

INTRODUCTION THE FUTURE OF OHIO'S COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE

In keeping with the purpose of our organization, the County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) regularly revises our vision of the future of county government and, in light of this vision, reviews the duties of the County Engineer. A recent review leads us to believe we can create a more effective and efficient operation for Ohio's residents by maintaining the high level of professional qualifications required of County Engineers and adding additional responsibilities to the office.

In Ohio, the County Engineer is a registered professional engineer and a registered professional surveyor – a requirement that has led to Ohio's national reputation for excellence in the County Engineer's office. CEAO encourages the legislature to maintain this requirement and, also, to ensure that the office remains an elected position with direct responsibility to the electorate. CEAO believes, too, that the role of the County Engineer should be expanded so that one elected professional would be responsible for duties in the areas of civil engineering, surveying, drainage improvements, permitting within public right-of-ways, highway and bridge construction and maintenance.

The CEAO's **PRIORITY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES and PLATFORM ISSUES**, as adopted by the Association are of critical importance to the counties of the state of Ohio. The County Engineers of Ohio maintain 25,805 bridges and 29,088 miles of urban and rural roadways that are vital to the continued growth and prosperity of the state. **Every trip begins and ends on a local road.**

The Association is promoting before the 129th General Assembly the following proposals for legislation. They are intended to enhance the budgets of County Engineers, in part by allowing them to accomplish more with funds currently

available. Raising the threshold limits on prevailing wage laws, and annually adjusting the threshold limits on force account projects to the construction cost index, would all enable the County Engineer to provide better services while minimizing the burden to Ohio Taxpayers. The County Engineers Association of Ohio looks forward to working *with* the 129th General Assembly and the Kasich Administration to enact legislation which will promote more efficient use of existing local government funding.

PRIORITY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

The need for adequate, consistent and reliable funding for Ohio's local infrastructure is now more critical than ever due to recent inflation costs seen in the construction industry. **Since 2003, material costs for road and bridge improvements have doubled** forcing County Engineers to reduce in scope or eliminate many needed capital improvements. For the safety of the citizens of Ohio, we ask the 129th General Assembly to provide those dollars necessary to maintain and improve the highways and bridges for Ohio's traveling public.

As the **income from the gasoline tax declines** due to rising fuel costs, alternative fuels and more fuel efficient vehicles, the Ohio General Assembly needs to look at increasing other possible revenue sources to account for the rising inflationary costs recently seen in the construction industry. Instead of debating and spending countless hours on formulating fees on alternative fuels made from multiple agricultural products, hydrogen, batteries, etc., the need is to concentrate on the number, size of the vehicles and the number of miles a vehicle annually travels Ohio's highways, regardless of what powers that vehicle.

The base \$20 license plate fee for road and bridge construction in Ohio is one of the lowest in the nation and has not been adjusted for 30 years. The 129th General Assembly needs to consider adjusting that base fee for road and bridge improvements, allowing Counties to adjust their permissive plate fees and possibly indexing the

annual plate fee as a percentage of the blue book value of the vehicle. Income for needed road and bridge improvements from this source would annually rise as the value of the vehicles naturally rises and as more vehicles are placed on the highways.

Full Funding of the Issue I Program through the Ohio Public Works Commission is imperative to the reconstruction of Ohio's failing infrastructure.

Accident rates are on the rise.

Statistics show that due to Ohio's recent trend toward urban sprawl, there were more recorded accidents on locally maintained highways in Ohio. A reported **motor vehicle crash occurs on Ohio's highways an average of every 96 seconds.** 36% are located on county and township maintained roadways. The number of crashes per 100 million miles driven on county roads in Ohio is 80% greater than corresponding crash rates on interstates during that same period. **A General Accounting Office study states that rural road fatalities per vehicle mile traveled is more than 6 times the rate on urban expressways.** Without a significant increase in spending for safety improvements on Ohio's county highway system, the spread in crash rates is expected to increase as Ohio becomes more urbanized.

Roadway widening reduces accidents.

Recent studies show that widening a driving lane by one foot reduces accidents by 12%; widening a lane by two feet would reduce them by 23%. Increasing roadway "recovery distances" from 4 feet to 14 feet reduces accidents by 25%.

Local bridges are deficient.

County Engineers maintain 25,805 bridges in Ohio. Of these, **6,023 (one in every four) are closed, one lane, posted for load reductions, or are rated structurally deficient.** Each of these three types of structural problems presents a danger to local motorists and to operators of school buses, fire and rescue equipment and farm-to-market vehicles.



