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Vancouver Pile Driving created a dry dock to serve construction of the William R. Bennett Bridge. It helped the company earn a VRCA Silver Award of Excellence.

#### General Contractor \$15 to \$50 Million

### William R. Bennett Bridge floating bridge one of just eight in the world

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If someone sets out to do a \$40 million marine job in the middle of a desert, there are bound to be some challenges.

This is the situation that faced Vancouver Pile Driving Ltd. (VPDL) when it took a contract for part of the job of replacing the floating bridge across Lake Okanagan, which connects Kelowna to the west side of the lake.

The William R. Bennett Bridge is a public-private-partnership.

It enabled VPDL to win a Vancouver Regional Construction Association Silver Award in the category of a general contractor working on a job valued between \$15 million and \$50 million.

VPDL's portion of the project included constructing a dry dock that was 30 metres wide by 100 metres long by seven metres deep on the west side of the lake.

It was used for fabricating concrete pontoons. The company supplied and installed 89 piles at two abutments and five piers as well as new floating bridge sections from west to east consisting of nine new floating concrete pontoons.

This included removing, shortening and re-attaching existing north anchor cables and temporarily connecting the new bridge to the old.

The pile drive company constructed and installed four new 70-ton concrete anchors at the east end of the bridge.

Separately, the company is currently demolishing the 50-year old original floating bridge.

The largest portion of the new bridge is the floating structure. The bridge is a kilometre long, with the floating portion extending for .7 kilometres. The extreme west end is a conventional fixed structure.

This was done for two reasons – soil conditions were not suitable for anchoring a new floating structure and there was a need to create an elevated bridge, so boats could come and go without the disruption of opening and closing the bridge.

The structure is one of only eight floating bridges in the world and serves one of the heaviest traffic loads in the province.

Traffic volume in 2009 is expected to reach 48,400 cars per day and by 2017 that number is expected to rise to 69,000.

Gordon Carlson was VPDL's project engineer, but a marine contractor can feel lonely among cactus and tumbleweed.

"There is no real marine industry in the Okanagan," he said. "As a result, we had to move a lot of equipment from the coast to the Interior."

That equipment included three tug boats along with three cranes and barges. Even the marine expertise had to be imported.

"It was a very risky job," he said. "We put a lot of thought into how it was to be done. Because of the location, we weren't able to simply call in a spare tug boat."

It was a complicated challenge as it entailed building a new floating bridge parallel to the existing bridge with a gap of only 6.5 metres between them.

Public safety was a major concern as the old bridge was still used during construction. VPDL was also dealing with an extremely aggressive schedule.

The consortium building the bridge was anxious to complete it as quickly as possible, so they could get the cash flowing in.

Despite the challenges, the William R. Bennett Bridge opened in May of this year, 108 days ahead of schedule and on budget.

Members of the Bennett family, including William (Bill) R. Bennett, former Social Credit premier, were on hand for the event. It was almost 50 years after Bennett's father, W.A.C. Bennett, B.C. premier for 20 years, joined with Princess Margaret in cutting the ribbon for the first floating Kelowna bridge.

More information about the bridge can be found by visiting the Journal of Commerce archives at [www.journalofcommerce.com/article/id22936](http://www.journalofcommerce.com/article/id22936).



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