

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

KIMBERLY D. ROBSON

Plaintiff

v.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

Case No. 2007-03145-AD

Deputy Clerk Daniel R. Borchert

MEMORANDUM DECISION

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶1} 1) On February 19, 2007, at approximately 6:35 p.m., plaintiff, Kimberly D. Robson, was traveling on the approach ramp to Interstate 270 westbound in Franklin County, when her automobile struck, “a very large/deep,” pothole causing tire and rim damage to the vehicle.

{¶2} 2) Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover damages of \$546.82, the cost of replacement parts resulting from the February 19, 2007, property damage event. Plaintiff has asserted she incurred these damages as a proximate cause of negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation (“DOT”), in maintaining the roadway. The \$25.00 filing fee was paid and plaintiff requested reimbursement of that amount along with her claim for damages.

{¶3} 3) Defendant denied liability based on the contention that no DOT personnel had any knowledge of the pothole on Interstate 270 (ramp L milepost 52.64 in Franklin County) prior to plaintiff’s incident. Defendant acknowledged the pothole plaintiff’s vehicle struck was a defect that had previously been patched on February 5, 2007, and the patching material had deteriorated by February 19, 2007. Defendant contended plaintiff failed to produce sufficient evidence to establish the length of time the pothole existed before 6:35 p.m. on February 19, 2007, or the roadway was negligently maintained.

{¶4} 4) Furthermore, defendant explained DOT employees conduct roadway inspections on a routine basis and had any of these employees detected a roadway defect that defect would have promptly been repaired. Defendant contended, plaintiff did not produce sufficient evidence to prove DOT breached any duty of care owed to the traveling public in respect to roadway maintenance.

{¶5} 5) Despite filing a response, plaintiff did not submit any evidence to establish the length of time the defect was on the roadway prior to her property damage incident.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶6} 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, 361 N.E. 2d 486. However, defendant is not an insurer of the safety of its highways. See *Kniskern v. Township of Somerford* (1996), 112 Ohio App. 3d 189, 678 N.E. 2d 273; *Rhodus v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (1990), 67 Ohio App. 3d 723, 588 N.E. 2d

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864.

{¶7} 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, 517 N.E. 2d 1388. 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, 507 N.E. 2d 1179.

{¶8} 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. 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, 577 N.E. 2d 458. 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, 587 N.E. 2d 891.

{¶9} For plaintiff to prevail on a claim of negligence, she must prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant owed her a duty, that it breached that duty, and that the breach proximately caused her injuries. *Armstrong v. Best Buy Company, Inc.* 99 Ohio St. 3d 79, 81, 2003-Ohio-2573, ¶8, 788 N.E. 2d 1088, 1090 citing *Menifee v. Ohio Welding Products, Inc.* (1984), 15 Ohio St. 3d 75, 77, 472 N.E. 2d 707, 710. Plaintiff has the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that she suffered a loss and that this loss was proximately caused by defendant's negligence. *Barnum v. Ohio State University* (1977), 76-0368-AD. However, "[i]t is the duty of a party on whom the burden of

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proof rests to produce evidence which furnishes a reasonable basis for sustaining his claim. If the evidence so produced furnishes only a basis for a choice among different possibilities as to any issue in the case, he fails to sustain such burden.” Paragraph three of the syllabus in *Steven v. Indus. Comm.* (1945), 145 Ohio St. 1981, 61 N.E. 2d 198, approved and followed.

{¶10} Ordinarily in a claim involving roadway defects, plaintiff must prove either: 1) defendant had actual or constructive notice of the defective condition and failed to respond in a reasonable time or responded in a negligent manner, or 2) that defendant, in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently. *Denis v. Department of Transportation* (1976), 75-0287-AD. Defendant acknowledged the damage-causing pothole plaintiff’s vehicle struck was a defect that had been previously patched and deteriorated. This fact alone does not provide proof of negligent maintenance. A pothole patch that deteriorates in less than ten days is prima facie evidence of negligent maintenance. See *Matala v. Ohio Department of Transportation*, 2003-01270-AD, 2003-Ohio-2618. However, a pothole patch which may or may not have deteriorated over a longer time frame does not constitute in and of itself conclusive evidence of negligent maintenance. See *Edwards v. Ohio Department of Transportation, District 8* (2006), 2006-01343-AD, jud, 2006-Ohio-7173.

{¶11} Plaintiff has not shown, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant failed to discharge a duty owed to plaintiff, or that plaintiff’s injury was proximately caused by defendant’s negligence. Plaintiff has failed to show that the damage-causing pothole was connected to any conduct under the control of defendant or that there was any negligence on the part of defendant or its agents. *Taylor v. Transportation Dept.* (1998), 97-10898-AD; *Weininger v. Department of Transportation* (1999), 99-10909-AD; *Witherell v. Ohio Dept. of Transportation* (2000), 2000-04758-AD.

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v.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

ENTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE
DETERMINATION

Defendant

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.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

Kimberly D. Robson
830 State Route 207
Chillicothe, Ohio 45601

James G. Beasley, Director
Department of Transportation
1980 West Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43223

RDK/laa
7/17
Filed 8/15/07
Sent to S.C. reporter 10/30/07