Editor's note
This article was adapted from information provided in the spring 2005 issue of Wisconsin LTAP. Many suggestions in the original article were provided by Bob Kleinschmidt, retired bridge project maintenance manager for Minnesota DOT. Thank you to Michael Todsen, LeRoy Bergmann, and Donna Buchwald at the Iowa DOT for reviewing this article and focusing the content for Iowans.

Spring checkup for local bridges

Conducting basic bridge maintenance and inspection at this time of year can help local agencies ensure that local bridges remain as strong and safe as possible for the duration of their service life.

Record keeping
Accurate, up-to-date records are the heart of a good bridge maintenance and inspection program.

Organize. Start a file folder for each bridge in your jurisdiction. Put reports, photos, and completed work orders in it. Plan a visual inspection as you plan pavement surface condition ratings.

If a consultant does your safety inspections, go along and ask questions about items needing maintenance.

Make a list of work that's needed, set priorities, and schedule repairs.

Develop emergency phone list. Don't wait for a flood to discover you have an old phone number for a critical person. Organize or update an emergency response plan with names, home and cell phone numbers, and a sequence of contacts in an emergency.

Distribute the plan to employees and emergency services in your area so they have appropriate contacts.

Spring cleaning
Just like your plows, trucks, and spreading equipment, bridges need to be cleaned of salt and sand after a winter of deicing, anti-icing, and sanding activities.

Flush decks, seats, caps, and salt-splash zones with water. Clean drainage systems and expansion joints. Clean and lubricate bearing assemblies.
Obtaining funding for bridge improvements

According to the 2004 National Bridge Inventory, 4,700 of the nearly 20,000 bridges on Iowa’s county roads and 310 of the 1,400 bridges on city streets in Iowa are structurally deficient; more than 1,200 county road bridges and 160 city bridges are functionally obsolete.

If you have a bridge that is in poor condition (structurally deficient) or too narrow (functionally obsolete) you may contact the Iowa DOT Office of Local Systems for assistance on available funding.

For city bridges, contact Donna Buchwald, 515-239-1051, donna.buchwald@dot.iowa.gov; for county bridges, contact LeRoy Bergmann, 515-239-1506, leroy.bergmann@dot.iowa.gov.

You can also find information on various funding programs available for road and bridge projects, including application deadlines, at www.dot.state.ia.us.fundguid.htm.

For more information

If you have questions about bridge inspections, including the National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS), contact Michael Todsen, Iowa DOT Office of Bridges and Structures, 515-233-7726, michael.todsen@dot.iowa.gov.