

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

RANDALL L. JACOBSON

Case No. 2007-05164-AD

Plaintiff

Deputy Clerk Daniel R. Borchert

v.

MEMORANDUM DECISION

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶1} 1) On March 24, 2007, at approximately 1:00 a.m., plaintiff, Randall L. Jacobson, was traveling on State Route 123 at the Interstate 71 overpass bridge in Warren County, when his automobile struck a pothole in the left turn lane to the ramp to Interstate 71 south. The pothole caused tire and wheel damage to plaintiff's vehicle.

{¶2} 2) Plaintiff asserted his property damage was proximately caused by negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation ("DOT"), in failing to maintain the roadway free of hazards. Consequently, plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$735.90, the total cost of replacement parts and automotive repair expenses incurred resulting from the March 24, 2007, property damage event. Plaintiff paid the \$25.00 filing fee and requested reimbursement of that amount along with his damage claim.

{¶3} 3) Defendant denied liability based on the contention that no DOT personnel had any knowledge of the pothole on the roadway prior to plaintiff's property damage occurrence. Defendant located the damage-causing pothole at milepost 14.97 on State Route 123 in Warren County. Defendant asserted plaintiff failed to produce any evidence showing how long the pothole existed prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim.

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{¶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.

{¶5} 5) Plaintiff did not submit any evidence to establish the length of time the defect was on the roadway prior to his property damage incident.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶6} Defendant has the duty to maintain its highways in a reasonably safe condition for the motor public. *Knickel v. Ohio Department of Transportation* (1976), 49 Ohio App. 2d 335, 3 O.O. 3d 413, 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 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, 31 OBR 64, 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 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



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MEMORANDUM DECISION

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. Therefore, defendant is not liable for any damage plaintiff may have suffered from the pothole.

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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.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

Randall L. Jacobson
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James G. Beasley, Director
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RDK/laa
10/10
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