

2007-concordeinquiry

**SPECIAL
REPORT**



Ontario government should take proactive approach to bridge inspections, says official

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Quebec's transfer of all municipal bridges and overpasses to its transportation department should not go unnoticed by Ontario's government, state industry officials.

"In Quebec, the commission heard from engineers that a culture of penny-pinching and careerism trumped responsible engineering practices," says Andy Manahan Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario executive director. "There is a role for the Ontario government to take a more proactive approach with respect to bridge inspections."

The de la Concorde overpass collapse inquiry triggered Quebec's "upload" of 4,400 structures previously delegated to municipalities in 1993. Ontario municipalities have also suffered from similar structures downloaded to them by the province during the Premier Mike Harris years, notes Rob Bradford, Ontario Road Builders' Association executive director.

"We suspect there are municipalities out there who simply cannot afford the possible repairs to their bridges and their inspection. This is a concern," adds Bradford.

Both Manahan and Bradford say the province needs to find funding methods to help municipalities deal with this infrastructure cost.

As far as provincial bridge inspections go, Ontario's transportation ministry inspects approximately half of its bridges and large culverts each year. The province is responsible for 2,800 bridges and 1,900 large culverts.

As of Dec 31, 2006, all inspections for bridges owned by the province are up-to-date, notes Emna Dhahak, MTO senior media liaison officer. Inspections for 2007 are underway and

scheduled for completion prior to December 31, 2007. MTO requires inspectors to attend training sessions every two years to ensure their skills are current.

“The detailed visual inspections are performed under the direction of a professional engineer with expertise and experience in bridge engineering,” explains Dhahak. “MTO-owned structure inspections are performed by either in-house engineers or consulting engineers hired by the ministry.”