

Local Assistance
Highway Bridge Program Advisory Committee Meeting
April 16, 2020—Decisions Made and Action Items

Attendees

Dee Lam, Acting Division Chief, DLA
Mark Samuelson, DLA
Robert Peterson, DLA
Linda Newton, DLA
Eileen Crawford, DLA
Robert Zezoff, DLA H
Jim Perrault, DLAE D6
Sudhakar Vatti, Caltrans SLA
Michael Chung, San Joaquin County
Jason Vivian, Tulare County
Matt Randall, Placer County
Chris Sneddon, Santa Barbara County

Debbie O'Leary, City of Oxnard
Robert Newman, City of Santa Clarita
Jesse Gothan, City of Sacramento
Ross McKeown, MTC
José Luis Cáceres, SACOG
Jon Pray, CTC
Greg Kolle, FHWA
Adam Fisher, FHWA
Rebecca Neves, City of Placerville
Susan Herman, CSUS
Kirk Anderson, D6

Decisions

No decisions were made at the meeting.

Action Items

Item Number	Status	Who	Action	Date Created	Target Date
A95	Open	DLA	Bridge Capacity System (BCS) hosting: consider costs and risks, with input from County of LA, Caltrans IT, and LTAP Center	02/19/2015	2020
A106	Open	All/ Ross	Review proposed HBP policy improvements regarding: ADT/Future ADT, approach roadway length, bridge project item eligibility for Federal-aid reimbursement, width of bridge project lanes and shoulders	8/23/2018	4/16/2020 Agenda Item #6
A110	Open	CSAC reps	Contact county agencies whose unprogrammed bridge projects appear on the scour critical list coded 1 or 2, to promote awareness of HEC 23 chapter 2 (Scour Plan of Action and	2/21/2019	2020

			Countermeasures), available mitigation funding, and HBP prioritization criteria.		
A112	Open	DLA	Invite a specialist from Caltrans Division of Environmental Analysis to provide input on NEPA process, for discussion on how to streamline	4/18/2019	2020
A114	Open	All	Discuss possible changes to 6-A scoping document to help estimate project cost more precisely	4/18/2019	4/16/2020 Agenda #6
A115	Open	All	Discuss future of BIC program to balance flexibility and fairness—e.g., whether to simplify the program to encourage better utilization, discontinue program, or other action.	4/18/2019	2020
A120	Open	DLA	DLA to circulate letter for comment to 6 county agencies whose yet-to-be programmed bridge projects appear on the scour critical list coded 2, seeking response on Scour Plan of Action and Countermeasures	8/22/2019	2020
A121	Complete	DLA	Invite selected consultant to report on bridge portion of 2020 CA Statewide Local Streets & Roads Needs Assessment	8/22/2019	02/20/2020
A122	Open	DLA	Draft guidelines for CSAC and LCC to use in implementing SB 137 Federal-State Highway Funds exchange	12/12/2019	2020
A123	Open	DLA	How many projects are we delivering versus in the past with rising costs?	02/20/2020	2020
A124	Open	DLA	Report on Bridge Projects with Inactive Obligation and possible actions by the HBP Managers	02/20/2020	2020

Discussions

1. Welcome

- The meeting was held by Webex in the morning session, by phone for the afternoon session
- Dee Lam introduced herself as the Acting Division Chief, now that Ray Zhang has retired

2. Agenda Review

- No items were added to the agenda

3. Review of 2/20/20 Draft action summary

- A106 was discussed as Agenda #7 in February
- A113 is now complete; will be removed next time
- A114 was discussed as Agenda #7 in February
- A118 is now complete; will be removed next time
- Some target dates read 2019; Eileen will update these
- Still working on A122 draft guidelines for SB-137
- 2 items added last time—A123, A124
- Re: A121, Matt noted that comments for the Streets and Roads Needs Assessment were originally due 4/17/20 but the deadline has been extended to 5/1/20 due to low response rate. Multiple channels—Local Assistance blog, messages out via SACOG region newsletters, etc.—are needed to remind survey respondents to weigh in
- Re: A124, agencies typically work directly with DLA when invoicing. If the agency is not invoicing (and there are many possible reasons for this), then DLA is more likely to have up-to-date information about why. Action is for DLA to update its processes with Implementation and how they share inactive obligation statuses with the RTPAs and MPOs

4. Financial Status/Financial Constraint

- HBP has obligated \$168M of its FY apportionment as of April 2020
- Current apportionment delivery is an all-time high for the HBP
- In mid-March obligational authority (OA) was maxed out; no additional E-76s will be submitted to FHWA until May 1
- HBP projects are queueing up, so the remainder of this FY's apportionment (about \$78M) will go very quickly

Comments

Of the \$168M that has been obligated, Linda estimated a small portion is accounted for by two or three AC conversions for high-cost bridges. 6th Street in LA has not submitted for authorization yet.

