

OHIO PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Bill Information

HB74 ENACT FY22-23 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET *(OELSLAGER S)*

To make appropriations for programs related to transportation and public safety for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of those programs.

CURRENT STATUS

3/10/2021 - Senate Transportation, (Fifth Hearing)

HB110 OPERATING BUDGET *(OELSLAGER S)*

To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.

CURRENT STATUS

3/4/2021 - House Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, (Eighth Hearing)

HB140 MODIFY ELECTION NOTICES, BALLOT LANGUAGE FOR PROPERTY TAX LEVIES *(MERRIN D)*

To enact the "Ballot Uniformity and Transparency Act" to modify the form of election notices and ballot language for property tax levies.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

HB141 MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS *(SKINDELL M, UPCHURCH T)*

To make appropriations related to public transportation.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House Finance

HB146**REGARDS APPLYING PREVAILING WAGE LAW TO PUBLIC PROJECTS** (RIEDEL C, MANCHESTER S)

To allow political subdivisions, special districts, and state institutions of higher education to elect to apply the Prevailing Wage Law to public improvement projects.

CURRENT STATUS

3/3/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing)

SB4**EXEMPT EMS LINE OPERATORS-PUBLIC RECORDS** (ROEGNER K)

To include emergency service telecommunicators and certain Ohio National Guard members as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House Civil Justice

SB15**FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY** (WILSON S)

To change the circumstances in which certain fiscal officers may be held liable for a loss of public funds.

CURRENT STATUS

3/2/2021 - Senate Local Government and Elections, (Third Hearing)

SB18**INTERNAL REVENUE CODE** (ROEGNER K, SCHAFFER T)

To expressly incorporate changes in the Internal Revenue Code since March 27, 2020, into Ohio law and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

3/2/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Third Hearing)

SB32**ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION** (RULLI M)

To require the Director of Transportation to establish an electric vehicle charging station grant rebate program and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

2/17/2021 - Senate Transportation, (First Hearing)

SB56**INDEMNITY-DESIGN CONTRACTS** (BLESSING III L)

To regulate the use of indemnity provisions in professional design contracts related to public improvements.

CURRENT STATUS

3/2/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (First Hearing)



SB67 STUDY PROGRESS / CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS (WILLIAMS S)

To establish a committee to study the progress and challenges of African Americans in Ohio and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Finance



SB93 REQUIRE VOTE-COUNTY SALES TAX INCREASE (ANTANI N)

To require voter approval of any increase in the rate of a county sales tax.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Introduced



Week in Review

Friday, February 26, 2021

ABORTION

A recent study has found that legislative and legal attempts to limit abortion access has helped fuel beliefs that abortion is illegal in Ohio. Maria Gallo, the study's lead author and a professor of epidemiology at Ohio State University (OSU), said these repeated legislative attempts at restrictions on abortion, the veto by one governor and support of another, and court actions on the legislation were confusing, even to her.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine said his administration plans to allow Ohio's professional baseball and soccer teams to fill their stadiums to 30 percent capacity at the beginning of their seasons but said he and local health departments will also want to see teams' COVID mitigation plans.

The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission voted 3-0 Thursday to approve an agreement related to FC Cincinnati's new stadium project. The commission approved a cooperative use agreement with the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority for the project.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The House Finance Higher Education Subcommittee received budget testimony from the Ohio Attorney General's Office Wednesday, with Director of Policy and Legislation Mike Rodgers requesting additional changes in state law be enacted through HB110 (Oelslager) as well. The office's current request is for \$383 million in FY22 and \$386 million in FY23, Rodgers said. They currently have around 1,490 full-time staff and 28 part-time employees.

FY22-23 BUDGET

The House Finance Committee wasted little time after reconvening Thursday afternoon in accepting a substitute version of transportation budget bill, HB74 (Oelslager). This sets the stage for the bill's final trajectory for action in the House with Speaker of the House Bob Cupp (R-Lima) telling reporters a vote is expected in committee on Wednesday, March 3 with the bill on the House floor on Thursday, March 4.

