

# Highway Planning and Management

I'd like to talk to you about our audit of **Highway Planning and Management**.

The Ministry of Transportation manages a network of over 40,000 kilometres of provincial highway lanes, covering a distance of about 17,000 total kilometres, with assets valued at \$56 billion dollars, excluding bridges and culverts.

The Ministry has the authority to construct provincial highways, and is also responsible for maintaining and repairing highways.

In 2021/22, the Ministry spent about \$2 billion dollars on capital construction for highway expansion and rehabilitation projects.

Our audit assessed whether the Ministry of Transportation effectively planned and prioritized highway projects based on provincial infrastructure needs, as well as maintained, repaired and renewed existing provincial highways, in accordance with sound asset management principles.

Our audit concluded that the Ministry changed its prioritization of highway projects following government direction.

Further, the Ministry's processes to identify and plan for the maintenance, repair and renewal of existing provincial highways were not always efficient.

Over the last 10 years, the Ministry has consistently proposed highly rated highway expansion projects to the provincial government, based on the Ministry's prioritization assessment of each project.

However, in 2019, the Ministry proposed deferring 6 highway expansion projects that were previously approved by the Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet, and recommended funding the construction of 4 highway projects identified as government priorities.

This recommendation was made even though these 4 highway projects were ranked as lower priority by the Ministry's technical and engineering staff.

The Ministry elevated the prioritization of the 4 highway projects at the direction of the Minister's office.

Our audit noted that decisions about building priorities and financing should be made only after a rigorous and objective review of information and evidence.

Changing direction without going through the sound procedures the province already has in place for this could result in highways that are needed sooner being delayed or even delayed indefinitely.

Our audit noted that there is no implementation strategy for transportation plans.

Although the Ministry has finalized and published a transportation plan for one of the province's regions, it has not established timelines to finalize plans for the entire province.

Our report contains 12 recommendations, including that the Ministry of Transportation:

- request official written Ministerial direction when the provincial government's objectives do not align with the recommendations of the Ministry's subject-matter experts;
- make ministerial directions public on its website; and
- establish a target timeframe to finalize and complete transportation plans for the entire province including establishing short, medium, and long-term project priorities for each regional transportation plan.

To read this report, you can visit our website at [www.auditor.on.ca](http://www.auditor.on.ca)