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Municipalities get improved access to infrastructure asset management system

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Municipalities now have better access to an infrastructure asset management system thanks to a new funding agreement between the province and the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA), industry officials say.

The ministries of transportation and energy and infrastructure are providing \$450,000 to fund OGRA's Municipal DataWorks (MDW) application software. Ontario municipalities can use the program to create a full inventory of their assets, track life cycles, monitor their condition and develop asset management plans.

"Asset management is something we have been calling for some time now with respect to a variety of infrastructure classes," said Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. "This is a way to encourage municipalities to do proper reporting and analysis of their infrastructure and the state of it."

The use of MDW enables the province and municipalities to better plan for the funding, construction and repair of municipal infrastructure, including roads, bridges, sewers and water works. Nearly 300 municipalities (65 per cent) of Ontario municipalities currently use MDW. There are benefits for construction in asset management, added Manahan.

"If you have a handle on your infrastructure assets, you have better capital programming and planning," he said.

"This will result in a pipeline of projects which benefits construction jobs and the contractors bidding on the work."

OGRA said it was pleased that the province has "recognized the value of MDW." The compiled data in MDW will only strengthen Ontario municipalities in their critical infrastructure management.

"OGRA provides this application free to Ontario municipalities, allowing us to identify and respond to the needs of rural and northern Ontario communities where the need is often the greatest," stated Eric Rutherford, OGRA President, in a statement.

The Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA) has been a strong advocate for improved asset management practices and sees the new agreement as recognition that asset management systems are needed.

"The key now that the province has provided this funding is that there needs to be a stipulation that municipalities need to use it," said Karen Renkema, director, government relations with ORBA. "Right now it is a choice and asset management should not be a choice."

A recent provincial auditor general report found that the average age of municipal bridges was 43 years and ranged from 12 to 100 years in age.

Approximately 85 per cent of municipalities that responded to the auditor's survey indicated that they had a backlog of rehabilitation work to comply with their requirement to perform inspections every two years.

Among the auditor general's recommendations was that the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) and municipalities work together to review MTO's funding arrangement with municipalities. This review would ensure funds provided are effective for proper maintenance and rehabilitation of bridges and promote good asset-management practices. Renkema said the new agreement helps address that recommendation.

"May be not this year but in the future, when the province is considering municipal infrastructure programs or funding, decisions should be based on what is needed based on asset management systems," explained Renkema.

"It is then very clear then to see what asset needs dollars put towards it."