

Court of Claims of Ohio

The Ohio Judicial Center
65 South Front Street, Third Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
614.387.9800 or 1.800.824.8263
www.cco.state.oh.us

TOM FORCONE

Plaintiff

v.

DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

Case No. 2006-03362-AD

Daniel R. Borchert

Deputy Clerk

MEMORANDUM DECISION

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On April 11, 2006, at approximately 9:00 p.m., plaintiff, Tom Forcone, was traveling south on State Route 7 “crossing the bridge south of the Lisbon Route 45 entry ramp to route 7 south” when his car struck a large pothole causing wheel damage to the vehicle.

{¶ 2} 2) Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$1,347.26, the cost of replacement parts and automobile repair necessitated by the April 11, 2006, event. Plaintiff implied the damage to his car was proximately caused by negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation (“DOT”), in maintaining the roadway. The \$25.00 filing fee was paid.

{¶ 3} 3) Defendant denied liability based on the contention that no DOT personnel had any knowledge of the pothole on the ramp prior to plaintiff’s April 11, 2006, property damage occurrence. Defendant located the damage-causing pothole at about milepost 3.20 on State Route 7 in Columbiana County. Defendant asserted plaintiff failed to produce any evidence showing how long the pothole existed prior to 9:00 p.m.

{¶ 4} 4) Defendant denied receiving any calls or complaints regarding the

particular pothole before plaintiff's incident. Defendant explained DOT employees conduct roadway inspections, "at least two times a month." Apparently no potholes were discovered during previous roadway inspections. Defendant suggested the pothole likely, "existed for only a short time before the incident," forming the basis of this claim. Defendant denied DOT employees were negligent in regard to roadway maintenance.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶ 5} Defendant has the duty to maintain its highways in a reasonably safe condition for the motoring public. *Knickel v. Ohio Department of Transportation* (1976), 49 Ohio App. 2d 335. However, defendant is not an insurer of the safety of its highways. See *Kniskern v. Township of Somerford* (1996), 112 Ohio App. 3d 189; *Rhodus v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (1990), 67 Ohio App. 3d 723.

{¶ 6} In order to prove a breach of the duty to maintain the highways, plaintiff must prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant had actual or constructive notice of the precise condition or defect alleged to have caused the accident. *McClellan v. ODOT* (1986), 34 Ohio App. 3d 247. Defendant is only liable for roadway conditions of which it has notice, but fails to reasonably correct. *Bussard v. Dept. of Transp.* (1986), 31 Ohio Misc. 2d 1.

{¶ 7} Plaintiff has not produced sufficient evidence to indicate the length of time the particular pothole was present on the roadway prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim. Plaintiff has not shown defendant had actual notice of the pothole for a sufficient length of time to invoke liability. Additionally, the trier of fact is precluded from making an inference of defendant's constructive notice, unless evidence is presented in respect to the time the pothole appeared on the roadway. *Spires v. Ohio Highway Department* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 262. There is no indication defendant had constructive notice of the pothole. Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to infer

defendant in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently or that defendant's acts caused the defective condition. *Herlihy v. Ohio Department of Transportation* (1999), 99-07011-AD. Size of the defect (pothole) is insufficient to show notice or duration of existence. *O'Neil v. Department of Transportation* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 287. Therefore, defendant is not liable for any damage plaintiff may have suffered from the pothole on April 11, 2006.

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ENTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE
DETERMINATION

Having considered all the evidence in the claim file and, for the reasons set forth in the memorandum decision filed concurrently herewith, judgment is rendered in favor of defendant. Court costs are assessed against plaintiff. The clerk shall serve upon all parties notice of this judgment and its date of entry upon the journal.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

Tom Forcone
1220 South River
Toronto, Ohio 43964

Plaintiff, Pro se

Gordon Proctor, Director
Department of Transportation
1980 West Broad Street
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For Defendant

RDK/laa
8/28
Filed 9/29/06
Sent to S.C. reporter 11/1/06