Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission
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John R. Kasich, Governor • Jerry N. Hruby, Chairman

Joint Legislative Task Force on Department of Transportation Issues – October 7, 2015

Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission Testimony – Randy Cole, Executive Director

Chairperson Manning, Chairperson Grossman and members of the Committee, my name is Randy Cole, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. We are here at the request of the Chairs to provide information to consider as the Committee reviews the proposed 75 mile per hour speed limit on rural highways and sections of highways in the State of Ohio.

Since 1955, the Commission has operated the Ohio Turnpike, a modern, limited-access highway, which extends 241 miles across northern Ohio. The entire Turnpike was incorporated by the Federal Highway Administration into the Interstate Highway System with sections designated as Interstate Routes 76, 80 and 90.

The Commission is a body both corporate and politic and is an instrumentality of the State of Ohio. The 10-member Commission, chaired by Mayor Jerry N. Hruby of Brecksville, determines toll rates, collects revenues, controls disbursements and has title to all assets, except for title to real estate, which the Commission purchases in the name of the State of Ohio.

As you might expect, the safety of our travelers and employees is our top concern. Since the implementation of the 70 mile per hour speed limit on the Ohio Turnpike in April of 2011, there has been a 14.47 percent increase in fatal crashes.

We believe this increase to be the result of multiple factors, including some severe winter weather events during the period from April of 2011 to April of 2015 (as seen on the chart on page 5). The Commission has observed that even when faced with adverse and dangerous weather conditions, a majority of drivers do not slow down for the conditions.

In 2006, the average driver had a five percent chance of being involved in a crash. A recent study presented at the University of California at Berkeley found that for every one percent increase in speed, a driver's chance of a crash increases by two percent, the chance of serious injury increases by three percent, and the chance of a fatality increases by about four percent. From this study alone, it is reasonable to conclude that changing the speed limit to 75 miles per hour will result in more crashes on the Ohio Turnpike.

Another major factor of immediate concern is that distracted driving crashes have risen sharply in recent years – and the higher the speed, the greater the risk, which is a major factor in the Commission's preference for the Turnpike speed limit to remain at 70 miles per hour.

A 2009 Virginia Tech Transportation Institute study shows that for every 6 seconds of drive time, a driver sending or receiving a text message spends 4.6 of those seconds with their eyes off the road. So, given what we know about observed driver behavior and speed limits, if the speed limit is 75 miles per hour, passenger cars will be traveling a minimum of 80 miles per hour on average (See data referencing speed surveys). This means that drivers texting behind the wheel will blindly drive more than 500 feet every time they glance down at their phone, while only looking up at the road for one single second to make sure they're staying between the lines and not following too closely.

There are three types of noted driver distractions: 1. Visual distractions- anything that takes your eyes off the road, 2. Manual distractions- anything that takes your hands off the steering wheel; and, 3. Cognitive distractions- anything that takes your mind off driving. Unfortunately, cell phone use (especially smart phones and texting) combines all three into one highly dangerous and potentially deadly distraction. Did anyone on the Committee happen to see *60 Minutes* Sunday night? Driver distraction is one reason why Google and major auto manufacturers are making significant investments in driverless car technology. Drivers are getting worse, not better.

On the topic of distracted driving I have one more important point: According to research completed by the University of Utah, using a cell phone while driving delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent**.**

Distance covered based on speed

MPH	Distance covered in 1.0 sec.	Distance covered in 2.0 sec.	Distance covered in 4.6 sec.
55	81 ft.	161 ft.	371 ft.
60	88 ft.	176 ft.	405 ft.
65	95 ft.	191 ft.	439 ft.
70	103 ft.	205 ft.	472 ft.
75	110 ft.	220 ft.	506 ft.
80	117 ft.	235 ft.	540 ft.

A 1983 engineering study confirmed the Ohio Turnpike meets the requirements for a 70 mile per hour design speed. As part of the Commission's Pavement Replacement Program, we are currently evaluating and upgrading acceleration and deceleration ramps to the current 70 miles per hour design speed. However, during the Ohio Turnpike's 60-year history, the speed limit has never been higher than 70 miles per hour. More importantly, the Ohio Turnpike has never been evaluated for a 75 mile per hour speed limit, which means raising the speed limit without an evaluation, will put more drivers and more employees, especially in work zones, at greater risk. Again, it is our preference that the Ohio Turnpike speed limit remains at 70 miles per hour.

