

# DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

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## AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

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Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

U.S. bridge report offers warnings that Ontario should heed, association says

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Age and climbing construction costs are among the challenges facing American bridges a recent study concludes, and Ontario should look at the study's findings, says a provincial construction association.

"The quantum of what was looked at is much bigger than what we have in Ontario," said Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

"However, we also have bridges which are coming up to 50 and 60 years in their lifespan and we have to look at proper maintenance and repair."

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) released a study at the beginning of August on the first anniversary of the Minnesota bridge collapse. The collapse of Interstate 35 West in Minneapolis killed 13 people and injured 144. The study looked at the condition of the more than 590,000 bridges in the United States.

"The current generation of 'baby boomer' bridges is showing their age and they're going to require significant investment. We must act now," said Peter Rahn, AASHTO president and director of the Missouri Department of Transportation in a statement.

Among the report's key findings were that American bridges were typically built to last 50 years. The average age of a bridge in the United States is 43 years and almost 20 percent are over 50 years old. If all of America's bridges were to be fixed and modernized immediately, it would carry a US\$140 billion price tag.

An RCCAO commissioned study last fall found that Ontario's municipal bridges need at least \$2 billion over the next five years in rehabilitation cash alone to help avoid a tragic failure.

Manahan notes that both the AASHTO and RCCAO reports have the same message —years of deferred bridge maintenance, irregular inspections, and lack of government oversight have put public safety potentially at risk.

“There is a sense of things moving slowly. We want to take Ontario’s bridge concerns to the next step,” said Manahan. “We are hoping to talk to some MTO (Ministry of Transportation) officials about the AASHTO report to see what we all can learn from it.”

The costs of steel, asphalt, concrete and earthwork have risen by at least 50 per cent in the past five years, reports AASHTO. These increases are forcing delays of bridge improvements and replacements. AASHTO points to not just increases in government investment but also to using revenue options such as tolls, tax increases, annual road user fees, bonds or private investment to bridge the cash gap for repair work.

An increased commitment to research and innovation is also a key approach to tackling American bridge woes, the report said. Manahan said that techniques such as the recent rapid bridge replacements in the Ottawa area are examples of innovation already underway in Ontario but added more is needed.

“Ultimately, we have to make sure we are doing the proper repairs for what is needed and looking at the life cycle of these bridges,” said Manahan.