A casualty of the sub bill is the governor's touted distracted driver provisions. Other major changes in the include the removal of all

fee increases targeted for funding for the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Instead, the proposal provides an additional \$35 million per year in General Revenue Funds (GRF) "solely for highway patrol operating costs." In addition, sub HB74 doubles the proposed funding for public transportation, House Finance Committee Chair Scott Oelslager (D-North Canton) said, "taking it to \$193.7 million over the next two years, specifically \$46.3 million GRF, \$66 million flex funds and \$81.4 million in FTA funding over the biennium."

The House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee's continuing review of the school financing bill, HB1 (Callender-Sweeney), focused on transportation issues and overall funding Thursday after discussion on categorical aid and charter schools Wednesday. Specifically, the subcommittee heard presentations Wednesday on funding proposals for categorical aid, charter schools and other costs beyond the base expenses in the formula. Several members of the working group of local education officials who helped write the plan provided testimony covering several topics including economically disadvantaged assistance, special education, gifted education, English learners, career-technical education, educational service centers, open enrollment, charter schools and vouchers, among others.

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced recently that 16,018 new business filings were filed with the Ohio Secretary of State Business Services Division, a 33 percent increase from January 2020.

CORONAVIRUS

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) released more details Friday about a series of virtual townhall meetings Gov. Mike DeWine recently announced to provide information about the COVID-19 vaccine. Each of the four town halls is designed for a specific population, but all four are open to anyone. They will feature panelists including medical experts, faith leaders, public health professionals and community leaders from those specific populations. The events and their target audiences are as follows: Monday, Feb. 22, 6:30 p.m., African-American Ohioans; Tuesday, Feb. 23, 6:30 p.m., Hispanic/Latino Ohioans; Monday, March 1, 6:30 p.m., Asian-American and Pacific-Islander Ohioans; Tuesday, March 2, 6:30 p.m., Rural Ohioans. Links for watching the events are available at www.coronavirus.ohio.gov/townhall.

Gov. Mike DeWine again reiterated it will take "weeks" to meet vaccine demand for those 65 and older, but said Monday that once that's done, the administration plans to expand vaccine eligibility again in five-year increments, sequentially adding those 60 and older, 55 and older and 50 and older.

Gov. Mike DeWine Tuesday announced he was ordering the flags of the United States and the state of Ohio to be flown at half-staff upon all public buildings and grounds throughout the state until sunset on Friday, Feb. 26. The lowering is in remembrance of the more than 500,000 Americans who have died due to COVID-19, including more than 14,000 Ohioans.

Gov. Mike DeWine said Thursday that his administration will be releasing guidance in the coming days on how spring events such as proms, graduations, and fairs can be held as restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are eased. DeWine said during his Thursday press conference that the guidance will be based on what his administration knows about the spread of the virus through Ohio. He said while the next few months will be critical in containing the virus as vaccinations continue, and there are still concerns about the variants of the virus that are appearing in the U.S. and around the globe, they are optimistic that these events can be held.

DISASTERS

The Ohio National Guard has been activated again -- this time to assist with debris removal in Lawrence and Gallia counties following recent snow and ice storms over the last two weeks. Gov. Mike DeWine activated the guard Friday afternoon, Feb. 19, when members of the 1191st Engineer Company in Portsmouth were sent to assist local authorities with the removal of downed trees that are interfering with work to restore power and are obstructing area ditches, creeks, and streams.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for five projects expected to create 1,382 new jobs and retain 978 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The projects are expected to collectively result in more than \$80 million in new payroll and spur more than \$51 million in investments across Ohio.

EDUCATION

The federal government will not accept states' requests to waive academic testing requirements for the spring as it did last year, but will offer flexibility in testing administration. In a letter to state education leaders, the acting assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), Ian Rosenblum, wrote that testing data is important for families, educators and the public in understanding the effects of the pandemic on children, identifying inequities and directing resources.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced Tuesday that campaign contribution limits will be increased over the next two years after a rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). There are various categories for contributions, including contributing to a political party, campaign committee, party candidate fund, and political action committee (PAC). For example, the new contribution limit from an individual to any one candidate committee is now \$13,704.41, up from the limit of \$13,292.35 for the past two years.

