

Local Assistance
Highway Bridge Program Advisory Committee Meeting
July 9, 2020 Workshop

Attendees

Dee Lam, Acting Division Chief, DLA
Linda Newton, DLA
Jeremy Wright, DLA
Jim Perrault, DLAE D6
Michael Chung, San Joaquin County
Chris Sneddon, Santa Barbara County
Rebecca Neves, City of Placerville
Robert Newman, City of Santa Clarita
Ross McKeown, MTC
Jon Pray, CTC
Kirk Anderson, D6

Robert Peterson, DLA
Eileen Crawford, DLA
Robert Zezoff, DLA
Sudhakar Vatti, SLA
Matt Randall, Placer County
Marina Espinoza, CSAC
Andy Chou, DLA
Jesse Gothan, City of Sacramento
José Luis Cáceres, SACOG
Greg Kolle, FHWA
Susan Herman, CSUS

Discussions

The intent of this workshop was to continue the discussion on the 9 proposed HBP Chapter 6 Reform Proposals.

A review of the committee's feedback from the June 18 meeting regarding HBP policy items 1c and 2a.

- 1c—committee will need to revisit the 65% review; consensus on much else

2a—Limit HBP Funding to Basic Bridge Costs. 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.

- The committee had consensus that the statement on architectural treatments is clear.

Additional comments:

- Definition of baseline should be covered in bridge type selection report-this should be used as guiding document.
- Many states have definitions of baseline bridges for a given span, ADT, existing roadway width and other parameters. Would be a good idea to obtain lists from the states that have this, if California doesn't have one already.
 - HBP noted Caltrans does have common bridge types for certain span ranges; still many variations such as longer bridges, moveable, approach, location-specific environmental needs
 - DES may have such a list as a starting point. SLA: we have some guidance for type selection, though it's dated 1990—needs update

- What recourse do sponsors have if the preferred alternative that gets selected through NEPA and community input process is not the baseline type?
 - NEPA may require certain finishes or railings but will not typically require a certain structure type
 - Can there be a “way out” in case HBP says “here’s the baseline bridge you should build” but community selects another type.
 - If there’s a federal requirement to preserve certain aspects of a bridge (or follow other requirements that Fish & Wildlife or other federal/state entities impose), and an agency cannot obtain permits & move forward with the bridge without meeting the requirement, then why should this not be a covered cost? The bridge sponsor can be “held hostage” to such requirements.
 - An example was shared, a project in Sacramento had a comment from SHPO that the new bridge *cannot* mimic the existing, historic I Street bridge because it would threaten its distinctive character.
 - Would be helpful to get guidance from Caltrans Environmental Branch on the purpose of the Visual Impact analysis and where a line could be drawn.
 - Not all states have a federal bridge program—there’s no requirement that federal funds cover it. Think of the 2% as “seed” money. Just because a requirement is federal does not mean federal money must cover it. Mt. Vernon bridge is a good example of this
 - Limiting HBP spending to 2% makes a clear boundary—funding availability should be clear when public outreach is happening
- “Exception” language isn’t needed because historic bridges already have criteria described in Title 23
- **Keep: “The HBP participation in signature, or gateway structures will be limited to the cost of the baseline bridge.” HBP will update the definition of baseline bridge to say that this is guided by the type selection document.**
- Committee members voted on new language—members wanted to see actual text revisions first. Others supported. (7 YES, 1 NO)

2c—Limit HBP Funding to Basic Bridge Costs. ~~No approach roadwork beyond what is necessary to build abutments.~~ Approach roadway costs capped at 10% bridge construction cost unless otherwise approved by HBP managers.

Comments:

- Rather than specify what elements are/are not included in approach roadway, simpler to keep the percentage language.
- 10% seems low. An allowance of 20% would get projects closer to the 200 to 400-foot approach length
- HBP managers had noticed that “exactly 400 feet of approach roadwork was being done” on projects off the federal-aid system.

- Does specifying approach lengths undermine expectations that bridge sponsors simply follow standard engineering design practices?
- Local or state standards may require long approaches. This limits local agencies to road funds or SB-1; could be a limitation. This concern came up during the webinar.
- Vertical profile requirements of regulatory agencies—these may exceed AASHTO.
- Re-alignment to approach roadway may be needed if doing a staged construction, adding more length. Limiting funding for approach length may present a safety issue. (If need for exception is documented, HBP managers may consider it)
- Local agencies should be committed to the one-time allocation of local funds to cover expenses that HBP does not cover. The 10% option is reasonable.
- Committee members voted on new language (2 YES, 5 NO)
- **No determination to be made on this item now. HBP managers will re-introduce this at another time.**

3a and b—Project Delivery Accountability and Monitoring. a. Require regular project status report that provide project updates. This will replace the current annual survey. b. All changes to programmed project costs must be submitted to the HBP managers using LAPG 6-D

This change is to document need for cost increases and determine the project is still eligible for the HBP prior to its inclusion in the program list. It rearranges the workflow slightly.

