

## Chapter 22

# Highways and Infrastructure – Addressing Road Safety Concerns on Existing Highways

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

By November 2017, the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure had improved its processes to address safety concerns raised on existing provincial highways by implementing three of four recommendations we originally made in 2015, and made progress on the fourth recommendation.

The Ministry developed and followed processes for tracking the receipt of and responding to complaints about road safety. It set out criteria, in writing, for selecting safety improvement projects to complete in the upcoming year. It required staff to keep analysis and rationale for selecting these safety improvement projects.

It also began reporting to senior management on whether its road safety improvements had helped reduce the frequency and severity of collisions. However, that reporting only includes analysis on a small number of safety improvement projects. Without complete analysis and information, management may not know if the Ministry is focusing its resources on the right safety improvement projects. Also, the Ministry may not know if the resources spent on road safety improvement projects were worthwhile.

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry is responsible for managing the Province's 26,184 kilometres of highways, including maintaining safe road conditions as described in *The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997*.<sup>1</sup>

We reported in our *2015 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 35 that, for the period from September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2015, the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure had effective processes to address safety concerns raised on existing provincial highways except for the matters reflected in four recommendations. This chapter describes our follow up of management's actions on those recommendations.

To conduct this follow-up audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (including CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

We interviewed Ministry staff responsible for the Safety Improvement Program to assess the adequacy of the work being done to implement the recommendations. We also reviewed documentation supporting the Ministry's selection of safety improvement projects.

<sup>1</sup> *Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure 2016-17 Annual Report*, p. 3.



## 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendations, the status of each recommendation at November 30, 2017, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

### 3.1 Consistent Process for Tracking Complaints

***We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure develop and follow a consistent process for tracking complaints about road safety.*** (2015 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

**Status** – Implemented

The Ministry developed and followed a process for tracking complaints about road safety. This process includes documenting the nature of the complaint, details including the affected location, an assessment to determine if an engineering analysis is needed, and an initial assessment to determine if the project needs to be included in the Safety Improvement Projects (SIP) database.

We found that the Ministry consistently applied this process in all regions (i.e., North, Central, and South). This included gathering information surrounding the complaint and entering key information into the system to track the complaints. Where the Ministry determined that a safety improvement was needed, it included the project in the SIP database.

### 3.2 Project Selection Criteria Set Out in Writing

***We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure set out, in writing, the criteria for selecting safety improvement projects to complete in the upcoming year.*** (2015 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

**Status** – Implemented

By November 2017, the Ministry's SIP manual includes criteria for selecting safety improvement projects that it plans to complete in the upcoming year. The SIP manual sets out criteria that the Ministry uses to select projects (e.g., cost sharing with a third party, tied to upcoming construction in the area, high priority score, etc.). We found that the Ministry used these criteria for selecting projects.

### 3.3 Analysis and Selection Documentation Kept

***We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure require its staff to keep its analysis and rationale for selecting safety improvement projects to complete in the upcoming year.*** (2015 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

**Status** – Implemented

In its SIP manual, the Ministry includes direction to document and keep the analysis and rationale it used for selecting projects for the upcoming year.

The Ministry consistently followed the criteria set out in the SIP manual. For approved safety improvement projects included on its list, we found the Ministry adequately documented the rationale for the selection of these projects. Its list included the details of why it selected each project.

We also looked at projects that were not selected for the upcoming year that had a higher ranking than the projects selected. We found that the Ministry's documentation included appropriate rationale and analysis as to why those projects were not selected.

### 3.4 Periodic Reports on Road Safety Effectiveness Need Improvement

*We recommended that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure give senior management periodic reports on whether its road safety improvement program helped reduce the frequency and severity of collisions.* (2015 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 15, 2016)

**Status** – Partially Implemented

In November 2017, the Ministry gave senior management only the results of safety improvement projects completed over the last five years costing more than \$1 million. See **Figure 1** for details.

**Figure 1 – Content of November 2017 Safety Improvement Report to Senior Management**

For each project:

- Yearly statistics (number of collisions and number of collisions where there were injuries or fatalities) of the area before and after the improvement had been implemented—this information shows whether improvement changed the frequency and severity of collisions
- An analysis of the statistics and a conclusion on the effectiveness of the safety improvement

We consider the reporting threshold too high to provide sufficient assessment of the effectiveness of its road safety improvement projects. Because the Ministry is using a high reporting threshold, it is analyzing and reporting on only a small number of safety improvement projects each year, and on a small proportion of its safety improvement work. The November 2017 report included five projects costing \$7 million. Over the last five years, the Ministry completed about 250 projects costing about \$35 million. In 2016-17, the Ministry did not complete any safety improvement projects over \$1 million.

As the report provided to management presently only contains information on a few safety improvement projects, it only shows a small picture of the effectiveness of the program. (i.e., reporting on about 2% of the safety improvement projects the Ministry carried out). Without complete analysis and information, management may not know if the Ministry is focusing its resources on the right safety improvement projects. Also, the Ministry may not know if the resources spent on road safety improvement projects were worthwhile.

