

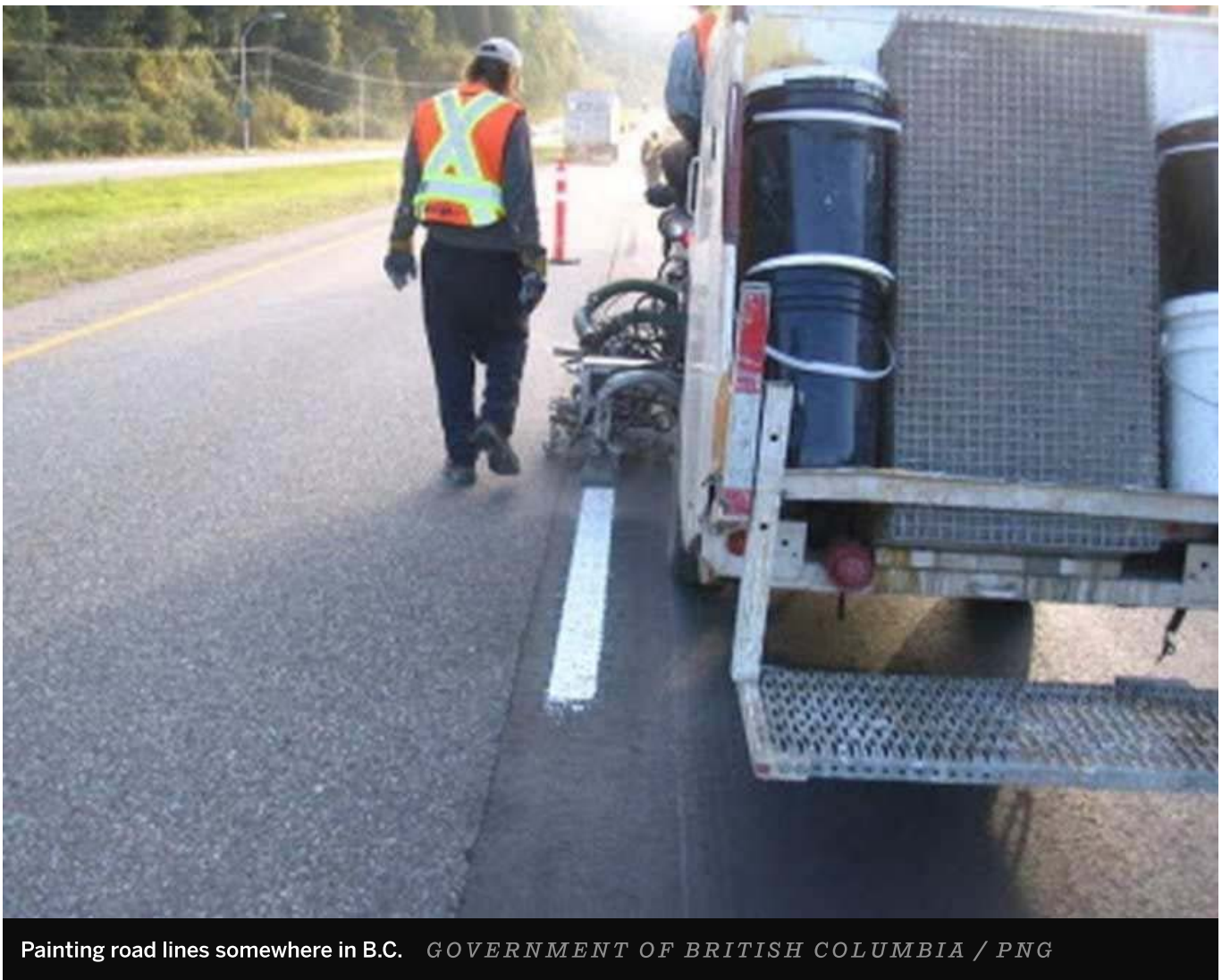
B.C. hunts for a durable highway line paint



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VICTORIA — B.C. is close to finding new and improved paint for highway lines, after several years of being forced to repeatedly re-mark roads

amid complaints that the paint has been wearing off within a matter of months.

