

# Available Accelerated Bridge Construction Options for Short Span Bridges



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# CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xx
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction	
Abstract.....	1
Background.....	2
Objectives of the Book.....	5
ABC-Definitions and Descriptions .....	6
Benefits of ABC .....	7
Applications .....	7
ABC Bridge Elements.....	10
Short Span Classification.....	10
Outline of the Book.....	12
Chapter 2 .....	16
Types of Elements and Subsystems	
Abstract.....	16
Prefabricated Bridge Elements and Systems (PBES)	
for Conventional Bridges .....	17
Elements.....	17
Systems .....	17
Superstructure Elements and Systems.....	18
Substructure.....	50
Building Bridges (20ft < Span < 70ft) .....	57
Reinforced Concrete.....	59
Corrugated Metal .....	61
Culverts (Span < 20ft).....	64
Circular Shape or Round Arch .....	64
Pipe Arch and Elliptical Shapes .....	65
Arch Culverts .....	66
Rectangular Cross-Section Culverts.....	66
Multiple Barrels .....	68
Three-sided Frame Culverts .....	68

Foundation .....	69
Geoform Rapid Embankment System .....	71
Geosynthetic Reinforced Soil (GRS) Integrated Bridge System...	72
Mechanically Stabilized Earth Retaining Walls .....	73
FDOT Review of Superstructure Types Appropriate for Short-Span Bridges .....	74
Chapter 3 .....	78
Joints and Connections .....	
Abstract.....	78
Joints and Connections .....	79
Typical ABC Connection Types .....	80
Superstructure Element Connections .....	86
Substructure Element Connections.....	110
Foundation Connections.....	133
Chapter 4 .....	142
Construction Methods .....	
Abstract.....	142
Construction Methods .....	142
Self-Propelled Modular Transporters (SPMT) .....	143
Longitudinal Launching .....	145
Horizontal Skidding or Sliding.....	146
Use of Cranes and Lifts.....	147
Other Heavy Lifting Equipment and Methods. ....	148
Chapter 5 .....	151
Inspection and Performance .....	
Abstract.....	151
Inspection of ABC bridges.....	152
Visual Inspection.....	156
Routine Inspection.....	157
Damage Inspections .....	157
In-Depth Inspections .....	157
Fracture Critical Inspections .....	157
Underwater Inspections.....	158
Special Inspections.....	158
Inspection Equipment .....	158
Bridge Inspection Forms.....	161
Non-Destructive Testing .....	164
Audio-Visual Methods .....	165

Acoustic-Seismic Methods.....	167
Impact Echo Testing (IE) .....	168
Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).....	169
Ultrasonic Testing (UT) .....	170
Infrared Thermography Testing (IR).....	170
Impulse Response Testing (IRT).....	171
Radiographic Testing (RT).....	171
Magnetic Flux Leakage Testing (MFL) .....	172
NDT Methods Most Applicable to Concrete Bridge Elements ...	172
NDT Methods Specifically Applicable to Steel Elements .....	173
Other Methods .....	175
Evaluation of Substructure for Reuse .....	178
Field Testing and Inspection of Concrete Elements.....	180
Field Testing and Inspection of Steel Elements .....	183
Performance of ABC Technologies to Date.....	184
Defects and Anomalies in Concrete Bridges.....	184
Damage Sequence .....	185
Defects and Anomalies Specific to ABC bridges.....	185
Defects and Anomalies in Steel Bridges .....	190
Performance Related to Construction Methods.....	193
Chapter 6 .....	194
Decision Making Process	
Abstract.....	194
Decision Making for a New Bridge Construction.....	194
Decision Making Tools Developed by Different State DOTs .....	198
Utah DOT.....	198
Oregon DOT.....	203
Connecticut DOT .....	203
Wisconsin DOT.....	209
Minnesota DOT.....	211
Iowa DOT.....	216
Colorado DOT.....	219
Washington DOT .....	222
Major Parameters Affecting the Selection of ABC bridge	
Elements and Systems in General.....	223
Time Constraint.....	223
Risk and Cost of the project .....	224
Environmental Considerations .....	224
Geometric Considerations .....	225
Site Condition and Accessibility .....	225

Design Constraints and Considerations.....	225
Compatibility Between Superstructure and Substructure, and Between Substructure and Foundation .....	226
Determination of Appropriate ABC Methods and Type of Superstructure.....	27
Considerations for Superstructure System and Elements Selection.....	230
Suitability of Substructure Types with Respect to Superstructure and Bridge Configuration .....	231
Available Selection Methods and Design Considerations for Substructure.....	236
Selection of Substructure Elements and Systems.....	238
Parameters Affecting the Selection of Bridge Elements and Construction Methods in General.....	238
Parameters Specific to Substructure.....	240
Selection of Substructure Based on Compatibility with Superstructure and Substructure-Specific Parameters .....	240
Suitability of Substructure Types with Respect to Foundation ...	241
Considerations for Substructure System and Elements Selection .....	247
Life Cycle Cost Analysis as a Tool for Decision Making.....	249
Basic Steps in LCCA.....	250
Decision Making for Replacement, Reuse, or Retrofitting/ Strengthening of Existing Foundations and Substructures .....	250
How to Use the Decision-Making Guide Provided in This Chapter? .....	253
Chapter 7 .....	255
Design Example	
Introduction.....	255
Bridge Description.....	255
Bridge System Selection .....	256
Determination of Appropriate ABC Methods and Type of Superstructure-Design Example.....	259
Considerations for Superstructure System and Elements Selection-Design Example.....	260
Available Selection and Design Considerations for Substructure-Design Example .....	260
Selection of Substructure Elements and Systems-Design example.....	261
Bridge Design Procedure for ABC .....	263



