



1. Transportation budget clears Senate

The Ohio Senate passed House Bill 51 this week, which was amended to combine the transportation budget and turnpike bonding proposal previously separated in the House. The proposal will allow \$1.5 billion in bonds to be issued on the Ohio Turnpike, which will generate \$1.5 billion in federal and local matching dollars.

The bill was heavily amended in committee and the following changes are among those adopted:

- Freeze E-ZPass rates for trips of 30 miles or less for 10 years.
- Permit deputy registrars to sell equipment for E-ZPass participation.
- Increase the maximum speed limit to 70 mph on interstate freeways outside of urban areas.
- Remove language added in the House to increase overweight vehicle limits to 90,000 from 80,000 lbs.
- Permit license plates made from aluminum, plastic or other suitable materials. Current law requires the use of steel.
- Repeal a provision of current law that prohibits the Ohio Department of Transportation from providing funds to more than five transportation improvement districts.
- Permit a port authority created before July 9, 1982 to loan funds and contract with governmental entities for certain services. The change makes the law consistent with port authorities created after July 9, 1982.

The House did not agree to the Senate amendments and the bill will now go to conference committee. The committee includes three legislators from both chambers. A committee report is expected by the end of next week.

2. PUCO chair discusses renewable and energy efficiency standards

The Senate Public Utilities Committee heard testimony from Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Chairman Todd Snitchler on March 12, 2013. The committee is undertaking a review of Ohio's energy efficiency, peak demand reduction and alternative energy resource provisions established in Senate Bill 221 of the 127th General Assembly. In response to submissions his office received from interested parties, Chairman Bill Seitz (R- Cincinnati) has introduced Senate Bill 58 as placeholder language to review and possibly modify the standards. Snitchler provided the committee with an overview of SB 221 provisions, which were slightly modified in Senate Bill 315 from last spring. The revised code requires that 25 percent of retail electricity sold by Electric Distribution Utilities (EDU) in the state be generated from alternative resources by 2025. Half may be produced from advanced energy resources, such as clean coal or fuel cells and half must be provided by renewable resources, such as solar or biomass. According to Snitchler, EDUs are currently on pace to meet the renewable benchmarks. Additionally, SB 221 requires EDUs to meet an energy efficiency benchmark of a 22 percent reduction by 2025, as well as a peak demand reduction of 7.75 percent. Snitchler said Ohio EDUs achieved nearly 3.1 million MWh of savings through energy efficiency from 2009 to 2011. In recognizing efforts to freeze the energy efficiency requirement during lame duck, which were led by FirstEnergy, Snitchler said he looked forward to committee discussion on the topic. "Our goal is to have a vibrant marketplace where suppliers can align their product offerings with customer demands, ensuring consumers can best control how their utility dollars are spent," said Snitchler.

The committee will meet March 19, 2013 and hear a presentation from Andrew Ott, senior vice president of markets for PJM. Additionally, a panel discussion on renewables will include discussion from representatives of the Industrial Energy Users, American Electric Power, Heartland Institute, Solar Energy Industries Association, Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the Mid-Atlantic Renewable Energy Coalition.

3. Governor's Executive Workforce Board discusses forecasting

Governor John Kasich joined his Executive Workforce Board this week to discuss a forecasting tool intended to identify skills and job needs for the state. Richard Stoff, president of the Ohio Business Roundtable, provided an overview of the Ohio Workforce Information Exchange, a survey tool created by Accenture, which allows employers to create a profile and input forecasting needs for up to five years. The information collected through online data collection will be aggregated by region and industry sector. Forecasting data will be shared with Ohio's colleges, universities and career technical schools to better align course offerings with industry needs. The roundtable is piloting the tool with about 25 of its members, which include some of Ohio's largest employers. The board will open up the program through OhioMeansJobs.com in the coming months.

The board also heard from John Bishop, CEO of Motorists Insurance Group who discussed the upcoming talent gap facing Ohio's insurance industry. According to Bishop, due to a large number of baby boomers in the profession, there will be roughly 17,000 retirees in the near future. To address the imminent need for new hires, the industry has begun to raise awareness with key audiences of career opportunities. They are also working with the higher education community to develop risk management insurance course offerings to ensure a ready workforce.

4. Governor Kasich makes leadership change at state development department

The governor this week announced that David Goodman, current director of the Department of Commerce, will replace Christiane Schmenk as head of the Development Services Agency (DSA) effective March 18. According to the governor's press release, Schmenk is leaving to pursue a position outside the agency. "David's led very capably at Commerce, he has earned my confidence and he has the right skill set to take DSA to the next level as Ohio continues to get back on its feet and create more jobs," said Governor Kasich.

Goodman was appointed by Governor Kasich to lead the Department of Commerce in January 2011. He previously served as a state senator and representative from Franklin County.

5. Opportunity available for BWC discount plan

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Enrollment is under way for "Destination: Excellence," a workers' compensation discount plan that rewards Ohio employers for helping prevent workplace injuries and getting those employees who are injured back to work. The cafeteria-style plan was introduced by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) last year. More than 100,000 employers participated and are expected to achieve an aggregate savings of roughly \$41 million. The program is designed to help Ohio employers focus on safety, accident prevention and return-to-work opportunities to bring injured workers back to work sooner. A package of BWC programs are offered in the plan, which allows employers to customize their own risk-management program – rewarding their investment in accident prevention, cost control and policy management.

The deadline to apply is April 30 and the effective date is July 1. Contact our government affairs team to learn more about the program.

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