

Ohio Senate Transportation, Commerce & Workforce Committee
County Engineers Association of Ohio
Dean Ringle, P.E., P.S., Executive Director
Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, Member
Transportation Infrastructure Informal Hearing

Chairman McColley, Ranking member Antonio, Vice Chair Uecker, members of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the benefits and importance of transportation funding.

I am Dean Ringle, Licensed Professional Engineer and Professional Surveyor, and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO).

Prior to joining CEAO, I worked at the Franklin County Engineer's Office for more than 36 years, with the last 17 years serving as the Franklin County Engineer. I started my public service in Hancock County, working at the Hancock County Engineer's Office during the first three years of my college education.

I am also fortunate enough to have been a member of Governor DeWine's *Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure*, where we heard testimony from interested parties from across the state on the need for additional funding for our transportation system.

Ohio's County Engineers are responsible for 26,000+ bridges and approximately 29,000 miles of urban and rural roadways that are vital to the continued growth and prosperity of Ohio.

Funding is a Federal, State and Local issue, but the majority of county infrastructure funding comes from either Gasoline/Diesel fuel taxes or Motor Vehicle License Plate registration fees. Unfortunately, the Gasoline/Diesel fuel tax funding sources hasn't increased in well over a decade to keep up with inflation. This lack of funding makes maintaining our aging infrastructure a nearly impossible task – especially for our 52 rural counties that utilize gasoline tax as their primary source of transportation revenue.

Recently Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Marchbanks presented before the *Advisory Committee*, and his testimony stated ODOT has a funding deficit, a hole of \$1 billion **per year** over the next 11 years.

Several factors are converging to create a crisis point for Ohio's local transportation system:

- Money the state receives through the fee on motor fuel hasn't kept pace with maintenance and construction needs to keep Ohio roadways in good condition.
- The motor fuel user fee stands at 28 cents per gallon, where it has been since 2005. That was the last year of a three-year cycle to increase the fee by 2 cents each year. Since then, construction costs have risen dramatically, so that the value of that dollar in 2003 is only 58 cents today.
- Vehicles are more fuel-efficient today, which means that revenues dedicated to road maintenance have remained relatively flat while wear and tear on the transportation system has increased.
- Electric and hybrid electric vehicles are another small, but growing, factor. All-electric and alternative-fuel vehicles contribute to the deterioration of roads, but their drivers pay no motor fuel fees. Hybrids pay some motor fuel fees, but not their full share.

The Fiscal Cliff Is Here for Local Infrastructure

The transportation funding hole is quite real. The hole is deep, and it is wide. The County Engineers around the state have made those steep cuts, or postponed bridge and road projects, due to lack of funding. I have enclosed, as a part of my testimony, a picture of the condition of state and county bridges from around the state in 2013. It shows the number of bridges closed and which ones are posted for less than normal legal loads. That picture has not gotten better during the last five years.

Director Marchbanks stated: "ODOT projects that its revenue hole is an **average** of \$1 billion over the next 11 years: It's an **annual** shortfall, and it includes only ODOT projects."

Director Marchbanks also stated to the Governor's *Advisory Committee*:

"That doesn't take into account **local** needs. County, township, and municipal governments are facing the same fiscal challenges as ODOT and rely on the same motor fuel user fee that hasn't changed since 2005."

The *Advisory Committee* report also summarizes the following:

“Marchbanks told the committee that local governments haven’t benefitted from the borrowing ODOT and the Turnpike Commission have done over the past 15 years. Many local governments have had to make steep cuts to road maintenance during the past decade.”

Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, Recommendation Report 2019

I have also enclosed, as a part of my testimony, a two-page summary showing the current road and bridge funding needs of just the County Engineers (\$1.12 Billion per year), the current funding (\$450 million per year) and the shortage (which comes out to \$670 million per year). That is just to keep our existing county roads and bridges in safe repair.

<p>Total Current County Revenue: \$450 million Current County Need Annually: \$1.12 Billion Funding Deficiency Annually: 60%</p>

There is a substantial need for transportation funding for ODOT and local roads and bridges. We are appreciative for the genuine interest the Governor’s office has shown in this need, and we are thankful for your concern and desire to get our transportation system to a level needed in Ohio for the safety of the traveling public, and their economic prosperity.