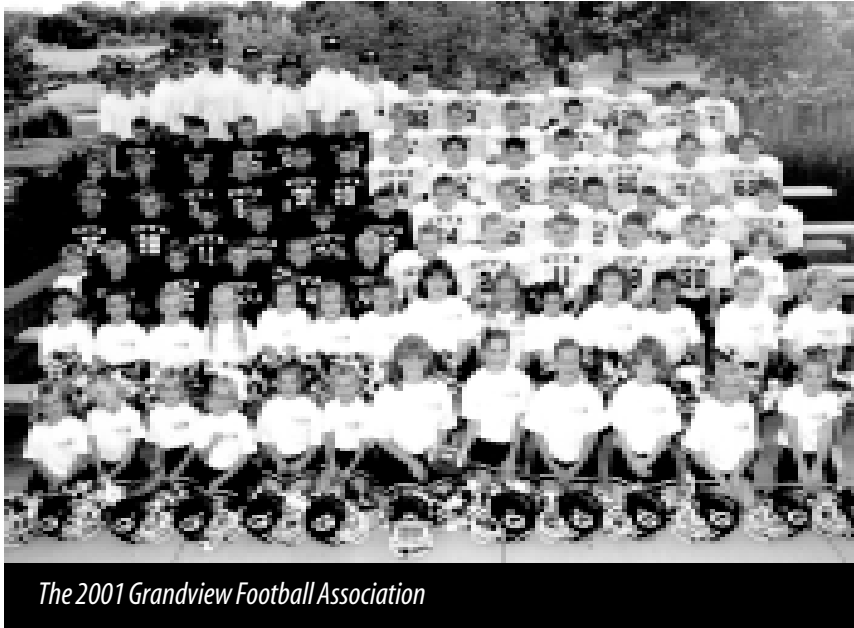
The interest in the program was so great, they were able to enter two teams into the

game and sportsmanship to be quality players.

Not only did the young athletes and coaches receive support from the high school but also The Ohio State University football team. Alderman and the coaches of the Grandview Youth Football Association were able to arrange a meeting with the team.

Alderman was dedicated to getting this league started and was honored with an award in his name for his efforts and donation of time. The Alderman Award will be handed down year after year to an individual that donates their to the helping with all of the aspects of the program

"This experience has been so rewarding; not only have I gotten to teach these kids my love of the game, but also it has helped me to deal with children better and be a better parent to my own kids," Alderman, already has plans for next sea-



*Photos Courtesy of Mitch Alderman*

*The 2001 Grandview Football Association*

NIAA football league this past season. With 50 players enrolled, the two teams were broken down into the pee-wee division, age groups of six to eight-year-olds and the junior division of nine to 11-year-olds. Each team played eight games against teams in northern Columbus.

The youth league practiced two days a week and held games on Sundays. The home games were held at the Grandview Heights High School football field.

Alderman was one of the the coaches of the pee-wee team and in their first season of coaching and as a league, the team finished the season with two wins, five losses and one tie game. Many of the games they lost were close and, overall, Alderman was very pleased.

"For many of these kids, this is their first opportunity to play football," said Alderman. "I try to focus on teaching them the game and not on winning." Although Alderman does agree that football is a sport of competition, he feels his players need to learn the



*Mitch Alderman sharing a few last minute plays with members of his team.*

son and looks forward to recruiting new kids and coaching next year.

When not on the sidelines coaching his team, Alderman is spending time with his wife Stacey, six-year-old daughter Alexis and six-month-old daughter Alicia. Alderman and his family reside in Grove City.

# Job Profile

## Behind the Scenes of the Maumee River Crossing



Photo/Abigail Erford

### **Abigail Erford**

*District 2*

Construction of the largest project in ODOT history, the \$240 million Maumee River Crossing (MRC), has begun, and while everyone will be able to see the actual construction of the bridge, very few people will ever know the extent of the effort behind the project. It must have support and dedication from everyone involved and due to the size of the project, the list of people involved stretches to just about everyone employed by District 2. Everyone plays a part, whether it be the project manager, the construction crew, or the employees who are now stepping up to take on more responsibilities. However, there is one person who has proven to be a great asset to the project and a key figure in its success. That person is Mike Gramza, MRC construction engineer and project manager for the MRC.

