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InfraGuide

By Sylvain Boudreau ing. M.Eng

Preventive maintenance, like the proverbial stitch-in-time, has an instinctive appeal to people working with infrastructure.

That appeal, in part, accounts for the success of a recent primer on preventative maintenance for municipal roads, says Mike Sheflin, who chairs the technical committee on municipal roads and sidewalks for the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure (InfraGuide).

The primer, released just 18 months ago, was the first in InfraGuide's growing collection of best practice reports on road infrastructure. Another six documents ranging from road drainage to crack sealing in asphalt pavements have since been released.

“While there has been good interest in all our best practices, our most successful roads document to date is still our first -- *Timely Preventive Maintenance for Municipal Roads*,” says Nancy Schepers, InfraGuide project director.

A joint project of the federal government and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, InfraGuide was created in 2001 to help address Canada's looming infrastructure deficit. Through its new national network of people and its two dozen best practices documents, municipalities now have access to Canadian experience and knowledge when dealing with local infrastructure problems.

The roads committee chairman, a former chief administrative officer of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, has the help of municipal stakeholders from Whitehorse to Gander who serve on various committees. At their sides are also engineering consultants, representatives of the Cement Association of Canada, Ontario Good Roads Association, the Ontario Hot Mix Producers Association and a National Research Council technical advisor.

Standing behind that collective wisdom is an InfraGuide survey of 420 representatives in 270 municipalities throughout the country. Completed in 2002, it captured the state of municipal practices and identified another probable reason for the success of the preventive maintenance primer.

The survey found that a third of Canadian municipalities still do road maintenance only when they perceive a hazard. The need for a primer to help them create good preventive maintenance programs -- and to help others improve existing programs -- was apparent. The popular primer gives the basic components of a preventive maintenance program and sets out six steps to help in the rehabilitation of the right road, at the right time, with the right treatment.

In Ontario, other surveys show that about 50 per cent of Ontario municipalities have preventative maintenance programs in place, says Brian Anderson of the Ontario Goods Roads Association.

He recommends the InfraGuide primer – particularly when local decisions are made to maintain good roads and allow poor roads to deteriorate to the point of replacement. The primer can help everyone understand the rationale.

“It’s a very good tool to assist a road manager in selling the idea to council,” says Mr. Anderson, a member of the InfraGuide roads and sidewalks committee and also serves as a regional contact for the organization whose role is to provide local level information dissemination and input for InfraGuide. .

Other InfraGuide best practice reports were also prompted by apparent gaps in guidelines available to municipalities, says roads committee chairman Mike Sheflin.

Several years ago he assumed, for example, that good guidelines existed to help municipalities minimize stress on pavement from repeated digging on city streets. “It turns out there was none,” he says.

Not until the roads committee produced two best practice documents, *The Construction of Utility Boxes in Pavement* and *the Restoration and Repair of Utility Boxes in Pavement*. In parallel, NRC is tackling a thorough research project sponsored by large North American cities that will bring state of the art guidelines for utility cuts by mid-next year.

InfraGuide has also produced documents that give guidelines for sealing and filling cracks in asphalt concrete, best practices in road drainage and techniques for rut mitigation at intersections.

“I’m quite certain that a number of municipalities have read them and used them,” says Wally Wells, past president of the Ontario Public Works Association and another Ontario regional contact for InfraGuide.

Meanwhile, he points out that municipal councils in Kingston, Burlington, Cambridge, Oakville, and London, have officially endorsed InfraGuide through council resolutions.

This spring, the roads committee is expected to release two new reports -- one setting out best practices in design, construction and rehabilitation of sidewalks; the other on the use of thin overlays on asphalt pavement.

For more information on InfraGuide or to join its growing network, call 1-866-330-3350 or go on-line at www.infraguide.gc.ca.

Sylvain Boudeau, is the technical advisor for municipal roads and sidewalks for InfraGuide and an employee of the National Research Council.

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