

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

DOMINIC VELOTTA

Plaintiff

v.

THE OHIO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

Case No. 2009-01441-AD

Deputy Clerk Daniel R. Borchert

MEMORANDUM DECISION

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On December 29, 2008, at approximately 8:30 a.m., plaintiff, Dominic Velotta, was traveling south on Interstate 271 between milemarkers 28 and 29 in Cuyahoga County, when his 2004 Chrysler PT Cruiser struck a pothole causing rim damage to the vehicle.

{¶ 2} 2) Plaintiff implied the damage to his car was proximately caused by negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation (“DOT”), in failing to maintain the roadway. Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$553.35, the cost of replacement parts. The filing fee was paid.

{¶ 3} 3) Defendant denies liability in this matter based on the contention that no DOT personnel had any knowledge of the pothole prior to plaintiff’s property damage event. Defendant denies receiving any previous reports of the damage-causing pothole which DOT located between mileposts 28.00 and 29.00 on Interstate 271 in Cuyahoga County. Defendant suggests, “it is more likely than not that the pothole existed in that location for only a relatively short amount of time before plaintiff’s incident.”

{¶ 4} 4) Furthermore, defendant asserts plaintiff has not produced evidence to show DOT negligently maintained the roadway. Defendant explains that the DOT Cuyahoga 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 between mileposts 28.00 and 29.00 on Interstate 271 the last time this roadway was inspected prior to December 29, 2008. Defendant’s records show pothole patching operations were conducted in the vicinity of plaintiff’s incident on July 1, 2008 and December 18, 2008.

{¶ 5} 5) Despite filing a response, plaintiff did not provide any evidence to establish the length of time the damage-causing pothole was present on Interstate 271 prior to 8:30 a.m. on December 29, 2008. Plaintiff acknowledged he “had no way of knowing how long it (the pothole) was there.”

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, 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 recover in a suit involving damage proximately caused by roadway conditions including potholes, plaintiff must prove that either: 1) defendant had actual or constructive notice of the pothole 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.

{¶ 8} To prove a breach of the duty by defendant to maintain the highways plaintiff must establish, by a preponderance of the evidence, that DOT 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. No evidence has shown that defendant had actual notice of the damage-causing pothole.

{¶ 9} The trier of fact is precluded from making an inference of defendant's constructive notice, unless evidence is presented in respect to the time that the defective condition (pothole) developed. *Spires v. Ohio Highway Department* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 262, 577 N.E. 2d 458. 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. There is no evidence of constructive notice of the pothole.

{¶ 10} Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to infer that 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. Therefore, defendant is not liable for any damage plaintiff may have suffered from the pothole.

{¶ 11} Plaintiff has not shown, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant failed to discharge a duty owed to him or that his property damage was proximately caused by defendant's negligence. Plaintiff 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.

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

DOMINIC VELOTTA

Plaintiff

v.

THE OHIO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION

Defendant

Case No. 2009-01441-AD

Deputy Clerk Daniel R. Borchert

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:

Dominic Velotta
11114 Quail Hollow Drive
Concord, Ohio 44077

Jolene M. Molitoris, Director
Department of Transportation
1980 West Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43223

RDK/laa
4/9
Filed 4/20/09
Sent to S.C. reporter 7/30/09