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Wellington County bridges study to compare delivery methods

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A study of bridges in Wellington County, Ontario, will compare traditional versus alternative construction delivery methods to determine how best to minimize long-term bridge renewal costs.

The recent 2012 Ontario budget and the province's 10-year Building Together infrastructure plan highlighted the need for an expanded use of Infrastructure Ontario (IO) to ensure that more projects come in on time and on budget.

"They need to move into AFP [alternative financing and procurement] and bundling because they just don't have the money," said Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) executive director Andy Manahan.

"Without pre-judging this study, it may essentially say that the traditional approach probably isn't working all that well because many of these so-called smaller and rural type municipalities aren't keeping on top of bridge rehabilitation and maintenance."

He said municipalities often only have money to repair the most urgent infrastructure and then don't keep up in the maintenance. That deferred maintenance by municipalities can lead to a more expensive project.

The Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA) partnered with RCCAO for this study, which will cost \$100,000. The Ministry of Transportation has committed \$50,000 toward this study, with \$35,000 from the RCCAO and \$15,000 from the OGRA including providing municipal data.

This study will provide a better understanding of the potential for municipalities to use alternative delivery approaches to minimize long-term bridge renewal costs. It will look at over 300 bridges.

The RCCAO and OGRA selected the County of Wellington for the case study as it is a mid-size county, with a population of 86,000, which includes seven lower-tier municipalities with a large number of bridges and culverts.

The work will phase in bridge data inventory, bridge structure needs, bridge investment needs, alternative delivery options and conclusions.

Bridge condition will be identified based on several factors. Structural deficiency will look at the average age of the structure and its average span. Bridges with existing posted load limits of less than 20 tonnes will be considered structurally deficient. Bridges with less than 8.5 metres of travel width for township and 11.5 metres of travel width for county bridges will be considered functionally deficient.

There has been sensitivity within the Ontario construction industry about project bundling attracting foreign firms to bid on larger projects.

"That may still be an issue, but the principle of bundling stuff to meet that threshold of \$50 million for IO to

view it, as a cost effective project, I think will probably bear true in this instance as well,” said Manahan.

“If there’s areas where the study shows that there’s some flaws or some barriers to doing things, then, before we go out and use this model across the whole province, hopefully we can iron out some of the difficulties in this pilot project.”

Manahan said it is important to maintain partnerships with the province and municipalities.

He said evidence based approaches are the best way to move forward.

The study is anticipated to take five to six months with results expected this September.

RCCAO is an alliance of various industry stakeholder groups.