ELECTIONS 2021

Reps. Bride Sweeney (D-Cleveland) and Michele Lepore-Hagan (D-Youngstown) Monday announced they are introducing legislation that would require counties to have multiple, secure ballot drop boxes, based on geography and population, seeking to overrule a recent directive by Secretary of State Frank LaRose limiting drop boxes to just one.

ENERGY AND UTILITIES

Gov. Mike DeWine reappointed Dennis Deters to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Friday, Feb. 19 and also received a second list of nominees for former Chairman Sam Randazzo's seat after rejecting the first batch. New candidates include former Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Jenifer French; Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Analytical Department Director Daniel Shields of Westerville (Independent); Marathon Petroleum Refining Sustainability Manager Virginia King of Perrysburg (Republican); and Environmental Review Appeals Commission (ERAC) Chairwoman Melissa Shilling of Johnstown (Republican).

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) opened a larger conversation this week on Senate President Matt Huffman's (R-Lima) Governing Board presentation in view of the General Assembly's reexamination of state utility policy enacted in pre-"fracking" energy omnibus 127-SB221 and amended in energy subsidy bill 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin).

The guilt of a dark-money group connected to former House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) is now complete. U.S. District Judge Timothy Black has delayed sentencing of the 501(c)4 Generation Now as additional racketeer-influenced corrupt organization (RICO) charges proceed against the former speaker but still sitting House member and several Statehouse lobbyists, but Black entered a plea deal and \$1.5 million forfeiture Friday negotiated by the U.S. Attorney's Office and signed by Generation Now President Jeffrey Longstreth over two weeks ago.

Proponents and opponents of HB128 (Hoops-Stein) are asking lawmakers to add language repealing the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) provision that requires guaranteed cost recovery for Ohio Valley Electric Corporation (OVEC) coal plants in Ohio and Indiana through 2030.

Senate President Matt Huffman's (R-Lima) divide-and-conquer strategy to upend various provisions of 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) by isolating no votes with "piecemeal" legislation made its second move Tuesday in committee passage of SB44's (Rulli-Cirino) repealed nuclear bailout. The Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee made short work of the bill despite a long list of tabled Democrat amendments to revoke other portions of 133-HB6, refund all utility charges declared unlawful by the Ohio Supreme Court, and require at least one member of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to represent consumer interests, among other proposed changes.

ENVIRONMENT

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) assessment that 2020 was the second-hottest year on record highlights the need for government action on climate change, according to the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC). "NOAA's report on 2020 being the second hottest year on record -- especially as carbon dioxide emissions decreased as a result of COVID-19 -- underscores the damage we've already done to our climate and the need to prioritize and implement pragmatic solutions," OEC Director of Climate Programs Sarah Spence told *Hannah News*.

GAMING/GAMBLING

All casinos have resumed 24-hour operations since Gov. Mike DeWine lifted the administration's coronavirus curfew, Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) Executive Director Matt Schuler said during a recent commission meeting.

As lottery retail agents, grocery stores should be allowed to offer sports gambling products when those games are legalized in the state, Joe Ewig of the Ohio Grocers Association (OGA) told the Senate Select Committee on Gaming on Wednesday.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Wednesday's Senate session included passage of SB3 (Roegner), to have Ohio join the Nurse Licensure Compact; SB30 (Dolan), establishing Aug. 31 as "Ohio Overdose Awareness Day;" SB57 (Hackett-Antonio), regarding property tax exemptions for permanent supportive housing; and SB19 (Schaffer), regarding property tax exemptions for wetlands projects.

Legislation that would require most state agencies to reduce the number of regulatory restrictions contained in its administrative rules by 30 percent by June 30, 2025 was reported out of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee on Wednesday. Lawmakers voted 4-2 along party lines to move SB9 (McColley-Roegner) after hearing opponent testimony from Robert Schutz of the Ohio Building Officials' Association (OBOA).

