
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Transportation

SNC-LAVALIN CHOSEN TO DELIVER WILLIAM R. BENNETT BRIDGE

KELOWNA – The Ministry of Transportation has selected SNC-Lavalin Inc. to design, build, finance and operate the new William R. Bennett Bridge in Kelowna, Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon and local MLAs Rick Thorpe, Sindi Hawkins and Al Horning announced today.

“The new toll-free bridge is going to improve safety, while reducing traffic congestion in Kelowna and on the west side,” said Falcon. “This agreement provides good value to taxpayers. Over the 30-year contract, government will save over \$16 million in construction, financing, maintenance and rehabilitation costs than if the bridge was delivered by traditional means.”

The capital cost of building the bridge is \$144.5 million, which is higher than the 2003 estimate of \$100 million due to dramatic increases in the cost of construction materials and labour. Concrete and steel prices have risen as much as 50 per cent over the past two years. In addition, fuel prices have risen 30 per cent in the last three months, driving up costs for similar projects throughout North America.

“For many years our community has been working hard towards reaching this goal of a new bridge,” said Hawkins, MLA for Kelowna-Mission. “The old bridge has served our community well, but we all know it needs to be replaced in order for our community to continue to grow and prosper.”

The total cost of payments the Province expects to make to SNC-Lavalin to design, build, finance, operate, maintain and rehabilitate the bridge over the course of the 30-year agreement is valued at \$179 million. Had the Province completed the project using a traditional procurement model, the cost was estimated at \$195 million. Risk for cost overruns is held by SNC-Lavalin rather than B.C. taxpayers. This is a fixed price contract for government, which means the Province will not pay more than the contract agreement stipulates.

“The new bridge is going benefit the Westside,” said Thorpe, MLA for Okanagan-Westside. “When traffic moves more smoothly, trade and tourism have room to grow, benefiting the economy of the Okanagan and British Columbia.”

“I am very pleased to see Kelowna take one more step towards the completion of the new bridge,” added Horning, MLA for Kelowna-Lake Country. “Our whole community will benefit and very soon we will see this new landmark being built. The William R. Bennett Bridge will be something of which we will all be proud once it is completed.”

The performance-based contract ensures that SNC-Lavalin has incentives to meet or exceed long-term safety, reliability and capacity objectives the ministry has set for the project. Further incentives are included to minimize road delays and closures, improve predictability and complete the project on time. The method of construction will also allow emergency vehicles to cross the bridge during the construction period.

The ministry will oversee the project, ensuring that specifications such as safety and sightline requirements, lane availability and signage are appropriately met. SNC-Lavalin will assume design, construction, maintenance and operation risks.

“We applaud the provincial government for their commitment to this project, which is a critical component of the vital Highway 97 transportation corridor,” said Kelowna Mayor Walter Gray. “When you combine the rapid growth we are experiencing in the Central Okanagan with the strength of the economy province-wide, it’s obvious this bridge can’t be built fast enough.”

“I’m very pleased that after many months of hard work the Westbank First Nation and the Province have reached an agreement for the west approach,” said Westbank First Nation Chief Robert Louie. “The agreement is critical to the overall bridge project, and we are very pleased that the Province is now proceeding with construction.”

In early July, SNC-Lavalin will begin construction of a dry dock north of Bear Creek Provincial Park, where the bridge pontoons will be built. They are expected to begin work at the new bridge site in 2006, with the new bridge expected to be open in July 2008.

The Ministry of Transportation will schedule a series of public information sessions throughout the month of July, where people can ask questions of the project’s team of experts.

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