A recent report from the Federal Highway Administration states that: **Ohio Ranks 5th in the Nation in the number of local bridges (county/city) classified as structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.**

FORCE ACCOUNT LIMITS

Current force account limits were last increased in June, 2003 with **no inflationary factors provided.** Since the threshold limits were set by the Ohio General Assembly, the cost for hotmix asphalt in place has risen from \$27.40/ton to \$65/ton in place, a **118%** increase. Redi-mix concrete has seen a **70%** increase along with a **90%** raise in reinforcing steel.

These thresholds must be first adjusted to reflect the increase in the cost of construction since July 1, 2003 and then annually increased by 3% to account for future inflation. The taxpayers of Ohio will be able to witness more county road and bridge improvements without the General Assembly raising taxes.

ROADWAY GRADE SEPARATIONS

The Ohio Turnpike Commission constructed grade separations at the intersection of the turnpike with public roads. As required by the ORC, the cost of these grade separations was paid by the commission as a part of the cost of the turnpike. **Legislation should be enacted to make the turnpike responsible for major repair and maintenance of grade separations constructed by the commission.**

PROFESSIONAL SURVEYING LICENSE

It is critical to the citizens of Ohio that the County Engineer holds both a professional engineering and surveying license due to the magnitude of the responsibilities mandated to the County Engineer by the Ohio Revised Code. As the County's Tax Map Draftsman, the professional surveying requirement is critical to assure the citizens the needed maintenance and accuracy of deed transfers, parcel splits and each County's Tax Maps. Having both professional licenses best serves the citizens of Ohio economically and efficiently.

LOAD RESTRICTIONS

Similar to having the ability to post a load limit restriction on a bridge located on a county or township road to preserve the safety of the citizens of the State, the County Engineer should have the ability to post **load restrictions on specific roadways after the completion of an engineering analysis** and create specific haul routes for cargo that would be detrimental to the local highways.

OUPS LEGISLATION

Public Road rights-of-way were established for the purpose of maintaining the integrity and safety of that roadway. OUPS legislation needs to **allow the public agency owning that right-of-way to maintain the control of its designated use.**

ENGINEERING SERVICES LIMIT

In order to expedite road and bridge improvements, the \$25,000 threshold limits whereby County Engineer's are required to go through the **QBS System to hire outside engineering services must be adjusted.**

"JUST BUILD" CONSTRUCTION

For non-complicated bridge replacement projects using federal funding, County Engineers should be allowed to use the **"Just Build" process to save months of programming and reduce the overall cost of substandard bridges.**

DRAINAGE LAW REVISIONS

Revise 6137.11 to allow Boards of County Commissioners to **revise original construction costs** when determining base assessment

adjustments for drainage improvements under permanent maintenance.

Section 6133 needs clarified to require the County Prosecutors and County Auditors in the county where the joint county ditch petition is filed, to perform the needed duties for the project.

Stormwater Management districts established under **Section 6115** need to have the ability to raise revenue to fund EPA mandates along with constructing and maintaining of stormwater systems.

Bonding requirements for filing drainage petitions under 6131 need to be increased to cover engineering and mailing costs.

UPDATE ANTIQUATED LAWS

CEAO feels it is necessary to either eliminate or modify numerous laws enacted by the state legislature decades ago. The county transportation systems in Ohio have evolved as a result of constantly changing volumes and types of traffic; hence, many laws affecting them are outdated as listed below:

The issuing of **road right-of-way construction, access permits, and permits for oversize/overweight vehicles** presently falls under the jurisdiction of the County Commissioners. Because of the engineering, design and safety considerations, that duty should be the County Engineer's.

ORC 5577 should be amended to make the funding of a sheriff's deputy from highway funds permissive instead of mandatory.

Counties should be allowed to charge **impact fees for infrastructure improvements** needed as a result of commercial, residential or agricultural developments.

It is imperative that the Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation and each of the ODOT's Deputy Directors be licensed **Professional Engineers.**

Bidding threshold limits need to be increased to reflect recent inflation within the construction industry and to better expedite projects.

ORC guardrail mandates need revised to comply with state and federal design standards.

In order to assist in the **funding of the Tax Map Office**, the County Auditor should have permissive authority to use REA funds.

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COUNTY ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM



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