

# DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

## AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

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Years of neglect have turned Ontario's bridges into safety hazards, report finds

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Ontario's municipal bridges need at least \$2 billion over the next five years in rehabilitation cash alone to help avoid a tragic failure, an industry report states.

"We should not wait for a disaster before we start to fix a problem. There are hundreds of bridges which require rehabilitation," says Andy Manahan, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario executive director. "For us, when the Laval overpass collapsed, it got us thinking that this was something we should be concerned about."

The RCCAO commissioned *Ontario's Bridges: Bridging the Gap*, a report prepared by MMM Group.

The report notes that years of deferred maintenance, irregular inspections, and lack of government oversight has put public safety potentially at risk.

"You cannot rest on your laurels. There is not one government but a number of different governments, at different levels, over a numbers of years, which contributed to this problem," says Manahan.

The study found there is no single provincial agency responsible to ensure that Ontario's estimated 12,000 municipal bridges are inspected every two years as required under the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act.

Also, there is no central hub for municipal bridge information.

Uniform records have not been kept since 1997.

Bridge maintenance is an expensive budget item and for some of Ontario's smaller municipalities, it can represent an enormous cost and burden, adds Manahan. Roll in bridge maintenance with other municipal infrastructure needs, and deference of maintenance and rehabilitation work is not unlikely.

"We know that when infrastructure rehab and work is deferred, it costs many times more to eventually get done," Manahan says.

One-time funding programs such as the Rural Infrastructure Investment Initiative, the Canada-Ontario Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund and the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority do help municipalities meet their immediate needs but long term funding is needed, the report finds.

“Because of funding pressures these municipalities tend to act on a short term basis and simply react to infrastructure rehabilitation needs,” the report states. “This situation only exacerbates the problem.”

This funding crunch also can affect bridge inspection quality. Municipalities may not have the funds available for preventative bridge work and regular inspections. The RCCAO also has concerns with a competitive bid process used to select inspectors.

“This process could discourage the use of higher end bridge technologies or work being done by the best people,” notes Manahan.