

MONTREAL — The RCMP is investigating how and why \$1.5 million in payments made their way into Swiss bank accounts belonging to Michel Fournier, the former boss of a federal Crown corporation that operates the Jacques-Cartier and Champlain bridges in Quebec.

Infrastructure Minister Denis Lebel requested the criminal investigation, according to information seen by QMI Agency.

Lebel confirmed the investigation Wednesday.

Lebel's office called in the RCMP after receiving a secret investigative report from Daniel H. Tingley, a retired Quebec Superior Court judge, and a Montreal forensic accounting firm.

The judge and the accounting firm examined Fournier's role and involvement in the awarding of a \$110-million contract to resurface the concrete roadway on the Jacques-Cartier Bridge in 2000, and the subsequent approval of \$17 million in change orders and additional payments, pushing the total to \$127 million.

A consortium led by SNC-Lavalin — linked to several corruption affairs involving millions in bribes paid for contracts in Canada and overseas in recent years -- won that contract.

Tingley declined to comment, saying he and others involved in producing his report are all operating under what he called "a confidentiality order."

Patrice Ryan, a Montreal publicist working for Fournier, says the former chief executive of the Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridge Corp. denies getting bribes and will co-operate with the RCMP.

Fournier, a long-time Liberal, is an ex-chief of staff to Jean Chretien when he was opposition leader.

Fournier is now retired and living in Victoria, B.C.

Swiss authorities are already investigating the allegations that Fournier accepted cash deposits totalling \$1.5 million in 2002 as the bridge work was being completed.