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REMOTE INSTALLATION

BY
ANDREW SNOOK



All Roads Construction builds state-of-the-art asphalt plant with remote assistance

> The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has created many challenges for the roadbuilding and aggregates industries since this past March. From changing safety protocols to the risk of job site shutdowns and challenges managing employees, companies have had their hands full to say the least. In addition to these challenges, All Roads Construction in Surrey, B.C., a Vancouver area road construction company and asphalt paving contractor, recently overcame another pandemic-related challenge: installing a new asphalt plant with only remote assistance available from the manufacturer.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

All Roads had recently decided to purchase a new asphalt plant to expand its operations. The company opted for the

Gencor 300TPH Skidded Asphalt Ultraplant, one of the top asphalt plants in the industry designed for meeting strict emission guidelines in places like the Metro Vancouver area and California.

“This whole process started almost two years ago with Metro Vancouver, receiving our air bylaw permit application, which was followed up with a video presentation of the proposed plant and its various emission controls,” explains Rod Stephens, president of All Roads Construction. “It’s similar to San Francisco here, very strict air pollution bylaws. We wanted to, not only meet the stringent specifications, but we also wanted to make sure our plant, on all levels, exceeded these expectations. All of our employees live in this area. We raise our children in this area, we raise our grandchildren in this area. We wanted to make sure we were not adding contaminants to the air. Our collective focus was to use the best 2020 control technologies available to support our neighborhood goal of being morally and corporately responsible. Gencor was chosen because they had a couple of unique features.”

“It is the first new plant in the Vancouver area in 14 years, so it was a challenge to get the permit,” adds Mark Howard, vice-president of sales at Gencor. “We call it the green machine. Noise-wise it’s very quiet, and we meet all the environmental requirements anywhere in North America.”

One of the features that sparked the interest of All Roads was the company’s patented blue smoke capture system.

“It takes all the blue smoke, captures it, and blows it back into our burner. It’s there for environmental reasons, but there are aesthetic reasons as well to make sure optics were good, as well as the air quality,” Stephens says.

The UltraFlo Baghouse Filtration System was another feature that sold All Roads on the 300TPH Skidded Asphalt Ultraplant.

“It has a state-of-the-art baghouse that is capturing all the dust,” Stephens says, adding that the add-on flue gas return system feature was also a point of interest for him. “This add-on feature allows you to take some of those gases created and recirculates them back to the burner... in the old days, these were emissions that went

Stephens says.

Since the company had never built or commissioned a Gencor asphalt plant before, Stephens reached out to a former business partner, Brent Balluff, to assist with the construction of the plant. Balluff had previous experience assembling Gencor plants. All Roads also hired a new plant manager, Dennis Ebby, who ended up being another key person involved in the successful construction and commissioning of the plant.

But even with Balluff and Ebby ready to assist with the project, All Roads had no idea of some of the challenges that would face them in the coming months. After receiving the shipment of parts for the construction of the new asphalt plant this past winter, the pandemic was declared, cutting off a great deal of travel between Canada and the U.S., where Gencor is based.

“Because of COVID-19, we had zero hands-on support from Gencor,” Stephens says. “We received 56 truck and trailer loads and needed to construct it. This made it a bit more challenging for sure.”

Fortunately, Gencor was able to do training with members of the All Roads team before the pandemic hit.

“They did some school training, I was up there a number of times,” Howard says.

Balluff said that the challenges related to the construction of the plant actually started before the arrival of the pandemic in March.

“We were to take our first delivery on January 13, and we’d set up a schedule, so the loads arrived in the order I wanted them to come in, but no sooner than we get started we get a heavy snowfall,” Balluff recalls. “In the first couple of weeks, I think we spent three or four mornings where we spent two hours just clearing snow. Then the weather warmed up and we were dealing with torrential rains.”

The preparation of the footings also created challenges.

“We’ve got cranes moving around, excavators doing excavations for footings. Some of the excavations exposed old fill sites and required us to go deeper than we wanted to go to get proper footings, so it was a mess,” Balluff says.

