

DRAFT Local Assistance  
Highway Bridge Program Advisory Committee Meeting  
March 17, 2021—Workshop Summary

**Attendees**

Dee Lam, DLA  
Mark Samuelson, DLA  
Linda Newton, DLA  
Andy Chou, DLA  
Jeremy Wright, DLA  
Michael Chung, San Joaquin County  
Matt Randall, Placer County  
Chris Sneddon, Santa Barbara County  
Jason Vivian, Tulare County  
Bobby Zezoff, DLA

Debbie O’Leary, City of Oxnard  
Rebecca Neves, City of Placerville  
Jesse Gothan, City of Sacramento  
Ross McKeown, MTC  
José Luis Cáceres, SACOG  
Jon Pray, CTC  
Tim Sobelman, CTC  
Susan Herman, CSUS  
Adam Fisher, FHWA  
Daniel Hawk, FHWA

**Discussion Topics**

The intent of this workshop was to continue the discussion on 2 proposed HBP Chapter 6 Reform Proposals that were previously not recommended by the HBP Advisory Committee. The two proposals for discussion are:

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.

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

**Opening Thoughts**

Dee Lam shared that in her conversations with Caltrans upper management the HBP team has been asked to present data to analyze impact of reforms on current portfolio.

**Review of past actions on the discussion topics**

Committee vote on High Cost reform was 0 yes, 6 no, 1 undecided; On Long Approach was 2 yes, 5 no

**Discussion on High Cost Bridge Project reform proposal of \$80M cap**

The HBP Advisory Committee members had wanted to reconsider high-cost project cap.

- Program between July 2020 and now shows the AC conversion commitments. For this reason, the \$80M cap for projects entering HBP (i.e. for those that do not have NEPA clearance yet) is appealing.
- Would like to see language such as “To be determined by Local Assistance depending on availability of federal funds.”

- Other developments: legislation is currently pending to consider a new bridge program. Stakeholders who don't like the high-cost cap will get involved in advocating for more federal funding in general—getting them to the table is a high priority.

HBP Advisory Committee member comments:

Makes sense to have a cap because California can't afford some of the most expensive bridges.

- The \$80M seems like an arbitrary number—what is the magic number?
- What is the mission statement that best aligns with any cap amount we determine?
- Rural counties do not have resources to make up the gap between cost and federal share. Urban counties have options such as tolls. Is it reasonable to expect other counties/entities to pool money to pick up the difference? Sharing the “pain” across the state will get all to the table to advocate for more funding.
- Or, is it best to push legislation by making alliances with a few, very strong advocates? If no local solution or federal bridge program solution, maybe our team should encourage high-cost bridge sponsors to find standalone money earmarks elsewhere.

High-cost bridges pose a potential threat to the rest of the program.

- Our emphasis is safety. HBP should the many small bridges that need repairs and replacement to improve safety.
- We need to be able to deliver on prior commitments. See Agenda handout 5B from February 2021.

Also feels that \$80M limit is arbitrary. Based on \$20M/year of 4-year FTIP.

- Prefers a tiered approach. As a bridge goes up in cost their match ratio goes up, so that sponsor is paying a larger percentage as cost increases. Unsure a single dollar value is the right metric.
- Consider efficiency of bridge in relation to ADT. High-cost bridge with high traffic numbers could deliver high value. Detour route in rural areas also could be considered.

Disagrees with efficiency of bridge in relation to ADT statement. Freeway funding and local roadway funding are two separate things.

- Similarly, there should be a separate program that takes ADT count out of the equation. Make a different program for high-cost bridges and local bridges.

If FHWA could approve a separate funding source for high-cost bridge projects that would allow HBP to get more “bang for buck” for local bridges. High-cost projects take up over half the project for 15 years.

Do other states have a successful bridge funding system California can emulate? HBP manager answer: Unsure if there is a system we can emulate. California's \$300M for local bridges is more than many states get for their entire program.

HBP managers shared the data analysis of the caps on high-cost projects currently programmed. See table below

Currently there are 53 HC projects out of 813 projects in the program. The HC projects come to a total of @2.27B out of a Program total of \$4.86B. This results in only 6.5% of the projects are utilizing 46.7% of the funding. With an annual programming capacity of \$289M, the Highway Bridge Program (HBP) is currently at a 16.8-year program.

It is proposed to cap the participation of HC projects in order to provide a more equitable distribution of funds. Table 1 – Cap on High Cost Projects, illustrates various capping limits and the associated savings.