Transportation Minister Todd Stone said the issue of rapidly disappearing yellow and white lines on B.C. highways is a hot topic that his ministry has spent considerable time researching.

"I have heard from more people on this particular issue than anything else in the three years I've been the minister," Stone said in an interview. "It seems to be a unifying issue across the province right now."

The City of Quesnel raised concerns in a [resolution \(http://www.nclga.ca/resolutions/highway-line-paint/160\)](http://www.nclga.ca/resolutions/highway-line-paint/160) to the North Central Local Government Association last week, demanding the province find more durable highway paint that lasts the winter driving season and that the province accelerate its re-painting program to address rapidly disappearing lines.

The problem dates to 2010, when Ottawa banned the oil-based highway marking paint used by most provinces, as part of new environmental protection standards. B.C. switched to a lower pollution alkyd paint for coastal and northern roads, and a water-based paint in the interior. Neither last a full year, and the Transportation Ministry has been getting complaints ever since.

"Provinces all started looking around for a paint that had the same longevity and durability as the oil-based paint," said Stone. "And such a paint does not exist."

Disappearing lines is a safety concern for motorists who need to see the centre line and side road markings during night driving or in poor weather conditions, said the minister.

So Stone instructed his staff to find a solution.

The result was [three test sites, near Maple Ridge, Kamloops and Prince George \(http://tranbc.ca/2015/09/25/looking-for-line-painting-that-can-take-a-pounding/#sthash.rNtNJWni.tsxojw5v.dpbs\)](http://tranbc.ca/2015/09/25/looking-for-line-painting-that-can-take-a-pounding/#sthash.rNtNJWni.tsxojw5v.dpbs) where for almost a year ministry staff have been monitoring the performance of 18 paints using different brands, compounds and thicknesses spread in multiple

lines across the highway. The paints have been run over by thousands of vehicles, covered in salt and sand, plowed by machines and otherwise subjected to the normal poundings of a B.C. highway.

“The good news is there’s actually two or three of those compounds that appear to be quite promising and they’d be environmentally friendly,” said Stone.

Stone said he hopes to pick winners in late summer or early fall, and start laying down paint before the winter.

Ministry crews and contractors normally repaint almost 30,000 kilometres of roads yearly, at a cost of almost \$11 million. But they’ve had to ramp up painting to address the durability problems.

“We’re probably using four to five times the volume of paint now than we did before we this regulatory change was made by the feds,” said Stone.

“We’re painting far more frequently to keep up with it, we’re trying to paint earlier in the spring, kind of a mid-spring paint where previously we hadn’t done that, and we do a summer and fall paint.

“Normally we’d paint the lines once a year — sometimes we could get by every other year with the oil-based paints. So the stop gap measure has been to put a lot more paint down a lot more frequently, and even then the challenge has been enormous.”

Meanwhile, the province does have an alternative it has been using on roads where visibility, geography and weather make for dangerous conditions, such as parts of the Coquihalla Highway. Crews grind out a line-sized trench in the pavement and pour a clumpy epoxy-plastic paint nicknamed “[golden oatmeal \(http://tranbc.ca/2011/10/26/golden-oatmeal-glows-for-safety/#sthash.RGUS0gf3.R5oetes1.dpbs\)](http://tranbc.ca/2011/10/26/golden-oatmeal-glows-for-safety/#sthash.RGUS0gf3.R5oetes1.dpbs)” that bonds to the asphalt using the same material as dentures. Because it sits just below the rest of the pavement, it better withstands wear.

“The problem is to do that is extremely cost prohibitive,” said Stone. “It’s very pricey.”

“The longer term solution has got to be to come up with a viable long-standing durable paint that you can apply in the traditional manner.”