Instead of hiring outside contractors, All Roads decided to primarily employ members of its road crews for the assembly of the plant to get them some work during the off-season.

“Many of our guys had been exposed



A year-and-a-half of planning was put into All Roads Construction’s purchase, assembly and commissioning of its new Gencor 300TPH Skidded Asphalt Ultraplant.

off into the sky. This plant recirculates them and returns it, so it is not going into the atmosphere. That was important for us. It was one reason we ultimately went with Gencor, their environmental component was something we bought into.”

At the time that All Roads purchased the new Gencor plant, they knew there would be significant work needed to complete its construction.

“Our plant is sitting on the edge of a river and it’s very visible. To make sure it stays safe and sound without a chance of contamination, we had to seismically upgrade all of our silos. We had to do a bunch of piledriving underneath the silos, which were all set on concrete foundations. It was a lot of engineering and thousands of emails. There was a solid year-and-a-half of planning to put this together,”

to plants but had never assembled a plant before. That was a challenge because we had to, in effect, educate each crew member as they came on,” Balluff says. “It took us longer than predicted, but we had a great group of guys.”

ENTER COVID-19

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic was declared when All Roads was about one third of the way through construction of the new plant.

“That threw us a real curveball. We didn’t know if we were going to continue building the plant,” Balluff says. “We ended up being considered essential because of the nature of the highways needing asphalt plants. On site, we had to implement the necessary protocols: the two-metre rule, anyone deemed to have any symptoms had to stay home. Everything was new and a learning curve.”

“The social distancing was a key factor cause you’re pulling wrenches, working side by side with your peers. We tried our best to keep our distance, put up two-metre signs,” adds All Roads plant manager Dennis Ebby, saying that the after-work activities of All Roads employees were not a major concern. “We were working so many hours that we didn’t have time to socialize. We went to work, went home to sleep, and then got up and kept on going.”

Once assembled, All Roads faced another challenge. Gencor representatives were not able to travel to All Roads’ site to assist with the on-site commissioning of the plant due to travel restrictions in place at the time because of the pandemic.

“When it became clear that they weren’t going to be coming on site when we did some of the things, that made me sweat. Not having them coming and looking over your shoulder,” Balluff says. “Fortunately, Dennis [Ebby] was far more up to date technically than I was. He was able to work well with a lot of the technical, PLC communication items. With only minor problems, we fired up the plant and did it completely with long-distance help from Gencor.”

Gencor offered as much assistance as it could, given the unique circumstances, and were regularly in communication with the All Roads team to answer any questions they had, or to fire over any drawings they needed to assist them with the assembly and commissioning. The construction and commissioning process



Despite only remote assistance being available during the assembly and commissioning phases of the plant, the project went relatively smoothly. All Roads Construction produced over 100,000 tons of asphalt from its new plant in the first four months.

took about five months to complete.

“We made our first mix on May 22, and it went without a hitch,” Stephens says.

In September, a Gencor representative was able to travel to All Roads’ site to assist with a few minor kinks that needed to be worked out on the system.

“We did end up getting a Gencor rep to come out a few weeks ago to tweak the settings on the burner,” Balluff says. “One of the reasons we went with Gencor was the advertised emission levels the plant would produce. The plant, emission-wise, is designed to satisfy the air quality emissions in the San Francisco area. When he came out, he dialed everything into the ‘nth’ degree, and we did meet the advertised emission levels.”

Because of All Roads’ great planning and people, the new asphalt plant ran smoothly from its first mix in May onward.

“We produced over 100,000 tons of asphalt from the plant in the first four months. A brand-new plant set up in COVID without on-site support because of flight restrictions,” Stephens says. “We kept it running without any downtime and it still hasn’t stopped. That was the benefit of the year-and-a-half of planning put into place. Planning is important. Having the right people on your team is extremely important. Purchasing the right equipment is important. The three of those together make this story a success.”



The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic was declared when All Roads was about one third of the way through construction of the new plant. Photos courtesy of All Roads Construction.