Leading off the first meeting of the House Technology and Innovation Committee, Chair Mark Fraizer (R-Newark) said advances in technology have created difficulties in keeping up with what is required, and that the committee can "make progress in streamlining, simplifying and reducing the cost of ownership and encouraging our state to adopt current technology and best practices." While the committee did not hear testimony on bills Wednesday, it did hear presentations from Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Director Matt Damschroder and Ervan Rodgers, who serves as state chief information officer (CIO) and assistant director of DAS.

Reps. Thomas West (D-Canton) and Casey Weinstein (D-Hudson) Wednesday announced new legislation that they said would address and seek to discourage false and racially motivated 9-1-1 calls. West said in a press conference that the two lawmakers have been working on the bill since last session and felt it was important to bring it forward this General Assembly.

The House approved two bills related to substance abuse at its session Thursday, one meant to address a shortage of treatment professionals and the other to stem misuse of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines. The chamber also approved updates to Ohio's program to allow victims of abuse to keep their personal information confidential and a revision to the statute of limitations on written and oral contracts.

A temporary statue of John Glenn will soon be erected inside the Ohio Statehouse near the Map Room following action by the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) on Thursday. The statue, which was approved for placement in the Statehouse from Monday, March 1 through Tuesday, March 1, 2022, will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the former astronaut's historic achievement of becoming the first American to orbit the Earth. Glenn also would've turned 100 years old on July 18, said Rep. Adam Holmes (R-Nashport), who proposed the idea to CSRAB.

In other action during the first CSRAB meeting since July 2020, the board approved three new "Great Ohioans" after they were recommended by the Capitol Square Foundation -- Larry Doby, Toni Morrison and Carl Stokes. CSRAB also approved a new administrative rule outlining a procedure to remove a commemorative work from Capitol Square.

The new House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee held its first meeting Thursday. Members heard presentations from mental health advocates and industry experts about the mental health and addiction recovery landscape. Chair Rep. Sara Carruthers (R-Hamilton) said she knows the committee "will do some wonderful things for Ohio," and the enthusiasm for the newly introduced committee was echoed by other committee members as well as the presenters.

In other legislation action, House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB7 (Grendell-Stewart), regarding probate law, guardianship and the trust code; House Ways and Means Committee reported out HB51 (Lampton), regarding valuation adjustments for destroyed property; and HB66 (Hoops), regarding a review of property tax exemptions; House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB6 (Roemer), regarding changes to laws governing certain professions as a result of COVID-19; Senate Health Committee reported out SB42 (Schaffer), to designate the second week of November as "Ohio Diabetes Awareness-Heart Connection Week;" and Senate Insurance Committee reported out SB27 (Hottinger), regarding state employee deferred compensation.

GOVERNOR

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Jill T. McGruder of Cincinnati (Hamilton Co.) to the University of Cincinnati Board of Trustees for a term beginning Feb. 25, 2021 and ending Jan. 1, 2030.
- Dawn M. Conway of Oakwood (Montgomery Co.) to the Wright State University Board of Trustees for a term beginning Feb. 22, 2021 and ending June 30, 2029.
- Dennis P. Deters of Cincinnati (Hamilton Co.) reappointed to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio for a term beginning April 11, 2021 and ending April 10, 2026.
- Frances S. Buchholzer of Akron (Summit Co.) to the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission for a term beginning Feb. 19, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.
- James E. Kunk of Dublin (Franklin Co.) to the Public Employees Retirement System Board of Trustees for a term beginning Feb. 19, 2021 and ending Sept. 27, 2024.
- Melanie Hogan of Lakewood (Cuyahoga Co.), David W. Bertsch of Munroe Falls (Summit Co.) and James Russell of Toledo (Lucas Co.) to the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council for terms beginning February 19, 2021 and ending Oct. 26, 2023.
- Christopher T. Dobeck of Munson (Geauga Co.) has been appointed to the State Auctioneers Commission for a term beginning Feb. 19, 2021 and ending Oct. 9, 2022.
- Keenan B. McKee of Eaton (Preble Co.) has been reappointed to the Ohio Board of Motor Vehicle Repair for a term beginning Feb. 19, 2021 and ending Jan. 1, 2024.
- Scott A. Myers of Sharon Center (Medina Co.) has been appointed to the State Veterinary Medical Licensing Board for a term beginning Feb. 19, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2023.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Research from the Center for Community Solutions (CCS) shows how "benefit cliffs," the point in which a person would lose public benefits if he or she received a wage increase, keep low-income families and individuals from financial independence. Emily Campbell, associate director at CCS, discussed her federally sponsored research on the topic during the organization's Friday webinar.

