



YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON SAFETY

In January, the Auditor General's office released its audit report on the state of British Columbia's management of forest service roads (FSR). Not surprisingly, there are issues, the biggest being from 2010 to 2018 there were 70 motor vehicle deaths and from 2012 to 2016 there were 499 motor vehicle accidents.

Other concerning facts from this report included:

- The requests for road maintenance funding from district offices ranged from \$28.6 to \$40.2 million; on average they received only \$5.5 million.
- 48 per cent of bridges and culverts are overdue for high priority repairs.
- Almost \$9 million of high priority maintenance work went unfunded.

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Further items of concern include the fact that the ministry's Engineering Funding Policy, which sets out the policy for forest district maintenance, primarily speaks to access for communities, rural residences, and high value recreation sites. Districts are not responsible to maintain FSRs for industrial use and are instructed to consider road closures and deactivation as an alternative to maintenance.

Of the nine recommendations that were put forward, it is disconcerting there was no mention of upgrading existing roads to accommodate industrial traffic. Most of us in the industry know that many of the resource roads were constructed years ago to accommodate 5- and 6-axle configurations of logging trucks; now we have 7- and 8-axle configurations trying to navigate roads that were just not designed for them. Issues like widened corners, line of sight, and a wider running surface are just a few of the

items that should be included as part of the recommendations and immediately corrected. I'm not sure if this is included in the \$9 million of high priority maintenance work which went unfunded, but it should definitely be considered as a priority. It is important that our industry do as much as possible to ensure the women and men who keep our industry moving are safe at all times.

Is this issue part of another problem that we need to consider? Hours of service and fatigue have become all too common and generally accepted by our industry. Is there a correlation between adjusted cycle times and road standards contributing to longer hours and burn-out in our drivers? Are these factors also

contributing to some of the 499 accidents as mentioned in the report?

Another concern regarding the recommendations is the lack of a timeline. It is important that we have a list and a plan to execute, but there is no end date. Given the severity of the issues discussed, should there not be a finish date? And not just around these recommendations, but with reporting and inspections, there will inevitably be another list of issues to be remedied. So, what will the timeline be for these to be fixed? One would hope that the most severe issues will be fixed in 2021.

If funding is the issue, perhaps we need to look to the past to assist in the future. In 2019, the provincial government announced the creation of the three-year Forest Employment Program. At the time, it was intended to bridge the shortfall in opportunities for contractors as a result of an economic downturn. Initially it had a

budget of \$9 million, but it has since been increased to \$21 million, which appears to be more than enough to cover the unfunded high-priority work mentioned in this report. Perhaps this funding would provide a dual purpose; not only to create safer roads but to assist some of those contractors who are still feeling the effects of the downturn over the last few years. After discussions with government regarding projects and priorities, it appears the ask needs to come from the local level. Given the outcome of this report, perhaps the district staff may want to look at their wish list with a different lens. I would imagine any of the forestry districts in the province would have at least one project that this funding could be spent on, and I would be more than happy to put them in touch with contractors who could do the work for them.

Speaking about safety, the health and safety of the general public continues to be our number one priority, especially during this unprecedented time. As such, our annual conference and trade show in May has been postponed, but we continue to monitor provincial and federal health orders regarding public gatherings to determine when we might be able to host it this year. Please continue to check the ILA website for updates.▲

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