

Chapter 25

Highways and Infrastructure – Maintaining Bridges

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure (Ministry) is responsible for all matters related to bridges on the provincial highway system, including the maintenance of these bridges. By November 30, 2015, the Ministry had implemented two recommendations initially made in our 2011 audit of the Ministry's processes to maintain bridges on provincial highways. By November 2015, it was keeping its bridge management system records up to date, and gave its senior management comprehensive and timely reports on the results of bridge maintenance activities. Keeping up-to-date information and providing robust and timely reports aids in making informed decisions about the Ministry's bridge maintenance.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Properly maintained bridges contribute to the safety of the transportation system and supports Saskatchewan's growing economy. The Ministry owns over 700 bridges. It classifies bridges using two general categories: minor¹ and major.² It has 594 minor bridges and 138 major bridges.³ Each year, it spends over \$35 million on maintaining, rehabilitating, and replacing its bridges.

This chapter describes our second follow-up of management's actions on the two recommendations we first made in our *2011 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 6, in our audit of the Ministry's processes to keep bridges within the provincial highway⁴ system in good repair.

To conduct this review, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the 2011 audit. The Ministry's management agreed with the criteria in the 2011 audit.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation, the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the recommendation's status at November 30, 2015, and the Ministry's actions up to that date. By November 30, 2015, the Ministry had implemented both recommendations.

¹ Minor bridges are on average smaller, and consist of both timber and short-span concrete/steel bridge structures. Total deck surface area of minor bridges is 107 thousand square metres.

² Major bridges are on average larger, and the majority of the bridge structure is made of concrete that is reinforced with steel. Total deck surface area of major bridges is 136 thousand square metres.

³ Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure records.

⁴ Section 2(b) of *The Highways Act, 1997* defines provincial highways.



3.1 Information on Bridges Kept Current

We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure keep bridge management system records up to date. (2011 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 4, 2012)

Status – Implemented

As part of bridge maintenance, the Ministry periodically inspects each bridge (e.g. inspects major bridges every two years). It enters the results of inspections into a computer system called the Bridge Management System (BMS). It uses BMS to track key information about its bridges (i.e., bridge age, bridge condition, who performed the inspection and when). Timely entry of inspection reports (e.g., bridge condition) provides management with up-to-date information to make informed decisions about the risk of bridge failure and planned and required maintenance.

Since January 2014 (the timing of our first follow-up), the Ministry has implemented a policy and related procedures over entry of key inspection information into BMS (what information to enter and by when). It requires staff to enter results of minor bridge inspections within two weeks of the inspection, and of major bridge inspections within one month of the inspection. In our testing of entry of inspection reports, we found the Ministry was keeping BMS up to date.

3.2 Results of Bridge Maintenance Actively Monitored

We recommended that senior management of the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure receive and review reports on the results of bridge inspection and maintenance activities. (2011 Report – Volume 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 4, 2012)

Status – Implemented

Senior management's receipt and regular review of reports on the results of bridge inspection and maintenance activities support informed long-term decisions about the bridges.

The Ministry created a policy that outlines what information senior management expects to receive and when (e.g., by July 15). For example, the policy requires staff report bridge inspection results each quarter. The policy also requires yearly reporting of its bridge inventory and condition and the results of its bridge maintenance program. We found senior management received the reports for its review by the deadlines specified in the policy; the reports included the required information.