

Alternative financing could help Wellington County maintain its bridges, report suggests

By [Chris Seto](#)

WELLINGTON COUNTY—The \$132 million needed to maintain the hundreds of bridges of Wellington County may be a little easier to finance if the county takes a different approach to their upkeep, a new provincial study suggests.

The County of Wellington Bridge Study was released earlier this month, commissioned by the Ontario Good Roads Association, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, and partially funded by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation.

The report asserts many of Ontario's bridges are more than 50 years old and require major rehabilitation and reconstruction. The problem is many municipalities don't have the financial resources to tackle these projects, so the bridges are left to sit, waiting to be maintained.

The study focused specifically on Wellington County, using it as an example of several municipalities throughout the province that have not been able to keep up with infrastructure rehabilitation.

The study was conducted based on the analysis of 635 bridges in Wellington, not including structures in the City of Guelph or those owned by the province.

By 2020, the county will have to pay about \$132 million—or \$19 million annually—to properly maintain its bridge infrastructure, the report projects. This cost deals with the backlog of bridge work that hasn't been addressed in the past. Between 2020 and 2050, once the backlog has been dealt with, the annual expenditure will be reduced to about \$11 million.

"The same challenges exist for other Ontario municipalities with a large inventory of bridges that require repair or replacement over the next 20 years," the report said.

The report suggests municipalities looking at updating their infrastructure should consider a range of options to reduce overall bridge renewal costs, such as municipally managed design-build contracts, multi-year contract bundling and alternative financing and procurement delivery.

Commonly referred to as AFP, alternative financing and procurement models would move away from the traditional way of tackling infrastructure maintenance. Instead of putting a single

project out to tender, municipalities could bundle a large number of bridges and contract that out to private firms that would be responsible for their construction and maintenance over time.

The alternative delivery model would bundle bridge rehabilitation work geographically, potentially with adjoining municipalities, and increase the size of the contracts, giving contractors the flexibility to standardize operations.

Alternative financing and procurement models could save 13 to 20 per cent of the cost over a traditional contract, the report said.

Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, said the study has been given to Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Glen Murray.

Joe Tiernay, executive director of the Ontario Good Roads Association, said the report was also sent to 444 municipalities across the province, including Wellington County and the City of Guelph.

"We're not saying that AFP is going to be a panacea in all cases, but at least municipalities should use a filter and say, 'should the AFP model be used, is it worthwhile?'" Manahan said.

"We know there's probably not one way of doing things, one size doesn't fit all, but there may be certain municipalities where AFP works."