

My name is Jeff Gaskin, Mayor of South Point, Lawrence County. Lawrence County is the southern most county and South Point is the southern most town in Ohio.

When I moved to South Point in the early 60's, Ohio was just finishing up the upgrade of US 52 to four lanes. United States route 52 runs from Portal, ND to Charleston, SC a little over 2000 miles, 2.8 miles of it in the village of SP. When ODOT finished up the four lanes, I was one of the first to ride on it, I was only 6 years old. I've been riding and driving on it ever since.

ODOT has maintained US route 52 for more than 60 years, until the last several years. Several years ago, ODOT informed SP that they were now required to mow the grass in the median. I told them then we did not have the safety equipment or the mowers to do it. We did talk about a plan where ODOT would charge the village for mowing the median on US 52. I later was able to negotiate the purchase of a surplus batwing mower from ODOT. And now ODOT is mowing the median and taking care weeds under guardrail.

Early 2022 there were several large potholes in the 2.8 miles of US 52 in the village. Several people hit them and called the county office of ODOT to complain and were told to call SP, it belongs to them. In the interest of public safety SP purchased blacktop patch and with ODOT helping to protect village workers, we patched the holes. Later ODOT did pave most of US 52 in the county, including the 2.8 miles in the village.

In two other villages in the county, along with SP, ODOT mowers would mow along raising the mowers at the village limits and putting them back down 2.8 miles later.

In Piketon, along US 23, Mayor Billy Preston was told it was his responsibility to replace a culvert under US 23. He told me that he didn't have any equipment bigger than a backhoe. ODOT finally did replace that culvert as it was impossible for Piketon to get it done.

In a little town along the river near Marietta, the mayor has witnessed ODOT snowplows raise the plow at his village limits and put them back down on the other side.

Former chair of this committee, Brian Baldrige, told me of Seaman along SR 32 of seeing an 18-year-old young man on a sears riding lawnmower cutting the median. Safety concerns????

About a year ago, ODOT in Lawrence County was scraping the grass off the berm of US 52 to allow water to drain off. But they stopped at the SP village limits.

Can you imagine the patchwork repair along US 52, if villages with limited funds are required to maintain US 52 in between the stretches maintained by ODOT. It might be like the 1930's when everything stopped at the county line. We struggle to do a fair job of maintaining streets in our villages. And, if there are problems with safety, construction, maintenance, the lawsuit may start with the villages, but where are the deep pockets?

We also believe that the rules are not being enforced equally across the state.

To give ODOT kudos, the Director, Asst Director, District 9 Deputy Director and the local county manager have always treated me with respect and strived to get me anything within reason to help me, this year District 9 helped us out by installing permanent “mowing ahead” signs at the village limits. We do cut the median twice a month and will continue to do because we do a better job and more often, with the batwing mower, and we also mow 14 acres of ODOT property around our intersection weekly, in all about 40 acres, because we want it to look good.

I wonder since US 52 in the village “belongs to the village” can I increase the speed limit to 70? Can I reduce it to 35 and write a boatload of tickets? There might be a myriad of things we could do with traffic. Of course, my Police Dept and my Fire Dept always has and always will help to handle problems on US 52.

I last spoke with the ODOT Assistant Director on April 4, 2023, he told me then that “according to the law, we are doing what we are supposed to do. My question is, for more than 60 years ODOT maintained everything to do with US 52, what changed 3 years ago? The only way to fix this is with legislation, meaning HB 83. HB 83 can be summed up in six words.....ODOT takes care of the highways.