Despite significant improvements in Ohio's long-term care system in recent years, there are still areas where the state faces challenges, including maintaining staff levels and safety at nursing homes, according to representatives of aging advocacy nonprofit AARP during a webinar conducted Monday. According to Bob Applebaum, a Ph.D. professor at Miami University whose research focuses on aging care, Ohio's score on the AARP Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) scorecard improved from a dismal 44th in the nation in 2014 to 19th in the nation in 2020.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Wright State University (WSU) announced Friday that its Board of Trustees voted to approve a plan to eliminate up to 113 "excess" faculty positions at the university's Dayton campus, citing declining enrollment. The university also announced the appointment of Oliver H. Evans as interim provost to replace Douglas Leaman, who left for a position at Auburn University at Montgomery.

Nearly six months into her time as president of Ohio State University (OSU), Kristina Johnson said she wants to make OSU the nation's best "21st-century land-grant institution" during her first State of the University address.

Ohio University (OU) announced it will host a virtual fireside chat with Hillary Clinton and her daughter Chelsea Clinton on Tuesday, March 2 at 4 p.m. The event is part of the university's celebration of Women's History Month. During "A Fireside Chat with Secretary Hillary Clinton and Chelsea Clinton," the Clintons will discuss their book, *The Book of Gutsy Women: Favorite Stories of Courage and Resilience*, and women in leadership in the 21st century.

The University of Cincinnati (UC) announced it received a \$1 million gift from alumnus Robert J. Herbold to establish the Robert J. Herbold Fellowship Endowment Fund at the UC College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS).

Ohio State University (OSU) announced Thursday that it is planning for a "reactivation" of its campuses this fall to offer "in-person experiences significantly expanded from current restrictions."

JUDICIAL

Gov. Mike DeWine's office announced the following three judicial appointments Friday: Eric Allen Marks as a Lucas County Common Pleas Court judge, to replace Judge Myron Duhart, who was elected to the Sixth District Court of Appeals. Marks will take the bench Monday, March 1 and must run in November 2022 to complete the term ending Dec. 31, 2024. Michael King was appointed judge on the Franklin County Municipal Court to replace Judge William Pollitt, who died last year. King will take office Monday, March 1. The term of office will expire in January of 2022, so King will need to run for election this year for a new term to remain on the bench. In addition, DeWine appointed Michelle Fisher to the Ashtabula County Court to replace Judge David Schroeder, who was elected to the Ashtabula County Common Pleas Court. Fisher will take office Monday, March 1. The term of office will expire at the end of 2022, and Fisher will need to run for election next year for a new term to remain on the bench.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Mayors Alliance announced its board appointed members to two recently formed committees, the Mayors and Police Chief Leadership Committee and the Mayors Education Advocacy Committee.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Jason Lagore, a state natural resources officer, died while responding to a call at Rocky Fork State Park on Tuesday, Feb. 23, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Gov. Mike DeWine ordered flags lowered in honor of his life and service.

PENSIONS

The state's six public retirement plans fell by an average of about 3.8 percent in the first two quarters ending June 30, 2020, RVK President Jim Voytko told the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) on Thursday.

PEOPLE

Angelika McClelland is the new deputy director for public affairs for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), the agency announced.

