

Pavement

MAY 2026

Project Title: Real-Time Monitoring of Concrete Strength to Determine Optimal Traffic Opening Time [TPF-5(471)]

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Task Manager:

Qiu Zheng
Transportation Engineer (Civil)
Qiu.Zheng@dot.ca.gov

DRISI Division Chief:

Prakash Sah, PE
Prakash.Sah@dot.ca.gov



DRISI provides solutions and knowledge that improves California's transportation system.

Real-time monitoring of concrete strength to determine optimal traffic opening time [TPF-5(471)]

Develop a non-destructive, field-ready method to monitor early-age concrete strength.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Accelerated construction schedules often subject young concrete to early loading, risking premature failures and reducing the lifespan of pavements and bridges. Current methods for determining traffic opening times, such as maturity testing and flexural beam testing, are inefficient, costly, and time-consuming.

Supported by the Indiana Department of Transportation (Lead Organization), this study developed a promising non-destructive method using electromechanical impedance (EMI) sensors with piezoelectric technology. Lab-scale testing demonstrated reliable, early-age (4–8 hours) strength monitoring, offering a faster, simpler alternative to conventional approaches.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This pooled-fund study includes:

- Developing field protocols to assess in-situ concrete strength, stiffness, and hydration behavior.
- Creating a user-friendly graphical interface for data interpretation.
- Conducting field implementation and training in participating states.
- Providing guidelines and specifications for EMI sensor use based on national data.
- Developing American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)-ready specifications for the smart sensing method.



WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal of this study is to deliver a field-deployable, wireless EMI-based sensing system, implement it in participating states, and develop AASHTO specifications for its use.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This technology will give the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) a reliable, efficient tool to determine optimal traffic opening times, reducing delays and cost overruns in concrete pavement construction.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The research team has made the following progress:

- Over 800 REBEL sensors have been deployed across 100+ projects, with continued improvements in long-term evolution (LTE) outage handling, battery efficiency (up to 56 days), and dashboard tracking features.
- Machine learning models and post-processing methods have been refined to improve accuracy and consistency of concrete strength predictions, supported by diagnostic tools to enhance model performance.
- The software interface has been enhanced, including dashboard features that display unique mixture designs and support multi-sensor comparison.
- Datalogger battery performance has been optimized to support extended field data collection.
- Field testing has been conducted in Iowa and Nebraska, including roller-compacted concrete applications.
- Ongoing algorithm improvements continue to enhance predictive performance and system reliability.