As project manager, Mike Gramza, plays an instrumental role in the construction of the MRC. It is his responsibility to oversee the construction of all the MRC projects, currently three projects are under construction. He must interpret plans and specifications for the construction inspection team, along with providing direction for any conflicts that may arise. He also deals with the administrative duties associated with the project, which includes assisting the personnel as needed, negotiating with contractors and keeping the district and Central Office management up to speed on the progress of the construction.

Presently, the majority of his time is spent making recommendations and providing support in the pre-bid process for the MRC bridge portion. This has included moderating the pre-bid meeting that was recently held and reviewing specs and notes set up in the contract to assure they will work with this unique bridge project. The job of preparing for the sale of the bridge portion of the project has been greatly enhanced by the teamwork of a large number of talented ODOT employees and consultants, according to Gramza. "Working in close contact with Mary Ellen Kimberlin, Mark Kelsey, Walid Gemayel, Jeff Hisem, and Ron Bauer from Central Office, to name just a few, along with Richard Martinko, District 2 deputy director, and the entire District 2 project team has been a necessity toward successfully completing the enormous task of preparing the MRC plans for sale," he said. The project is on schedule to sell by the end of the year.

Gramza comes very prepared to handle the intensity and responsibilities associated with this project. He graduated from the University of Toledo in 1988 and became a licensed engineer in 1992. He was hired at ODOT in 1986 as a co-op in the design office and was hired in full time in 1988, upon graduation from college. He began as a design

engineer 1, and soon advanced to design engineer 2, transportation engineer 3, and district design engineer, where he managed the district's in-house design department. In March 2000, he was named to his current position, district construction engineer.

Gramza has many goals when it comes to the success of the MRC. He feels it is his task to provide an atmosphere where the unique talents and various backgrounds of ODOT personnel, consultants, and contractors blend into a successful team.

The team's goals will first and foremost be to construct a structure of the highest quality that will be a landmark for the city of Toledo for the next century. Other team goals included completing the project on budget, finishing it on schedule and providing a safe work zone for team members and the traveling public.

Gramza has been married 11 years to his wife, Lisa. They currently live in Maumee with their two children, Kristin, 7, and Benjamin, 2. In his free time, he enjoys coaching Kristin's soccer team and trying to keep up with his kids. He also enjoys playing golf and spending Thursday nights with his family, debating about who is the next to get kicked off "Survivor."

# Resting Easy...ODOT Improving Roadside Convenience for the Public

**Ron Poole**  
Central Office

Anyone who has ever been on a long road trip appreciates the need for rest stops with clean bathroom facilities. ODOT recently launched a pilot program to improve several primitive rest areas with a new type of building called a modular conversion. These units are clean, sanitary, inexpensive to install and can be reused as needed.

The department's Office of Facilities began taking inventory of primitive rest areas – those without running water – and closing some due to budget cuts or other reasons in 1997. According to Christine Hunt, ODOT's Rest Area program coordinator, the department has closed 23 of its 60 primitive facilities in the last four years. Some primitives were formally closed and their land was either sold or reverted back to the original owners or heirs. Other rest areas were transferred to the ownership of local authorities or other government agencies. The remaining primitives presented a concern.

"Those 37 rest areas were needed by the public, but they were in pretty poor shape," said Hunt. "They are hard to keep clean, and represent a potential environmental hazard with their sewage. Yet because they are on secondary routes and could be bypassed by changes in the highway system, it is hard to justify spending the money to create whole new buildings when they could go unused."

While considering this problem with Landscape Architect Bill Sherman in 1998, Hunt came up with a solution: replace the primitives with new, prefabricated structures that could be moved from one location to another. Hunt researched these buildings and proposed they be tested in a pilot program starting this year.

"Christine was instrumental in getting this program started," said Sherman. "We found the buildings we wanted. And our contractor of choice was even our lowest bidder for the job."

The new buildings are called modular conversions, and are already assembled as whole units. When the department has selected and prepared a site according to certain electrical and plumbing needs, a modular conversion can be transported there easily by truck and lowered into place by crane. Once down, it can be bolted into place and connected to plumbing and electrical resources within four hours. The new flush facility is

sanitary and can be kept clean easily. If the highway alignments or other things change in the area and the rest area is no longer required, the building can be removed and used again on another site. And all this can be done for significantly less money than creating a new building.

