

Rural Infrastructure

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities



Saskatchewan's rural municipalities (RMs) are responsible for capital projects and the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of 164,000 kilometres of Canada's largest rural municipal road network. Saskatchewan, Canada, and North America rely on well-maintained rural municipal roadways in Saskatchewan to connect and seamlessly move a vast array of commodities both to and from the global market. This journey often starts in and around RMs, to the provincial primary weight network and the National Highway System, then finally to ports to export globally.

The Saskatchewan Provincial Ministry of Highways (MoH) does provide annual funding support for rural municipal infrastructure with a Rural Integrated Roads for Growth (RIRG) Program.

- In 2024-25, the RIRG Program increased the yearly incremental maintenance funding for each Clearing the Path (CTP) Corridor. The purpose of the CTP primary weight corridor system is to connect and seamlessly move Saskatchewan's vast array of commodities and industry at primary weights.
- Starting in 2025, the RIRG Program will increase the per RM funding available for bridge replacement projects from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.
- To better accommodate over-width vehicles such as agricultural equipment, SARM began a project to develop an alternative bridge barrier at the lowest height allowed by the Canadian Highway Bridge Design Code without sacrificing safety and performance. The new bridge barrier design should be available for adoption by rural communities, or by other Canadian jurisdictions, in 2025.

In 2020, the federal government committed \$10.5M for bridge and culvert projects as part of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) and would provide 33% of the assistance given to an RM for their project. However, the lengthy federal approval process (in some cases taking over a year) has resulted in RMs withdrawing their projects due to being unable to afford the project due to cost increases.

In 2023, RIRG was no longer able to add new projects to ICIP, which results in committed funding from the ICIP being lost for every withdrawn or under budget completed project after April 1, 2023.

As of April 2024, approximately \$1,286,000 of funding from the ICIP can not be utilized due to not being able to reallocate the funding to other projects. This has resulted in a reduction of ICIP's commitment to approximately 88% of the original commitment. It is expected that ICIP's commitment will drop to approximately 80% as more RMs withdraw from the program or current RMs projects come in under budget.

The Voice of Rural Saskatchewan

Challenges

RMs in Saskatchewan are unique. They have relatively small populations spread across a large geographical distance, and yet, they remain a major contributor to ensuring that our nation's export market remains active and strong. Local infrastructure is often required to support more extensive investments in the provincial and federal economies.

- The costs associated with building and maintaining bridges, roadways, and utilities often fall broadly on the shoulders of an RM and their ratepayers.
- Communities with small populations have limited access to tax dollars and funding based on per-capita models.
- Construction costs and inflation have negatively impacted an RM's ability to plan and complete projects.
- Financial support from the federal government is imperative to ensure that our nation remains connected from coast to coast.
- There is an inherent need to maintain infrastructure assets as a matter of public safety.

There are currently 1281 RM bridge structures in rural Saskatchewan and approximately 24% of them are restricted in some manner (1 in every 4 bridges). Approximately 81% of the total RM bridge inventory contains treated timber structural components which have a service life of approximately 50-60 years.

- Approximately 34% of all RM bridges are 60 years of age or older (beyond the service life of the bridge).
- Approximately 29% of all RM bridges are 50 to 59 years of age (at the service life of the bridge).
- Approximately 18% of all RM bridges are 40 to 49 years of age (coming up on the service life of the bridge).
- $34\% + 29\% + 18\% = 81\%$ of the rural bridge inventory requires replacement in the next ten years.

Advocacy Asks

Moving forward, SARM respectfully seeks opportunities to work with Canada to successfully fund the ever-increasing RM deficit in rural road infrastructure funding.

As the federal government works to achieve its climate change targets, increased financial support is needed for RMs, especially under the current projected timelines. Upgrades to the present infrastructure is needed to ensure compatibility with new technology and in many cases new infrastructure is required to be built.

**Thank you
for your time!**

SARM looks forward to working with the federal government on projects and initiatives positively impacting Saskatchewan's rural municipalities.