**Table 1 – Caps on High Cost Projects**

| CAP      | Program Savings | Program Years | Program Years reduced | No of Impacted Projects |
|----------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| \$40 M   | \$643 M         | 14.6          | 2.2                   | 20                      |
| \$60 M   | \$384 M         | 15.5          | 1.3                   | 9                       |
| \$80 M   | \$274 M         | 15.9          | 1.0                   | 4                       |
| \$100 M  | \$207 M         | 16.1          | 0.7                   | 4                       |
| No Limit | \$0             | 16.8          | 0                     | 0                       |

HBP Advisory Committee members comments:

With discussions on stimulus funding, new infrastructure bill, and community development projects, Sacramento's I Street Bridge project rises to the top. It replaces five bridges. If a cap were imposed and it is applied to I Street, it would be tempting to try to make the \$80M cap apply to each of the bridges that is being replaced.

- Reminded the group that new policy also says agencies must use local money for preliminary engineering (PE) to 30% design level. Effects of this will soon be seen.
- This program looks at all bridges the same—technical & structural soundness rather than overall benefit—but this may in fact be a weakness of the program.
- Sacramento has submitted 20 grant applications in past 3 months. Capping high-cost bridges seems simplest way to balance the checkbook and avoid the HBP becoming a grant making program.

What is Caltrans mission for the HBP? What is the feasibility for implementing the HBP reform to cap high-cost bridge amount?

HBP managers comments:

The goal of program is documented in the LAPG Chapter 6, which states "*The Highway Bridge Program (HBP) is a safety program that provides federal-aid to local agencies to replace and rehabilitate structurally deficient locally owned public highway bridges or complete preventive maintenance on bridges that are not deficient.*"

- We're a statewide program to distribute federal funds on a fair & equitable basis in the state.
- Concerned about using ADT as indicator, especially considering last year's equity discussion. Need to align with new mission of Caltrans.
- Amount of funds going to high-cost bridge projects is disproportionate to what other projects are getting. With recent prioritization that was established, the HBP is not first-come, first-serve any longer.
- With size of rivers in California, moveable bridges, high-cost projects will not go away. Infrastructure across the nation is not being maintained. We hope the bridge needs assessment will include data on this what percentage of future projects will be high cost.

HBP Advisory Committee members comments:

Some committee members do not support using ADT as a metric. Prefer to have data from needs assessment to help make decision.

Differing levels of match requirements for higher cost bridges—this makes more sense than an arbitrary cap. This approach might be helpful for getting more jurisdictions on board for better funding of the program overall.

Suggests a tiered approach for high-cost bridges, that could look like: up to \$100M 20% match rate, \$100-150M at 33%, \$150-200M at 50%, cap at \$200M.

Cost is determined when...? At the time of signing high-cost agreement, or later? Does same match rate apply for all phases funded through HBP?

With no cap or tier system, backlog and limited funding for new projects means priority level 1 are the only bridges that are getting metered in to the HBP. High-cost projects are eating up half of OA money.

\$80M cap reduces program backlog by only one year (would be 15.9 years), is this significant enough benefit to justify policy change?

HBP managers' comment:

When HBP was first started the intent was not originally to fund these very large bridges. More appropriate for different type of project. Currently 6.5% of projects in the program consume 50% of funding. Any policy change needs to be impactful for the whole program.

HBP Advisory Committee comments:

Other methods of prioritizing: equity—needs definition. Disadvantaged communities? Other definitions? High-cost local projects look and feel like larger state-owned and interstate projects in terms of benefit, ADT, connectivity.

HBP manger' comment:

SB-1 is for fixing current inventory. How many local agencies are putting SB-1 funds on local projects?

HBP Advisory Committee Members discussion:

State has a dedicated \$400M for bridges.

Some like the idea of a tiered program. Traditional way to evaluate safety vs. reality of limits of program. What if Isleton had a moveable bridge over Sacramento River that needed to be replaced for \$200M, town on one side, hospital on another...and the city has limited ability to pay for this? Some large bridges are wildfire escape routes for small rural communities. ADT isn't best metric in view of this.

Let's say the \$40M cap were imposed. What if the \$643M in savings, or a portion of it, were then applied to a separate program that was subject to more public scrutiny and qualitative deal-making? Our program includes both federal money and local jurisdictions' money. There must be a solution where agencies aren't simply told: "go find your own funding streams."

It looks bad for us to have no cap on the high-cost bridges. For optics' sake, can we say the cap is \$250M or some other obscenely high amount?

**HBP manager final takeaway comment:**

**Before any further analysis is done, let's get data input from needs analysis. The analysis should be available by the April HBP Advisory Committee meeting.**

#### **Discussion of Approach Roadways reform proposal**

HBP mangers presented the analysis directorate requested. Based on a sample of 10 projects currently in construction across the state, approach roadways account for 29-30% of total project cost. Capping the percentage of project cost HBP will fund for roadway approach will bring savings.