Comments:

- It was noted there are cases in which a local agency was not notified about approval status of the 6-D; this was inferred from programming documentation. What is best practice, according to DLAEs? Who are the main parties to this documentation?
- Important for bridge sponsors to know whether 6-D is approved. Would be helpful to add a Caltrans signature block to the 6-D form. Either way, clear paper trails are necessary because bridge projects take so many years and staff members turn over.
- HBP will introduce this process conversation in monthly meetings with district bridge program coordinators and DLAEs
- Typical turnaround time for 6-D approval depends on time of year; can be as long as 6 weeks. Best time to submit is January due to HQ workload. Predictable timelines for this are helpful.
- **HBP proposed removing this sentence from existing Chapter 6 language: “Failure to provide status may result in project cancellation.”**
- Committee members voted on new language (7 YES, 0 NO)

4b—Programming Changes. b. Include cost escalation factors with project programming.

HBP managers recommend replacing “industry standards” with “CTC approved escalation factors” so escalation is consistent across the state.

Comments:

- Agencies should re-calculate construction cost escalation at each milestone

- As projects move into the FTIP, federal regulations require showing costs in year of expenditure dollars
- CTC escalation factors (updated every 2 years) are a helpful guide; different regions may have higher rates
- Committee members voted on new language (7 YES, 0 NO)

5a—High-cost Bridges. a. Cap HBP funding on High Cost Bridge Projects to \$80 mil.

High cost projects take up 50% of on-system funding for the next 15 years. HBP noted that an implementation schedule will need to be agreed upon if this guideline change is approved, to account for new and in-progress high-cost bridge projects.

Comments:

- For parts of the state whose topography/geography requires high bridges, this cap is unfair. Many such regions cannot cover their costs without HBP. While these bridges do cause strain to the program as a whole, they are not the root of the problem.
- It was suggested imposing higher local agency match percentages to cover cost increases, rather than imposing the \$80M cap uniformly. Or, a scalable reimbursement rate for an additional tier of “super high cost” bridges
- High cost projects tend to be the ones that provide the most benefit in terms of number of users served—so their inclusion in the program is important. Is number of bridges replaced/repared the “best use of funds”? This is a broader discussion.
- It was suggested that high cost projects could compete in a grant program—to help “meter expectations”
- FHWA recommended an alternate mechanism where bridge owners could request “special funding” rather than drain the HBP
- It was noted that the overall intent behind policy change is good—it may not be workable, but it’s a helpful conversation starter for the larger issue of increasing funding for the bridge program.
- True problem HBP managers need to solve now is overcommitment of funds. It was proposed putting coverage of cost increases on bridge owners, rather than limiting dollar amount paid each year.
- The \$80M cap is an arbitrary, rather than technocratic/scientific solution. Cost-benefit analysis won’t pencil out because the bridges that serve fewer people are also often more poorly positioned to collect tolls, etc. to raise local funds.
- Doris Matsui’s office reached out on the I Street project, as she is involved in shaping next transportation act in Congress. This \$80M cap would certainly get her attention. Link to her June 30 testimony on the Moving Forward Act: <https://twitter.com/dorismatsui/status/1278044419489443845?s=21>
- High-cost bridges are “outliers” and they need outlier solutions. The money that local agencies and regions get is not proportional to these high costs. What about a 3rd party inter-regional program for bridges that do not fit the normal structure of HBP?

- FHWA recommended we need to look at the state's entire inventory and make decisions from there
- Committee members voted on new language (0 YES, 6 NO, 1 undecided)
- **HBP managers tasked the committee with coming up with a better proposal. The Committee members will work together on this.**

6a—Other Considerations. a. All bridge projects start as rehabilitation or BPMP, proposed replacements must be justified and approved by HBP managers

HBP noted that state bridge projects receive a peer review with input from various specialists, to be fair and consistent in determining most cost-effective project scope. Good idea to have parallel process for locally-owned bridges.

Comments:

- Needs to be clear what's required on the front end to determine replacement or rehab/BPMP
- Consider including language to make this apply primarily to bridges less than 100 years old; present design code is 75-year life span. Certain environments age bridges faster and slower.
- As of now, the average age of locally owned bridges in California is 55 years. Replacement cycle over the last decade has lengthened to 200+ years.
- Consider requiring sponsors to show evidence of having performed regular preventive maintenance to be eligible for HBP at all—this is already being worked into priority scheme voted on last time
- Final determination of replace vs. rehab will be done before type selection. Agencies would submit their justification for replacement when the project is being prioritized into the HBP.
- Committee members voted on new language (7 YES, 0 NO)

6b—Other Considerations. c. Only minimum AASHTO standards are eligible

HBP proposed removing the “and/or NACTO standards” language.

Comments:

- It was noted NACTO guidelines include helpful refinements for urban street design. They do include minimum width standards, factoring in speed and volume of adjacent traffic (e.g., for bike lanes). It was recommended guidance that explicitly puts bike/ped-friendly structures top of mind
- Cities that do not adopt NACTO guidelines defer to Caltrans bike/ped design standards.
- It was proposed including clarification that when local standards exceed minimum AASHTO, the agency covers the difference with other funding sources.
- If including NACTO language, it will be important to clarify what elements are and are not eligible (e.g. overlooks, 8-ft sidewalks with 2-ft buffer zones)

- Committee members voted on new language (7 YES, 0 NO) – need to flush out NACTO guidelines, 4 want with NACTO, 3 did not.