

Chapter 9

Highway Maintenance Follow Up

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In our 2010 Report – Volume 1, we reported on the effectiveness of the processes that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure (Ministry) uses to maintain certain types of provincial highways. We made four recommendations.

The Ministry has implemented one recommendation and made significant progress towards implementing the remaining three recommendations. It needs to complete the development of its maintenance strategic plan including the setting of service objectives. Also, it needs to update its guidance about reporting on the results of its maintenance to senior management.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997 gives the Ministry responsibility for all matters relating to highways including the maintenance of provincial highways. The Ministry's mission is to optimize the role of transportation as it relates to the economic and social development of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's road network consists of about 26,000 km of highways, including about 10,000 km of asphalt concrete pavements, 4,500 km of granular pavements, 5,400 km of thin membrane surface highways, 5,900 km of gravel highways and 280 km of ice roads. For the year ending March 31, 2011, the provincial highways system had a recorded cost of over \$4.0 billion and net book value of about \$2.2 billion. On average, the system was about halfway through its useful life.

Keeping Saskatchewan's transportation system safe and in good repair is vital to our economy.

3.0 BACKGROUND

In 2009, we assessed the Ministry's processes to maintain certain types of highways. In our 2010 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 7 (pp. 81-95), we concluded that, for the year ending March 31, 2009, the Ministry had adequate processes to maintain highways except it needed to set long-term service-level objectives for highways, use these objectives to prioritize its maintenance activities, and provide senior management with a report on the results of maintenance activities each year. We made four recommendations.

On November 25, 2010, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed with our recommendations.



4.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the recommendations and the Ministry's actions up to December 31, 2011. We found that the Ministry has made significant progress, but still has work to do.

4.1 Develop a Maintenance Plan

We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure:

- › Set long-term service-level objectives (such as long-term surface-condition factors)
- › Use service-level objectives to determine its annual and longer-term maintenance priorities (2010 Report – Volume 1)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

The Ministry initiated a major project to develop a comprehensive highway preservation policy that, once implemented, will be used to make strategic maintenance decisions. The project consists of three main parts: categorizing all provincial highways, developing an operational preservation policy and standards, and developing a maintenance strategic plan.

The Ministry has categorized all provincial highways primarily based on function and amount of use.

The Ministry has drafted an operational preservation policy and standards (policy document). At December 31, 2011, senior management had reviewed, but had not yet approved, the draft policy document.

The policy document sets out the policies, standards, and processes for management to use to make systematic, long-term maintenance decisions. The policy document:

- › Focuses on key outcomes that affect the public (e.g., road condition)
- › Defines goals, called key result areas (e.g., road condition and financial sustainability), that are the basis of its maintenance strategies
- › Requires defined, measurable service-level objectives to be set for each key result area. Use of service-level objectives in maintenance planning will guide the prioritization of maintenance activities

At December, 2011, work was ongoing to develop a maintenance strategic plan. The development of the maintenance strategic plan is to include the setting of the service-level objectives required by the standards. The Ministry told us that it expects the completed maintenance strategic plan to guide its work over the short, medium, and long term.

The Ministry expects to use this comprehensive highway preservation policy to make maintenance decisions for all categories of highways. It plans to implement the use of service-level objectives during the preparation of its 2014 summer maintenance plan. The Ministry told us that, once implemented, Saskatchewan will be one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to have a comprehensive highway preservation policy.

We recommended that senior management of the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure assess the reasonableness of maintenance costs used to develop its maintenance plan. (2010 Report –Volume 1)

Status – Implemented.

The Ministry has documented its processes used to plan maintenance including the use of its computer modelling system. Using past costs and actual surface-condition data, the Ministry estimated its maintenance costs for the short term and adjusted them for its estimate of inflation.

As part of its maintenance planning, management approved the estimated maintenance costs for its 2012 maintenance season. Senior management assessed the reasonableness of and approved those estimated maintenance costs and supporting information.

4.2 Monitor Performance

We recommended senior management of the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure receive a report on the results of the maintenance activities at the end of the maintenance season, as required. (2010 Report –Volume 1)

Status – We continue to make this recommendation.

In September 2011, senior management reviewed a report on the results of maintenance activities completed in the 2010-11 year. The report contained completed maintenance activities (e.g., square meters of spot sealing) compared to planned activities by region and program. It provided reasons where completed activities were different from planned activities. In August 2011, senior management also reviewed a report on road condition information (showing a six-year trend).

These reports provided senior management with valuable information on the results of maintenance activities. This information is needed to make informed decisions.

At December 2011, the Ministry had not updated guidance in its asset management manual to require the preparation of these reports and the review of them by senior management. Updated guidance in the Ministry's manual is key to consistent and ongoing reporting. As such, we continue to make this recommendation.

