

The CONSTRUCTOR **2010**

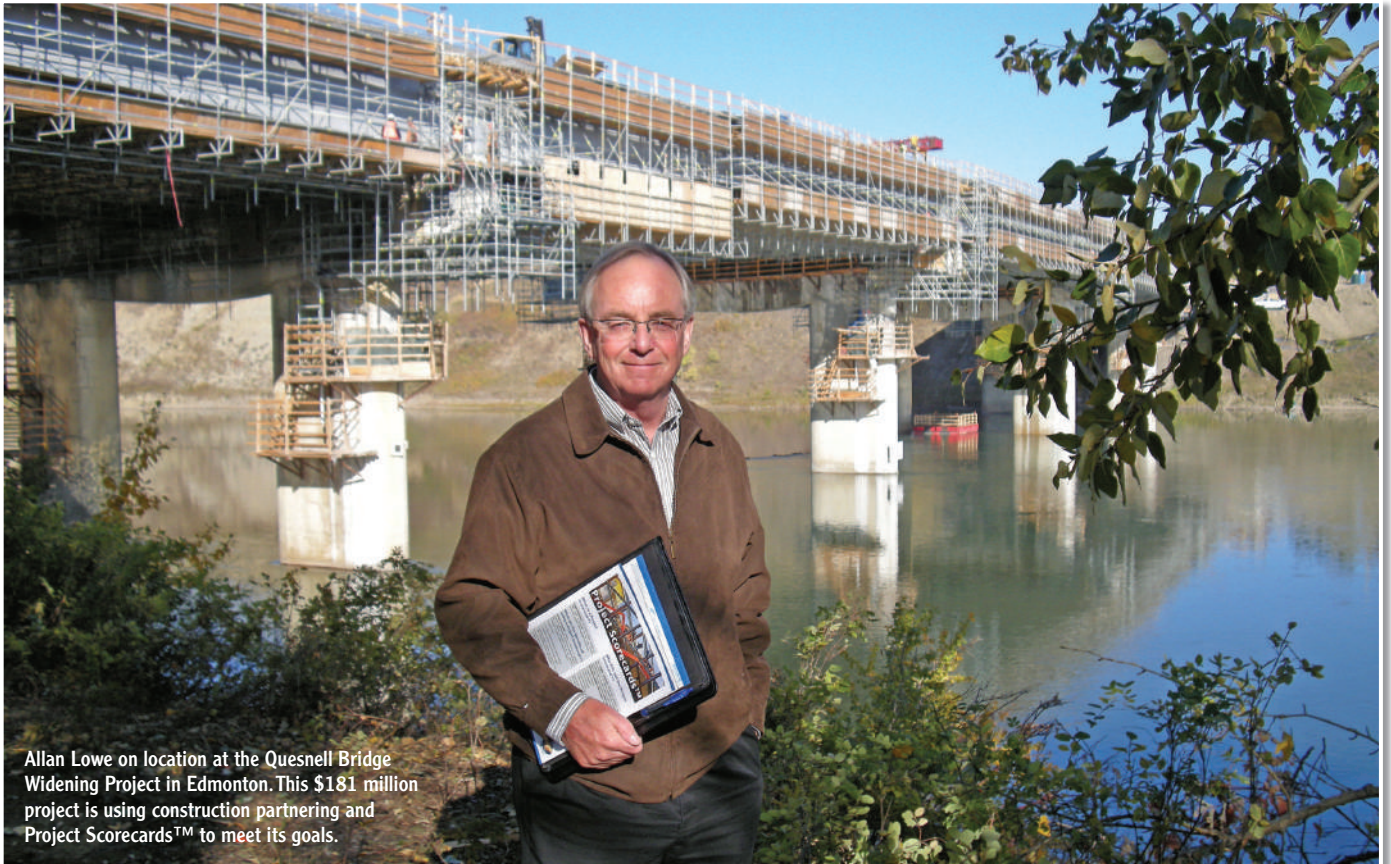
Building on the Frontier Spirit



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Construction partnering promotes teamwork and cooperation

By Lisa Fattori



Allan Lowe on location at the Quesnell Bridge Widening Project in Edmonton. This \$181 million project is using construction partnering and Project Scorecards™ to meet its goals.

