Improved Maintenance Methods for Bridge Drains and Expansion Joints

This research will study select maintenance methods for bridge joints and deck drains to determine their suitability to Caltrans’ maintenance operations.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Bridge deck joints and drains have specialized maintenance needs. They are subject to higher debris loads due to bridge barriers containing debris on the structure instead of the debris being able to move naturally off the road.

Maintenance efforts are more constrained because shoulders are frequently narrower than the adjacent roadway, and there is no access to the area outside the shoulder to work from or retreat to in an emergency event. Clogged drains and packed joints can lead to bridge damage and costly repairs. These problems and challenges have led California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to seek improved maintenance methods for bridge joints and deck drains.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Caltrans intends to review existing research and practices of other states, and consider existing commercial equipment and new concepts to identify better practices and equipment for adoption into Caltrans’ operations.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal of this research is to identify and implement improved maintenance methods on the State’s bridges to reduce damage from debris and increase the efficiency of maintenance operations.
WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Benefits include less damage to bridge structures, a reduction in associated repair costs, and lower maintenance costs through less maintenance efforts. An additional benefit will be increased safety for maintenance workers due to less exposure to highway traffic.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

A kickoff meeting was held with panel members in April 2021 to discuss the task proposal and to update the schedule due to initial delays. A one-year no-cost time extension was approved in May 2021, extending the end date to December 2022.

Two focused group meetings were held in June 2021, one with District 4 and the other with District 11 staff to identify and describe the problems they’re having with debris accumulation in joint seals, drainage inlets, barriers, scuppers, and other features on bridges. For more information, please contact the task manager.

A bridge joint packed with incompressible debris.