DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Airport funding

- Creates the Ohio Airport Improvement Program Fund to be administered by the Department of Transportation (ODOT) Office of Aviation.

Regional transportation improvement projects (RTIP)

- Authorizes the expansion of the membership of an RTIP governing board to include the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the JobsOhio network partner that covers the majority of the area encompassed by the RTIP or the CEO's designee.

Ohio Maritime Assistance Program

- Expands the grant eligibility criteria under the Ohio Maritime Assistance Program.

Rail infrastructure funding

- Appropriates $6 million, from the Ohio Highway and Transportation Safety Fund, to fund short-line rail development infrastructure projects that enhance capacity and improve safety.

U.S. Route 23 and I-71 connector

- Modifies the requirement that ODOT and the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission create a joint plan regarding the feasibility of connecting U.S. Route 23 and I-71 that was enacted through H.B. 54 of the 136th General Assembly.

Drones for First Responders Pilot Program

- Requires the ODOT Director to establish a Drones for First Responders Pilot Program.
- Specifies the goals for the program, including acquisition of unmanned aerial vehicle systems (UAVS) for first responders, training on those systems, obtaining necessary federal approvals for beyond visual line of sight operations, and integrating state infrastructure.
- Conditions the purchase of any UAVS on their compliance with federal laws and regulations, including those involving national security and defense spending.

Airport funding

(R.C. 4561.03)

The act creates the Ohio Airport Improvement Program Fund within the state treasury. The fund consists of money appropriated to it by the General Assembly. The fund must be used by the Office of Aviation to support the Ohio Airport Improvement Program, which was

administratively created by that Office. That program provides financial support to publicly owned, public-use airports in Ohio. All investment earnings of the fund must be credited to it.

Regional transportation improvement projects (RTIP)

(R.C. 5595.02)

Continuing law authorizes the boards of county commissioners of two or more counties to enter into a cooperative agreement creating a regional transportation improvement project (RTIP). To administer the cooperative agreement that creates an RTIP, a governing board must be created made up of a county commissioner and county engineer from each participating county, or their designees. The act authorizes the expansion of the governing board's membership by allowing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the JobsOhio network partner that covers the majority of the area encompassed by the RTIP, or that CEO's designee, to serve as an additional member.

Ohio Maritime Assistance Program

(R.C. 5501.91)

The act expands the grant eligibility criteria under the Ohio Maritime Assistance Program by doing both of the following:

- Allowing a port authority to apply for a grant without owning an active marine cargo terminal, provided the port authority is a co-applicant with an owner of such a terminal; and
- Allowing an applicant's active marine cargo terminal to be located on an Ohio River tributary, in addition to the shore of Lake Erie or the Ohio River or a tributary of Lake Erie as in continuing law.

Under continuing law, the grants are also available to a port authority that is located in, or has jurisdiction within, a federally qualified opportunity zone with an active marine cargo terminal with a stevedoring operation that is located on the shore of Lake Erie or the Ohio River.

Rail infrastructure funding

(R.C. 5747.502(F)(2); Sections 411.10 and 411.20)

The act appropriates $6 million for the Department of Transportation (ODOT), in conjunction with the Ohio Rail Commission, to identify and fund short-line rail development infrastructure projects that enhance capacity and improve safety. The funds are transferred from the Ohio Highway and Transportation Safety Fund (Fund 5XI0), which consists of Local Government Fund (LGF) money withheld from local governments that collect civil traffic camera fines.

U.S. Route 23 and I-71 connector

(Sections 610.20 and 610.21)

The act modifies the requirement, enacted earlier in 2025, that ODOT and the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission (OTIC) create a joint plan regarding the feasibility of connecting U.S. Route 23 and I-71. The modifications to the plan include all the following:

- Splitting the plan into two components, an interim report and a final joint plan;
- Specifying that the interim report must conceptually identify and evaluate the corridor alternatives and alignments;
- Authorizing ODOT and OTIC to consider alignments that were not part of the original specific list;
- Making the interim report due October 1, 2025, rather than the full plan due by September 30, 2025;
- Requiring the final joint plan to identify a preferred route for the connecting corridor, include all preliminary engineering assessments (design, cost estimates, right-of-way, and environmental impacts, etc.), and recommend whether final implementation should be through ODOT or OTIC; and
- Extending the deadline for the final joint plan to October 1, 2026.[163]

Drones for First Responders Pilot Program

(Sections 411.10, 411.20, and 755.20)

The act requires the Director of Transportation (ODOT Director) to establish a Drones for First Responders Pilot Program, to be administered by ODOT. The program must focus on the following goals:

- Acquiring unmanned aerial vehicle systems (UAVS) for first responders (law enforcement, fire departments, and emergency medical service organizations) within municipal corporations;
- Providing training on the operation of UAVS to those first responders;
- Obtaining approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for beyond visual line of sight operations (BVLOS) for purposes of the program;
- Integrating existing UAVS and state infrastructure for purposes of BVLOS under the program;
- Collecting metrics for cost-benefit analyses related to the advanced UAVS operations;

[163] For more information about the joint plan, see the end of page 22 of the LSC Final Analysis for H.B. 54 (PDF), which is available on the General Assembly's website: legislature.ohio.gov.

- Developing a comprehensive approach for community acceptance and integration of UAVS; and
- Standardizing the approval process with the FAA for UAVS operators in Ohio.

The ODOT Director, in addition to establishing any administrative procedures and requirements for the program, must establish a process to award money to the legislative authority of municipal corporations willing to participate. The money awarded must be used towards the purchase of UAVS, training, and the other goals of the program. Any UAVS purchased through the program must comply with the federal laws and regulations for those systems, including those involving national security. Thus, the UAVS (including their components, services, or maintenance) cannot originate from a country or entity that has been named a national security risk and must comply with other federal conditions on technology and defense spending.

By September 30, 2027, the ODOT Director must submit a report to the Governor, the Speaker of the House, the Senate President, the Minority Leaders of both chambers, and the Chairpersons of any transportation-related committees. The report must detail how funds were spent in the program, the success of the program in meeting its goals, the cost-benefit analyses created, and any recommendations for additional integration of UAVS operations by first responders.