The \$25.8M carry-over balance from FY18-19 is advanced HBP apportionment from a future year. This was done because of rescission that was written into FAST Act. HBP apportionments were subject to rescission, but this was later repealed.

More bridge projects are being added to the queue every day and will surely exceed the \$78M projected balance. Options include:

- Stop sending E-76s when we hit our apportionment value
- Ask agencies if they are to use AC as a tool

- Dip into 2021 apportionment

Re: demand backlog

- The financial status and financial constraint reports contain a lot of data that can be used to advocate for more funds— the \$289M apportionment isn't enough
- There are 441 projects programmed in the current FTIP; 17-18 years' demand
- Of the \$75M programmed for Off-system in FFY19/20, construction costs accounted for \$58.1M (15.5M of which was for cost increases). Of 24 Off-system projects programmed, half of them have cost increases. This hurts the probability of projects getting construction programmed when they want it
- How can PE contract documentation stay current with NEPA and design standards when there is an 18-year backlog?
- In April 2019 the HBP had 16.93 years of demand (combined On- and Off-system categories) and was trending towards the goal of having only a 15-year backlog. This was due to LAPM Chapter 6 updates that prioritized and metered projects into the program. Since SB-1 has resulted in higher demand for construction the backlog is lengthening again
- José Luís said he could provide info from a project in District 3 that had bids come in around 2x the engineer's estimate

FHWA in FFY 18-19 awarded \$225 million in grant funding under a Competitive Highway Bridge Program for highway bridge replacement or rehabilitation projects on public roads that demonstrated cost savings by bundling at least two highway bridge projects into a single contract. California did not meet the criteria to be invited for this competitive funding, but one of Ray Zhang's goals was to be ready if a similar opportunity arose again. Greg will research the grant and coordinate with CTC staff on bringing a presentation on this and other HBP funding issues to the CTC.

Some HBP projects could be used as part of economic stimulus to make up for lost revenue during coronavirus stay-at-home orders—this is in progress in CA State legislature.

5. 2020 Prioritization

Under the current prioritization scheme, 2020 shows a demand of \$267M in On-system projects (61 of them), and \$155.5M for 76 Off-system projects. Suggestions to further manage this include:

- Allowing only projects ranked 1 and 2
- Re-ranking preventive maintenance projects from rank 6 to rank 4
- Resolve the bridges with Scour 113 = U code (unknown foundation); load posting may be based on very conservative assumptions. Can Caltrans visit local agencies to re-emphasize the importance of their as-built plans?

Re: preservation. HBP managers asked for input on the idea of carving out a BPMP amount separate from bridge replacements/rehabs.

- Mike noted that for State-owned bridges, about 25% of available funds goes to preventive maintenance and 75% to rehabilitation and replacement
- Chris suggested prioritizing maintenance projects under \$500K
- Greg suggested emphasizing BIC for preventive work

Re: policy that currently includes some State bridge owners in Local HBP:

- Future agreements through CTC should include funds to the Local HBP for State CalFire and/or State Parks-owned bridges; no CalFire bridges are currently programmed
- Future policy should not include CalFire—agency can get hazard mitigation funds; State parks can use ATP grants

No call for a vote/decision this meeting but any changes to prioritization must be made by August. Additional comments:

- A “no additional projects” approach might spur more usage of BIC
- Let’s consider a 25%/75% formula for BPMP/rehab and replace
- Rebecca commented that it’s difficult for most small agencies to carry construction funds until more OA is available. Her agency had a conditioned local match from developer—so didn’t have to carry substantial costs for a long time. Such tools aren’t always available
- Chris noted that local agency revenues will be down 20% or more due to COVID-19 (Rebecca’s agency estimates a 36% loss in Q2), so the idea of using BIC won’t be practical
- Frequent re-prioritization makes it hard for local agencies to plan and execute
- Caltrans is still developing guidance to bring back to the committee on SB-137 funds. If the federal-state exchange results in State only funds for local bridges this could result in faster and less expensive projects than locals using BIC or prioritization through federal HBP. This topic and the idea of getting a better scope for Scour 113 Unknown projects can be covered in a future meeting

6. HBP Guidelines Changes

HBP managers thanked everyone for submitting comments earlier. All rankings and comments were put into an Excel spreadsheet.

Nine items rose to the top and were discussed as HBP reform proposals. Purpose of discussion was to add clarification and build consensus. All changes to LAPM Chapter 6 must be done by end of August for January 2021 publication, so the committee should plan to vote on these changes at the June meeting.