- Of those 10 projects analyzed, average cost was \$10.1M per projects.
- With a cap at 10%, 55 additional projects can be funded through the program. Compared to high-cost bridge cap, this reform proposal offers more immediate savings and a higher amount of savings.
- See table below [screenshot]

### Roadways Approach

Construction for HBP projects consist of multiple items, such as construction of the Bridge, the Roadway Approach, etc. The current average cost of Roadway Approaches is 29% of the Bridge cost.

It is proposed to cap the participation of Roadway Approaches at 10% of the Bridge cost in order to direct more HBP funds towards the bridge construction.

Table 2 – Cap on Roadway Approach illustrates a \$1.2M savings per project. There are currently 465 projects in the program that would be affected by this reform. A 10% cap applied to the 465 projects would yield a program savings of approximately \$556M. This would also result in a 2-year savings in programming years.

**Table 2 - Cap on Roadway Approach**

|          | Roadway Approach Cap | Capped Roadway Approach Cost per project | Costs Saved per project | Total Costs Saved | Program years | No. of Construction Projects Funded <sup>1</sup> |
|----------|----------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--|
|          | 5%                   | \$0.3M                                   | \$1.5M                  | \$705M            | 14.4          | 70   |
| Proposed | 10%                  | \$0.6M                                   | \$1.2M                  | \$556M            | 14.9          | 55   |
|          | 15%                  | \$1.0M                                   | \$0.9M                  | \$406M            | 15.4          | 40   |
|          | 20%                  | \$1.3M                                   | \$0.6M                  | \$257M            | 15.9          | 25   |
|          | 25%                  | \$1.6M                                   | \$0.2M                  | \$107M            | 16.5          | 11   |
| Current  | No limit             | \$1.8M                                   | \$0                     | \$0               | 16.8          | 0  |

Note 1 – The number of construction projects that can be funded as result of the savings is determined by the "Total Costs Saved" divided by the average construction cost of a replacement project at \$10.1 million.

### HBP Advisory Committee comments:

Thank you for doing the cost analysis so we don't have to guess at impact of reforms.

- Don't limit approach roadway costs created because of federal, state, or local agencies' new requirements for higher bridges (thus farther out touchdown points).
- Limit costs created due to "extras" such as re-doing nearby intersections, adding passing lanes, etc.

Good reform provided this is an opportunity to incentivize efficient spending, i.e., for local agencies to stop "padding" their projects. For example, is the \$556M savings under the proposed 10% cap going to burden the local agencies, or will they be able to realize savings too? (via other funding streams and/or by building a leaner project)

If an outside force requires approaches to be longer, the 10% cap should not apply across the board. Prime example is a flood district requires a bridge to be raised per new flood conditions.

Can Caltrans provide specific examples of agencies that ask for elements that are necessary from local point of view but might be considered unnecessary by Caltrans standards?

- There are many instances when a local agency is required to include certain elements.
- Supports 10% cap if there are other federal funding streams, e.g. RSTP.
- For Off-federal aid system projects, COVID has reduced revenue for road funding and the like. Many local agencies won't be able to absorb the difference.

The primary goal of HBP is bridges. Inherent in bridge projects are roadway approaches. Within each water channel there are jurisdictional permitting agencies such as Central Valley Flood Protection Board.

- Bridge height must be based on board's requirement; longer approaches won't meet guideline.
- Agencies designing based on regulatory requirements for minimum touchdown should not be subject to cap.
- DLAE engineers reviewing projects will not impose consistent standards.

RSTP will fund bridge "and related work" for both On- and Off-system projects.

Are there any other reform policies for roadway approach? HBP manager answer: Yes, modified language to anything exceeding the AASHTO minimum for width and federal guidelines for attainable touchdown. Comments due on the rest of the office bulletin, Chapter 6 reforms next Tuesday, 3/23/21.

If there's a standard that says, "this is bridge" and "this is not bridge," having such language would be helpful. What was rationale for Federal Highways recommended 10% cap?

HBP managers comments:

Federal Highways recommended the 10% cap.

Construction cost is the bulk of project costs. Savings won't be realized until 10-15 years down the road if this reform is only imposed on projects that have not yet started PE

Only way to see whether this proposal will truly cut "fat" is to look at each project individually. Different regions in the state are under different requirements for flood protection. Central Valley Flood Protection Board has requirement for taller bridges than the state requires. They would be disproportionately impacted by 10% cap.

Delegated authority has been pulled from districts, so that approach roadway lengths will all be managed through Caltrans HQ.

**HBP manager final takeaway comment:**

**There is no support for this reform. We will not bring it to the April HBP meeting.**

**Adjourn**