



Ohio Contractors Association

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Ohio House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony for HB 74 – Written Only
Christopher L. Runyan, President
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Minority Member Crawley, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 74, the transportation budget bill. My name is Chris Runyan, and I am the President of the Ohio Contractors Association (OCA). By way of background, the OCA is the trade association for the heavy/highway construction industry. Our membership consists of more than 200 contractors and 250 companies and organizations that provide materials and services that support the horizontal construction industry. Our members perform most of the highway and public improvement construction needs for Ohio's state and local government entities. The men and women you see paving roadways, building bridges, replacing sewer systems or upgrading sections of the Interstate, those individuals are our members.

On behalf of our members, thank you for your continued support for funding Ohio's extensive transportation infrastructure system needs. The funding increase provided in the last transportation spending bill has been vital in allowing ODOT and local governments to continue to maintain the condition of the economic backbone of this state and the viability of Ohio's highway construction industry. For our members, the capital funding provided in the transportation budget bills means jobs for the more than 17,000 Ohioans employed in building and maintaining Ohio's vast road and bridge network.

Like all industries and business in Ohio, the pandemic certainly presented challenges for the construction sector. Thankfully, construction was deemed an essential business and our members found innovative ways to keep needed highway improvement projects safely on track and sometimes ahead of schedule and under budget. Maintaining Ohio's transportation infrastructure is vital for all Ohio citizens and our members were grateful to continue to work uninterrupted during these challenging times.

ODOT's capital construction program remained largely unchanged through calendar year 2020 except for their Major/New or TRAC program. A number of those large construction projects were deferred to future dates due to the COVID-related funding shortfall. Unfortunately, the proposed budget indicates funding for future construction programs will be reduced. As you know, Ohio funds its infrastructure program with motor fuel taxes collected on gallons of fuel sold. As Director Marchbanks shared in his testimony to this Committee, in the Spring of 2020 traffic declined nearly 50 percent

compared to 2019. The reductions in traffic from March-November resulted in a nearly \$200 million reduction in funding for the 2020-2021 biennium. With some assistance from the federal government and slowly rebounding traffic volumes, the budget before you anticipates a reduction of \$174 million and \$159 million in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 from previous estimates, respectively.

While the pandemic and resulting dramatic traffic declines could never be foreseen, their occurrence does bring to light the shortcomings of a fixed motor fuel use tax system for funding transportation needs. With vehicle fuel efficiency increasing and the prominence of electric and hybrid vehicles, the buying power of the motor fuel tax is eroding. We encourage continued consideration of fees for non-petroleum-based vehicles and further discussion of a vehicle-miles-traveled model for generating revenue. While the changeover from a per-gallon of fuel to a per-mile fee will not happen in the near future, consideration of how to ensure ODOT and local governments can consistently and predictably fund their system needs should continue. At the same time, all vehicles, regardless of how they are powered should continue to pay their fair share for using Ohio's roadways.

Keeping the folks that work in the heavy/highway construction industry is also of paramount importance. OCA fully supports the language in HB 74 that would make distracted driving a primary offense. While distractions create dangerous situations under normal driving conditions, the prospect of a crash occurring when driving distracted is amplified in construction zones. A driver's situational awareness should be heightened not reduced because of merging construction traffic, narrowed lanes and shoulders, speed reductions, irregular traffic patterns, and uneven surface conditions often found in work zones. Being distracted magnifies these hazards and threatens the lives of the motorist and the workers.

According to data provided by ODOT, there were 4506 work zone crashes in Ohio during 2020 resulting in 21 fatalities and 120 serious injuries. Three of those fatalities were contractor employees and 17 of the serious injuries were either ODOT or contractor employees. Our goal must be to get every employee home to their families each night. We also encourage consideration of language that would increase fines for distracted driving in construction zones just as they are for those speeding in construction zones.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 74. We encourage your support for funding Ohio's transportation needs now and in the future. And we respectfully ask for your approval of enhanced measures to address the dangers posed by distracted driving. On both issues, our membership is grateful for your support.