1. Accountable Project Cost and Schedule

c. All projects must have a Field Review, Type Selection, Hydraulic Report, 65% and 95% plans reviewed by HQ and/or SLA.

The purpose of this proposal is to ensure all projects are being reviewed at the same level and that all have eligible scope. Projects that come in late in the cycle sometimes have to re-validate information because of ineligible scope. Reviews by HQ or SLA would be advisory, rather than mandatory.

Comments

- The 65% PS&E review would mainly be for code issues but this feeds into eligibility too; the idea is to ensure projects are staying on scope and there aren't other alternatives that might help the local agency more than their current plan. And 95% review is just to make sure code, bridge rail, etc. is updated—last minute checks.
- Context: An example of a low water crossing project with 6-A for \$2.5M. Eight years later agency submitted a 6-D for \$12.5M—scope creep, agency going own direction with elements that weren't HBP eligible. Frustrating for HBP and agency to have gone 8 years on a project that wasn't eligible.
- District 10 is already very proactive about requesting DLA approval of the type selection and design, so adding extra reviews might cause time lag. However, Districts differ in their practice of reviewing PS&E packages; some do only a cursory review; an additional SLA review would not add much extra time.
- The proposal seems to contrast with other initiatives to speed up projects and get more done. Also, after Field Review, Type Selection, and Hydraulic Report reviews, is a 95% PS&E review too late to be finding scope and code problems?
- Agencies don't want to get caught in differences of opinion regarding engineering judgment; checks should be limited to scope creep.
- How to account for situations where an agency might want to do a replacement when the project is determined to meet scope requirements for rehabilitation only? Re-frame reviews as "HBP will pay for these elements...agency will use other funding sources for non-HBP eligible elements."
- Should a "tiered" approach be taken, where more reviews are required for larger, more complicated projects than for smaller, less-complicated ones?
- Will Caltrans add more staff to avoid causing timeline delays? HQ will streamline their interactions with SLA to reduce redundant reviews and work more closely, with status meetings about projects.
- 6-A and 6-D don't often tell the full story; not seeing any plans after type selection seems risky. However, the onus should (ideally) be on local agency to request reviews. Can there be language that gives agencies incentives to ask for SLA review at 65% and 95%?
- Most committee members approve the proposal if reviews can be guaranteed within a certain timeframe.

- HBP managers noted that another way to look at this proposal is to achieve better documentation of what is/isn't HBP eligible—helps down the line with agencies talking to decision makers about how much money they really have to spend from federal and other sources.

2. Limit HBP Funding to Basic Bridge Costs

a. All bridges are only funded at the cost of basic structural solution. No aesthetics treatment (except historic bridge projects). HBP will not pay for signature structures.

Comments

- The purpose of this proposal is to clarify that HBP is not for funding “statement” bridges but to span a gap. HBP will pay for baseline bridge, the most cost-effective way to get across the gap.
- Jesse agreed with proposal, as long as there is sensitivity to NEPA requirements and functional elements. HBP should fund items that are identified as environmental mitigations.
- For bridges that are in highly visible locations—as demonstrated in the outreach process—consider imposing a cap on the total construction costs for special visual elements (currently it's 2% of construction costs). When community provides input about more extravagant structures, this gives boundary language for local engineers to discuss with elected officials.
- Definition of base structural costs comes from SLA review of plans. Ideally the consultant would come up with costs, then SLA directs what an appropriate structure type would be. Data also comes from Type Selection report; the “most appropriate structure” would already be documented.
- Need people & policies to referee all exceptions. If possible, to calculate extra aesthetics costs, this should be documented for each project so it can be aggregated.
- Some permitting agencies require aesthetic elements, e.g., CA Coastal Commission has “scenic and visual quality policies” for colors, rail types, etc. Boundaries need to be clear about permitting agency requirements.
- Permitting agency requirements and some aesthetic requirements may not NEPA requirements. To provide HBP funding statewide in a fair and equitable manner, these items may not be HBP eligible.

2. Limit HBP Funding to Basic Bridge Costs

c. No approach roadwork beyond what is necessary to build abutments. Approach roadway costs capped at x% bridge construction cost unless otherwise approved by HBP managers.

Comments

- Currently there are 200 feet and 400 feet approach limits for On- or Off-system respectively. Many agencies seem to view this as a given, regardless of whether their proposed bridge can achieve touchdown with shorter approach roadway. Consider having approach roadway capped at 10% of bridge construction cost OR 200/400-ft approach, whichever is less expensive.
- Good to encourage agencies to have creative solutions. Emphasize bridge safety, not roadway rehabilitation.
- Sometimes an approach roadway longer than 200 or 400 feet is needed. Should there be a hard cap, regardless of regulatory agency requirements?