While the practice of construction partnering is not a new phenomenon, it's increasingly being adopted as a means of preventing disputes that can escalate into more serious claims. When all parties commit to a working relationship that fosters trust, open communication and co-operation toward common goals, projects inherently run more smoothly and are more efficient and profitable. From the owner, prime contractor, consultants and architect to the various sub-trades of a project, construction partnering creates a win-win situation for everyone involved.

"Pre-construction meetings don't go nearly as deep as partnership meetings," says construction partnering facilitator, Allan Lowe, president of Allan Lowe and

Associates Inc. "Third party facilitators have proven and developed processes that help participants to identify common goals, and provide tools to keep those goals at the forefront, throughout the duration of a project," he says.

Typically, a construction partnering workshop is scheduled after contracts have been awarded and prior to the start of construction. Participants include a project's owner, consultants, architect, prime contractor and major sub-contractors, who are all asked to clearly define their individual concerns and goals. The workshop facilitator conducts a series of exercises where participants interact and develop strategies to achieve common goals and prevent disputes. After working through various

issues, participants pen a charter which itemizes specific goals and reinforces the group's commitment toward co-operation.

"Before, our construction projects were strictly delivered on an adversarial basis, and we would wait to refute claims that would arrive on our desks," says Nino DeLaurentiis, P.Eng., construction manager for Alberta Transportation, Southern Region. "The construction partnering workshop was a real eye-opener about the way projects are delivered. I learned that I needed to be able to place myself in the shoes of others and to understand their goals."

The more complex a project, the more risk is involved, which from the outset, can create an adversarial relationship rather

than one based on co-operation. All parties have their individual goals: the project's owner wants quality construction that is on time and on budget; the prime contractor wants to be efficient and profitable; and consultants have to ensure that specifications are carried out. Construction partnering puts common goals ahead of individual goals, and clearly-defined expectations minimize the risks associated with larger projects, such as scheduling changes, delays and worker safety.

Despite a team approach and show of goodwill, there will be conflicts that require expedient resolution. An effective construction partnering tool is Allan Lowe's "issue resolution ladder," which is a set procedure that all parties follow in addressing issues or concerns. Stakeholders have a four-level hierarchy within their own organizations to deal with a particular problem, beginning with the level one, on-site super, and moving up levels to upper management. If the issue is not resolved within a certain time frame, then the matter passes up to the next level.

"The issue resolution ladder is a very effective strategy for managing a project on a daily basis," says Brian Pearce, P.Eng., chief business officer for consulting firm Stewart Weir.

"Most issues usually arise in the field, and it's usually at this level or the next level that the problem gets resolved. While the philosophy of partnering runs throughout the hierarchy, those at the first few levels see the practical benefits of resolving disputes quickly and early in the hierarchy," Pearce says.

Months later, after the initial construction partnering workshop, a refresher workshop or subsequent meetings may be necessary to reaffirm team goals as they were set out in the charter. Allan Lowe and Associates' Project Scorecard™ is a follow-up program that gives regular report cards on how a team is maintaining its partnering objectives. The online partnering team survey gathers feedback from participants about various goals and strategies that were identified as pertinent to the project's success. If there is a disconnect

between objectives and the reality of a project's day-to-day operations, the team can address issues to ensure that the partnership goals continue throughout the life of a project.

"The Project Scorecard™ asks specific questions about the priorities that were agreed upon and included in the charter," says Bill Campbell, P.Eng., infrastructure operations manager for Graham Group.

"This is a maintenance program to see how well a project is progressing. Sometimes, you may get an issue that gets confrontational, which warrants a refresher partnering session to get the team back on track," Campbell says.

Matt Boiko, general supervisor of Special Projects, City of Edmonton, states that: "Project Scorecards™ have become a very important and useful project management tool. They enable the project team to identify potential problems early enough in the project so that the consultant, contractor and owner can work together in a proactive environment, rather than a reactive one."





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Following the success of construction partnering in the U.S. transportation industry, Alberta Transportation has adopted the practice as standard for all large projects. In fact, Allan Lowe and Associates offers two construction partnering workshops that are accredited by the Canadian Construction Association – Gold Seal Certification Program. While construction partnering is quite familiar to those in transportation construction, the process is still quite new and untried in the commercial and residential construction sectors.

"I've met with various associations to explain construction partnering, and everyone is very excited by the idea," Lowe says. "The benefits are proven and the process can be applied in any construction sector. As people learn more about it, we'll see more partnering in private construction projects." ■



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