

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

BRIAN RHODES

Plaintiff

v.

OHIO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

Case No. 2008-04978-AD

Deputy Clerk Daniel R. Borchert

MEMORANDUM DECISION

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On April 3, 2008, at approximately 10:50 a.m., plaintiff, Brian Rhodes, was traveling east on Interstate 670 near the Interstate 71 interchange in Franklin County, when his automobile struck a large pothole causing tire damage to the 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 keep the roadway free of hazardous conditions. Consequently, plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$165.66, the total cost he incurred for replacement parts.

{¶ 3} 3) Defendant explained the pothole plaintiff’s car struck had been previously patched by DOT personnel on March 6, 2008 and the patching repair had completely deteriorated by April 3, 2008, the date of plaintiff’s incident. Defendant asserted plaintiff did not produce any evidence to establish how long the damage-causing pothole existed prior to his April 3, 2008 incident. Defendant implied no DOT personnel had any knowledge of the pothole which DOT located at milepost 4.58 on

Interstate 670 in Franklin County. Defendant stated the DOT “Franklin County Manager conducts roadway inspections on all state roadways within the county on a routine basis, at least one to two times a month.” Apparently, no potholes were discovered at milepost 4.58 on Interstate 670 the last time that section of roadway was inspected between March 6, 2008 and April 3, 2008. Defendant stated “if ODOT personnel had detected any defects they would have been promptly scheduled for repair.” DOT records show potholes were patched in the vicinity of plaintiff’s incident on February 14, 2008, March 3, 2008, March 4, 2008, March 6, 2008, and March 20, 2008.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶ 4} 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, 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.

{¶ 5} 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 condition 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.

{¶ 6} 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. *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.

{¶ 7} For plaintiff to prevail on a claim of negligence, he must prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant owed him a duty, that it breached that duty, and that the breach proximately caused his injuries. *Armstrong v. Best Buy Company, Inc.* 99 Ohio St. 3d 79, , 2003-Ohio-2573, 788 N.E. 2d 1088, ¶8 citing *Menifee v. Ohio Welding Products, Inc.* (1984), 15 Ohio St. 3d 75, 77, 15 OBR 79, 472 N.E. 2d 707. Plaintiff has the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that he 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 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. 198, 30 O.O. 415, 61 N.E. 2d 198, approved and followed.

{¶ 8} 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 plaintiffs' 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.

{¶ 9} 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. *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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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:

Brian Rhodes
150 Liming Farm Road
Mount Orab, Ohio 45154

James G. Beasley, Director
Department of Transportation
1980 West Broad Street
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RDK/laa

7/17

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