3. Project Delivery Accountability and Monitoring

- a. Required regular project status report that provide project updates. This will replace the current annual surveys.**
- b. All changes to programmed project costs must be submitted to the HBP Managers using LAPG 6-D.**

Comments

- The purpose of this proposal is to clarify that the required documentation and a full review of agencies' projected cost increases must happen before any such increases are programmed. Cost increases shown in the survey will no longer be added without the documentation. It also requires agencies to submit information on what's been accomplished in the past year, to allow HBP managers to monitor progress.
- HBP managers may present updated annual survey form at next meeting.

4. Programming Changes

- b. Include cost escalation factors with project programming.**

Comments

- HBP managers are reluctant to endorse this proposal. Local agencies should calculate cost escalation and include it in the LAPG 6-A or 6-D.
- LAPM should highlight that agencies must estimate the cost of projects in year-of-expenditure dollars.
- Recommend all agencies use the industry standard for escalation, such as provide by Engineering News Record.

5. High-cost Bridges

- a. Cap HBP funding on High Cost Bridge Projects to \$80 mil.**

Comments

- This proposal would allow agencies to get conversions for high-cost projects within one FTIP cycle.
- \$80M seems too low—what about \$250M?
- Change the conversion amount of \$20M per FTIP year.
- Five current projects would no longer receive over \$80M HBP if cap changes to \$80M.
- Consider cap as a percentage of the whole program vs. a defined number. What if the program does get more funding?
- Using percentages would mean looking separately at On- vs. Off-system. \$250M cap means one bridge takes up one year's worth of FTIP programming. Lower limit would avoid over-committing the program to one project; would also encourage the use of multi-funding streams for large projects.
- HBP drafted a new definition of high-cost bridge project. This was emailed to the committee on 4/17/20, for discussion in June.

6. Other considerations

a. All bridge projects start as rehabilitation or BPMP, proposed replacements must be justified and approved by HBP managers.

Comments

- The reason for this proposal is to clean up guidelines for inspection report and eligibility, following the change in January 2018 to poor-fair-good rating rather than “structurally deficient.” It also emphasizes the principle that just because a local agency wants a certain project scope doesn’t mean this is the best choice
- The idea is to prevent agencies from committing to bridge replacements too early. Have more consideration of “what’s wrong with the bridge and determining appropriate scope up front.
- To encourage a more thoughtful approach to scoping, consider language such as “engineering review to determine structural needs” rather than automatically starting with rehabilitation or BPMP.
- In the example of a timber bridge with SR rating less than 50, would this still have to start out as rehabilitation, then agency would need to provide justification for replacement? In such a case the justification process should be a simple conversation rather than numerous reports.
- Consider adding a metric such as “bridges that are under 100 years old” or another number, rather than have a blanket expectation—so agencies can develop their project scopes more independently.

6. Other considerations

c. Only minimum AASHTO standards is eligible.

Comments

- The idea behind this proposal is to be fair and equitable statewide. If local agencies have standards such as “must be 14 feet wide with trees” this isn’t fair for others.
- Consider adding “and/or NACTO standards” and “width needed to accommodate ADA compliance.” Ross noted that feedback from his agencies is that AASHTO standards do not encourage the bike transit sufficiently. He will provide more information about how much NACTO standards differ from AASHTO standards.

7. Review New Action Items

No new action items

8. Roundtable

- Jason Vivian will not attend next meeting.
- HBP managers indicated there are no updates yet on any HBP impacts expected due to revised revenue estimates
- Matt noted that CSAC is working on advocating for more bridge funding for the whole HBP; he will follow up with League of Cities about coordinating efforts. He sent data and talking points to Ross and José Luis.
- Matt will also send a link out for his new blog to communicate about HBP committee activities. It’s an idea for another way to engage 58 counties and hundreds of city transportation agencies
- Ross mentioned the potential for stimulus money from Congress to backfill lost revenues such as sales taxes and tolls normally for transportation. Hopefully this will be followed up with a stimulus for getting new projects out for job creation. With these, there may be an opportunity for more money for the bridge program.
- José Luis said regions may opt to forgo adopting a new FTIP this year. So, 2023 will be considered a “beyond” year and EPSP won’t work
- Greg said he and Matt have been working on presentation for CEAC meeting (was to be in Monterey—was cancelled). It compares 2019 to 2010 data on downward trend of bridge work completed with available funding. He will ask to be on the June agenda to talk about a needs-based approach to bridge projects.
- HBP managers said that as of today, the project delivery agreements for seismic projects are still due May 31—HBP managers will update when all is finalized with CTC.