

2020 - 2021
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OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION

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February 18, 2021

The Honorable Scott Oelslager, Chair
Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St., 13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: HB 74 Transportation Budget

Dear Chairman Oelslager:

On behalf of the Ohio Township Association (OTA) and as a member of the Fix Our Roads Ohio (FOR Ohio) coalition, I am writing to express our support for House Bill 74, the Transportation Budget, particularly the distracted driving provisions.

A strong transportation system includes well-funded and safe roads, a responsibility shared by state and local officials. In fact, townships maintain 34 percent of the roads in Ohio – more than any other jurisdiction. Township officials take responsibility for their share of the roads seriously, and the OTA has been a consistent advocate for increased support in these duties, including additional funding through the recent motor fuel tax increase.

While adequate funding is essential to improving road conditions, it is only one piece of the puzzle. Distracted driving is a problem causing additional safety concerns. In 2017, Ohio recorded approximately 14,000 distracted driving crashes, and the problem is only increasing with the proliferation of smart phones in society.

In an effort to make all roads safer, the OTA supports efforts to curb distracted driving, including the Governor's proposal in House Bill 74, by reducing the use of handheld devices while traveling. Changing unsafe driver behavior is an important part of building an effective transportation system in Ohio.

The OTA is requesting a small amendment to House Bill 74 as well. The bill adds R.C. §5577.045, which makes exceptions to certain weight limits related to fire engines. The definition of "fire engine" includes vehicles used by any municipal or volunteer fire department. The OTA requests that this definition be expanded to include township departments, as not all township fire departments are volunteer.

In addition, the OTA would like to note items in our legislative priorities related to transportation issues, specifically increasing force account limits and allowing townships to receive a sixteen and a half-cent refund on fuel purchases.

The limits on force account work were last increased in 2003, while fuel and supply costs have continued to rise. The OTA requests that the General Assembly consider increasing the force account limits to reflect the cost of doing business today. Additionally, the OTA recommends that force account thresholds be tied to the construction price index so that the force account limits keep pace with inflation.

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As it relates to fuel, townships receive revenue from the motor fuel tax, but also pay the tax themselves. Certain jurisdictions receive a partial refund from the state on the costs of their fuel, including schools, educational service centers, and county boards of developmental disabilities – recently increased to sixteen and a half cents per gallon. The OTA requests that townships be permitted to apply for the same refund as these entities.

The OTA supports the provisions in House Bill 74 but would welcome the opportunity to discuss the additions outlined above – both funding-related changes would allow townships to stretch scarce dollars further. The OTA appreciates the General Assembly's consideration of these issues. If you have any questions or concerns about our position, please do not hesitate to contact me or OTA Director of Governmental Affairs Marisa Myers at 614-863-0045.

Sincerely,

Heidi M. Fought
Executive Director