"Under our current specifications, it would cost us \$800,000 to upgrade a rest area with a permanent building," said Hunt. "A reusable modular conversion only costs \$135,000 to purchase and install."

The first of these buildings was installed in August on U.S. Route 24, 11 miles west of Defiance in Paulding County, and will soon be officially opened to the public. A second conversion is planned to be installed at a location in Henry County in the spring, and the department plans to hire civil engineers to prepare six more sites for

installation after the second one is completed.

Sherman notes the replacement of primitive facilities with these new ones will have a positive effect on the image of the state.

"More than 100 million travelers visit our rest areas every year, and even though we do not like to think about it, they form an impression of our state based on the accommodations they find," he said. "These new buildings will help make their impression of Ohio a positive one."



*The first modular conversion installed along U.S. Route 24 in Paulding county.*

Photo/Rhonda Pees

# Reading to Succeed

**Sara Davis**  
*Central Office*

Since taking office in January 1999, Gov. Taft has made it his mission to help every child learn to read through his OhioReads Program. Employees from ODOT's Central Office are doing their part by volunteering time to help students at Stockbridge Elementary School in Columbus.

Raising the bar for education has been an important part of Gov. Taft's administration and will continue to be for the 2001-2002 school year. For the first time, students in the fourth-grade will be required to pass the fourth-grade proficiency test before moving on to the fifth-grade. Only 40 percent of all fourth graders passed the most recent proficiency test.

To ensure this goal is met, more than \$40 million in classroom reading grants have been allocated to 740 applicants, and a total of \$10 million in community reading grants was awarded to 358 applicants. These funds are used to provide curriculum materials,

professional development, training, and technologies for students, teachers and volunteers participating in the program.

ODOT's Central Office has been volunteering at Stockbridge Elementary and participating in tutoring activities for 11 years. Last year, the department had 13 volunteers who donated three hours every other Wednesday to tutor with the time considered part of their regular work hours.

Tutors focused not only on the students need for literacy, but assisted with class assignments in the subjects of reading and math for students in the grades K- 5. Tutoring at each school differs based on that schools needs. For Stockbridge Elementary, the tutoring program usually runs through May.

Jill Sumner, administrative assistant of the Office of Quality and Human Resources

has served as Central Office's OhioReads coordinator for the past year and has seen first hand the effects these few hours every other week has on a student. "The children are responding very well and are improving with each session in both reading and math," said Sumner. "My hope is to get more volunteers so we can better assist the students who need extra help."

The OhioReads Program at Stockbridge Elementary has yet to begin for the 2001-2002 school year and will begin when the school receives grant approval for an after school program and can better evaluate their needs. Currently, Central Office has eight tutors for this year and more are still needed. Anyone from Central Office interested in volunteering or with questions regarding the program can contact Jill Sumner at (614) 466-8992.

Opportunities are available for districts who are not currently participating in OhioReads. To find out how to get involved or if you are interested in starting a program contact OhioReads toll free at 1-888-OHIOREADS or visit the website at [www.ohioreads.org](http://www.ohioreads.org).

The OhioReads program will continue to grow with more than 40,000 reading tutors statewide and more than \$50 million being allocated for fiscal year 2002-2003. Do your part by volunteering to help a child learn to read.



# FYI

## New Quality Website Feature

The Office of Quality and Organizational Development has recently introduced a new feature to the ODOT Intranet site. Located under the "Quality" section, the "Shared Practices" selection contains new and innovative ideas being put into practice by ODOT personnel around the state. The Quality Office encourages all ODOT members to take advantage of this opportunity to learn ways to improve the department. Those with ideas they would like to see included in this new feature can contact Carol Schubert with the Office of Quality and Organizational Development via e-mail or at: (614) 752-5722.

## Fast Facts:

### Ohio's interstate and freeway network:

comprises only 24 percent of the state system's lane miles but carries 52 percent of Ohio's traffic and 85 percent of the state's truck freight

is expanded at less than one third of 1 percent annually

endures traffic volumes that have risen by 1 percent to 3 percent annually

withstands truck volumes that have increased by 42 percent during the past 10 years

File Photo

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PRINTED BY THE ODOT PRINT SHOP

Our mission is to provide a world-class transportation system that links Ohio to a global economy while preserving the state's unique character and enhancing its quality of life.

Cover/ Bruce Hull