As evidenced by Ohio State Highway Patrol aviation speed surveys conducted on the Ohio Turnpike (in the chart below) posting a higher uniform speed limit does not necessarily create a uniform speed limit; in fact, raising all speeds will result in a wider variation of speeds between passenger and commercial vehicles. As the chart indicates, commercial vehicles maintained virtually the same speed of 67-68 miles per hour even after the speed limit for all vehicles was raised to 70 miles per hour in April of 2011.

If the speed limit were to be raised to 75 miles per hour, it remains to be seen whether commercial vehicles would be inclined to change their typically governed rate of speed to achieve maximum fuel efficiency. In our estimation, it is reasonable to conclude that increasing the speed limit again will further exacerbate the variable speed limit as observed by the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

	65 MPH		70 MPH	
	2006	2010	2011	2014
Passenger	74.0 MPH (+9)	74.8 MPH (+9.8)	76.8 MPH (+6.8)	76.7 MPH (+6.7)
Commercial	67.0 MPH (+2)	66.1 MPH (+1.1)	67.9 MPH (-2.1)	68.0 MPH (-2.0)

Another concern of the Commission is that the Ohio Turnpike is the only road in the State of Ohio that permits long combination vehicles (L-C-Vs), including triple-trailers, as well as commercial trucks up to 90,000 pounds without a special permit. There were 103,217 trips by these LCVs on the Ohio Turnpike between January 1st, 2015 and August 31st, 2015.

During this same period, LCVs *weighing more than 100,000 pounds* made 26,023 trips on the Ohio Turnpike, and 30.3 percent of vehicle miles travelled were by commercial vehicles – or, about one third of all traffic, whereas commercial traffic on parallel interstates makes up about one fourth of total miles travelled.

The presence of a greater number of heavy and long-combination vehicles on the Ohio Turnpike is another important factor to consider especially given the fact that a greater variation in speed between commercial vehicles and passenger vehicles can be expected if the speed limit is raised to 75 miles per hour.

I'd like to bring up a consideration for the task force to consider about care in drafting any proposals. The previously proposed amendment to Section 5537.16 would have overridden the JCARR approved rule (O.A.C. 5537-2-03) allowing the Commission to reduce the speed where hazardous conditions warrant (i.e. construction zones, weather-related events and incident-based situations). With increases in technology and ability to communicate with drivers, we have been working with the Ohio State Highway Patrol to explore options for decreasing the speed limit and notify travelers of a change in speed limit if hazardous conditions exist. It is therefore critical for the Commission to be able to maintain its ability to adjust its speed limit when necessary for the safety of the traveling public.

To summarize the Commission's concerns:

For the safety of our employees and travelers, due to the many reasons I've already stated, we would prefer the speed limit remains 70 miles per hour. Additionally, it's important to maintain a uniform speed limit for passenger cars and commercial vehicles, as disparity in traffic speeds have proven to increase crashes. Similarly, we would prefer to maintain a uniform speed limit across all 241 miles of the Ohio Turnpike, as we are a mostly straight and flat, completely restricted-access rural highway. This uniformity, regardless of geographic location or surrounding population density, is also easier to enforce and communicate to our customers; of which about one third are out-of-state truckers and travelers. Lastly, due to construction, dangerous weather and other potential adverse conditions, the Commission must maintain its ability to adjust its own speeds for the safety of its travelers.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I'd be glad to answer any questions that you may have.

Comparison of crash statistics of 65 mph limits vs. 70 mph limits

Analysis Period	Date	Speed Limit (Truck/Passenger)	Fatal Crash	Fatal Crash Average	Percent Change	Injury Crash	Injury Crash Average	Percent Change	Property Damage Crash	Property Damage Crash Average	Percent Change	Total	Total Average	Percent Change
Before	2008-04-01 to 2009-04-01	65/65	7	6.33	14.47%	441	424.00	9.14%	1917	1885.67	12.60%	2,365	2316.00	11.97%
	2009-04-01 to 2010-04-01	65/65	6			416			1727			2,149		
	2010-04-01 to 2011-04-01	65/65	6			415			2013			2434		
After	2011-04-01 to 2012-04-01	70/70	6	7.25		491	462.75		2082	2123.25		2579	2593.25	
	2012-04-01 to 2013-04-01	70/70	5			446			2100			2551		
	2013-04-01 to 2014-04-01	70/70	11			498			2284			2793		
	2014-04-01 to 2015-04-01	70/70	7			416			2027			2450		