



Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee *House Bill 33*

Jack Marchbanks, Ph.D.
Ohio Department of Transportation

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Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

I am Dr. Jack Marchbanks, Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today, and to provide you with some information about transportation provisions in House Bill 33.

ODOT's mission to provide a transportation system that is safe, accessible, well maintained and positioned for the future is critical to the welfare and prosperity of our state and our citizens. Since taking office, the top transportation priorities for the DeWine-Husted administration have been safety and improving Ohioans' quality of life. During our time together today, I will explain how Governor DeWine's transportation priorities support these objectives.

The bulk of the Department's funding was authorized in House Bill 23: the Transportation Budget. Because constitutional and federal restrictions limit the expenditure of motor fuel tax dollars specifically to the maintenance of the state highway system, there are several transportation programs that cannot be funded in the transportation budget because they do not have a direct link to roads and bridges. These items are funded in the operating budget via state general revenue.

Transformational Investments

The Brent Spence project is not the only transformational component of the Governor's budget proposal. As the Governor said in his State of the State address: this is a fiscally sound budget that uses one-time money for one-time expenditures.

Rail Safety and Infrastructure Development

In line with the Governor's commitment to safety, this budget creates a Railroad Crossing Safety Grant program. With a one-time infusion of \$125 million in state general revenue, Ohio can leverage newly available federal infrastructure dollars to make improvements to overpasses, underpasses, and existing at-grade crossings throughout the state.

Many of you have stories about the danger and frustration of blocked railroad crossings. In 2022 alone, the Federal Rail Administration received 3580 blocked crossing complaints from Ohio. These funds will be used by the state and local communities as matching dollars to leverage up to \$400 million in federal funds over the next four years.

Additionally, Governor DeWine increased the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) appropriation from \$2 million to \$10 million. This increase helps short line railroads and companies in Ohio to access the rail network to transport raw materials and products. The additional funding puts Ohio in a more competitive position with peer states to assist with economic development and retention of jobs. ORDC's budget for this function has not been increased since Fiscal Year 2008 while Ohio is ranked in the top 10 states in originating and terminating rail carloads by both tonnage and value in the country. Importantly, JobsOhio has noted that approximately 50% of recent site selection requests for sites of 100 acres or more require rail.

Funding these important rail projects increases safety and improves Ohio's competitive position with our neighbors. And it just makes sense in light of recent high profile rail incidents in Ohio and elsewhere.

Aviation Safety and Innovation

The Governor's budget creates a two-year grant program to help public use airports catch up on much-needed improvements to their facilities and infrastructure. These important county assets contribute more than \$13 billion to the state's economy and need additional support.

ODOT currently provides about \$7 million annually for county airport safety and related maintenance. But every year, applications for funding far exceed the available funds. This one-time infusion of \$25 million in general revenue helps these publicly owned airports invest in critical maintenance that has been deferred due to lack of funding.

Electric Vehicle Charging and Uncrewed Aircraft

As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Ohio will receive \$140 million in federal funding over the next five years to install, operate, and maintain electric vehicle charging stations. With the implementation of fast chargers for electric vehicles comes a need for skilled electricians to install the infrastructure and trained technicians to maintain it.

The \$2 million appropriation for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Workforce Training is crucial to supporting Ohio's forthcoming Electric Vehicle (EV) workforce strategy, which is being led by the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation. The funding will be used to invest in EV charging infrastructure training and credentialing programs, providing opportunities for workers to gain the skills and credentials necessary to participate in this growing industry.

By investing in workforce training and development, Ohio will attract more investment in EV charging infrastructure, build a strong and competent workforce, and position itself as a leader in the EV industry. This will result in increased job opportunities and economic benefits for Ohioans. It will also ensure Ohio is well-positioned to perform necessary installation and maintenance of charging facilities and capitalize on the opportunities that come from this transition.

DriveOhio also oversees our efforts to build our next generation of transportation infrastructure, including technologies being deployed by the Ohio Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) Center that support advanced aircraft travel within low altitude airspace.

Uncrewed aircraft, (also known as drones) are being developed at blinding speed to transport sensitive items like life-saving organs and medication as well as other goods and supplies to urban and rural Ohio businesses and citizens. Additionally, innovators believe the horizon for piloted drones is fast approaching. This budget proposal includes \$11 million in general revenue to allow our UAS team to begin deploying the low-altitude aircraft radar system we've developed with our partners from the Department of Defense and NASA, to ensure these aircraft can operate safely while securing Ohio's place as a hub for innovation in this growing field.

Conclusion

Governor DeWine and Lieutenant Governor Husted are proposing transformational investments to keep people and freight flowing safely and easily through Ohio and beyond.

I sincerely appreciate all your efforts to work with your many constituencies by responding to and answering their many questions about Ohio's transportation system. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and respectfully ask for your approval of this important budget.