The League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus announced Monday that Amy Klaben will receive its 2021 Democracy In Action award, which is the league's highest honor and is awarded in recognition for outstanding participation in civic affairs. According to the league, Klaben has spent her career addressing the lack of affordable housing in Central Ohio. For 16 years she was the CEO of Homeport; then in 2017 she started the Move to Prosper program, which makes affordable rental housing in high opportunity areas available to low-income, single parent households.

POLITICS

Former Rep. John Becker, a Clermont County Republican recently term-limited out of the House, said Friday he's seeking to become chair of the Ohio Republican Party (ORP). Jane Timken resigned the role recently to enter the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Rob Portman, who is not seeking re-election in 2022. Becker said he sent a letter and resume to Republican State Central Committee members asking them to engage in a "fair process" for considering candidates at the Friday, Feb. 26 meeting.

POVERTY

Sen. Tim Schaffer's (R-Lancaster) SB17 would further harm Ohioans that are already struggling to make ends meet during the COVID-19 pandemic, a long line of opponents told the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee on Wednesday. Ten opponents testified in person, while more than 30 others provided written testimony in opposition to the bill, which they said would unnecessarily erect more barriers for poor Ohioans seeking to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and unemployment compensation.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) Superintendent Richard Fambro Tuesday discussed the OSHP's work and legislative priorities with

the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, saying they had never faced so many "enormous opposing obstacles simultaneously and on multiple fronts" as they did in 2020. Those included the pandemic and civil unrest, Fambro explained.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Controlling Board approved all items on its agenda Monday after a few questions from lawmakers about requests on Ohio State Highway Patrol security costs and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' plans for a new park in Xenia, among others.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission recently continued its modernization of its toll collection system, migrating data over to a new E-ZPass customer care system. Executive Director Ferzan Ahmed told the commission that the new system, which was designed and implemented by contractor TransCore over the last two years, manages the accounts of Ohio's E-ZPass customers and exchanges information with other tolling authorities to make electronic tolling possible.

Dean Ringle, executive director of the County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO), gave a presentation on county engineers' duties and the association's legislative priorities to the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee Tuesday. Those include preparing construction plans, specifications and estimates for improvements to all county roads; advising townships on road improvements and maintenance; inspecting and maintaining bridges; and overseeing new commercial and residential construction projects in unincorporated areas for conformance to public street construction standards as well as grading and erosion control requirements.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

For the week ending Saturday, Feb. 20, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 101,825 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That is lower than the 140,000-plus jobless claims reported in each of the last two weeks, but still much higher than the 47,786 reported three weeks ago. ODJFS has flagged tens of thousands of claims for potential fraud.

The Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council received another update from Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Director Kimberly Henderson Thursday, along with presentations by Gregory Gantt, chairman of the Unemployment Compensation Review Council (UCRC), and Zach Schiller, research director of Policy Matters Ohio (PMO). Henderson discussed progress on system updates, saying there were 900,000 monetary updates that needed to be made, and that the auditor of state's office has received information for their review. She recommended the council co-chairs, Rep. Mark Fraizer (R-Newark) and Sen. Bob Hackett (R-London), set additional clarity for the scope of the audit and that ODJFS will pay the cost of the audit.

UTILITIES

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is ordering Columbia Gas of Ohio to pay a \$250,000 forfeiture after enforcement officials blamed a pattern of maintenance failures for the utility's high-pressure alarms in Lawrence County and Zanesville and the deadly explosion of a Columbia Gas of Massachusetts gas line that killed one person, injured 22 others, destroyed five homes and damaged more than 130 structures in 2018.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The Bureau of Workers' Compensation Board of Directors held two meetings in executive session this week to interview potential investment consultants.

Interim Administrator of the Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) John Logue Wednesday unpacked the proposed budget for his agency, HB75 (Oelslager), for the House Insurance Committee, presaging the purpose for the special meeting Friday, Feb. 26 of the BWC Board of Directors: he told Rep. Mark Fraizer (R-Newark) that the board will be acting on the most recent rate recommendation, which will reduce the premium for private employers by 7.1 percent.