

Cities alone cannot fix infrastructure

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In May 2004, the Lorne St. overpass collapsed during a rehabilitation project. Fortunately, no one was killed or injured.

Teenager Skye Whitman of Greater Sudbury was not so lucky two years later. She died when a culvert collapsed as she drove over it on Bay St. in Whitefish in May 2006.

In September of that year, the de la Concorde overpass in Laval, Que., collapsed, killing five.

All these are examples (and there are more) of what happens when we neglect our roads, bridges and other municipal infrastructure.

Two reports released last week suggest that unless we do something now, Canadians face the prospect of more infrastructure failures similar to the ones that killed Whitman and those in Quebec.

The first, produced for the Residential and Civil Construction Association of Ontario, conservatively estimates provincial municipalities need to spend \$2 billion over the next five years to fix, repair, replace and maintain local bridges.

The second, prepared for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, concluded there is a \$123 billion municipal infrastructure deficit across the country.

Responsibility for fixing our old roads, bridges and culverts should not rest only with our municipalities. Cities are already stretched to the limit. Instead, the federal and provincial governments need to organize a national rebuilding program and take the lead in paying for it. Ottawa and Queen's Park, after all, are recording surpluses.

For that to happen, however, ordinary citizens need to get interested in infrastructure and demand that senior levels of government do something about it.

When told about the report on the poor shape of Ontario's bridges, Ontario Minister for Infrastructure Renewal David Caplan had this to say: "I don't buy the fact that (municipalities) are incapable of making spending choices. Like all of us, they have to prioritize."

In other words, don't ask us for any money.

Caplan's response is typical of the provincial government, and parties of all stripes - Liberal, Conservative and NDP - are guilty of it when they hold power.

And that's why the public needs to care about infrastructure. Without public pressure, more deadly road and **bridge** collapses are only a matter of time.

This is an edited version of an editorial that appeared Monday in the Sudbury Star.