Design Member Parameters .....	266
Material Properties .....	266
Load Combination.....	267
Cross-section .....	267
Composite Section Properties .....	268
Live Load Distribution Factor .....	269
Shipping and Handling.....	271
Bridge Load Analysis.....	272
Vehicular Live Load.....	273
Strength Limit State .....	274
Service Limit State .....	276
Shear Strength (AASHTO 6.10.9.2).....	277
Bearing Stiffeners (AASHTO 6.10.11).....	278
Shear Connector Design (AASHTO 6.10.10) .....	279
Slab Design .....	279
Closure Pour Design.....	283
References .....	286

# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1-1	Examples of short-span and buried bridges (Beaver, 2016) .....	3
Fig. 1-2	Other elements and methods for short-span bridges (Azizinamini, 2018) (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011)...	4
Fig. 1-3	ABC Bridge Elements .....	12
Fig. 2-1	Lightweight precast deck panel (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011) .....	22
Fig. 2-2	Open grid deck panel (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011) .....	22
Fig. 2-3	Timber deck panels (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	23
Fig. 2-4	Exodermic deck panel (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012) .....	23
Fig. 2-5	Orthotropic deck (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	25
Fig. 2-6	FRP deck panel (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	26
Fig. 2-7	FRP bridge deck and superstructure applications (Aboutaha, et al., 2005) .....	26
Fig. 2-8	Decked slab girder (McMullen & Chengyu, 2015) .....	32
Fig. 2-9	A sample decked U girder: top widths 15 feet 0 inch, 9 feet 10 inches, or 7 feet 3 inches (McMullen & Chengyu, 2015).....	33
Fig. 2-10	Typical Florida Slab Beam (FSB) Section (FDOT, 2016).....	33
Fig. 2-11	Inverted-tee Beams (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	34
Fig. 2-12	Decked bulb-tee shape compared to adjacent box beam configuration (Grace, Bebawy, & Kasabasic, 2015) .....	35
Fig. 2-13	Texas Adjacent Box Beam (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012) ....	36
Fig. 2-14	Traditional (a) adjacent and (b) spread configuration for 28-inch depth box beams (TxDOT, 2015) .....	37
Fig. 2-15	Double-tee Bridge Profile Typical Transverse Section (Aktan & Attanayake, 2013).....	38
Fig. 2-16	Decked Bulb-tee Cross Section (Aktan & Attanayake, 2013).	39
Fig. 2-17	Full-depth Top Flange NEXT Beam (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	40
Fig. 2-18	Cross-section of the FRP box girder bridge superstructure (Siwowski, Rajchel, Kaleta, & Własak, 2017) .....	42
Fig. 2-19	FRP box girder used in Com-bridge in Poland (Ali, et al., 2021).....	42

Fig. 2-20	Modular steel superstructure system (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	43
Fig. 2-21	Modular Beams with Decks (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	44
Fig. 2-22	Modular orthotropic superstructure system (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	44
Fig. 2-23	Modular steel folded plate girder (Azizinamini, 2014).....	45
Fig. 2-24	Fabrication of folded plate girder using a press break machine (Azizinamini, 2014). ....	45
Fig. 2-25	Modular double tee superstructure system (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	47
Fig. 2-26	Laminated timber deck system (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	47
Fig. 2-27	Prefabricated deck panel with a barrier (Utah DOT) (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	48
Fig. 2-28	3D model of prefabricated deck panel with barrier lab set-up at Iowa State University (Sritharan, Wipf, & Ecklund, 2017).....	49
Fig. 2-29	Bridge bearing (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	50
Fig. 2-30	Prefabricated pier bent (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	51
Fig. 2-31	Wall Pier (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	51
Fig. 2-32	Semi-integral abutment (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	53
Fig. 2-33	Prefabricated integral abutment (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	53
Fig. 2-34	Prefabricated cantilever abutment (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	54
Fig. 2-35	Prefabricated cantilever wing wall (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	54
Fig. 2-36	Precast Pier Cap (Culmo M. , 2009).....	55
Fig. 2-37	Rectangular pier cap (Caltrans, 2018) .....	56
Fig. 2-38	Inverted-tee pier cap (Caltrans, 2018). ....	56
Fig. 2-39	Buried Bridge Structure Geometry (Beaver, 2016) .....	58
Fig. 2-40	Rectangular (box) buried bridge (Beaver, 2016). ....	59
Fig. 2-41	Three-sided buried bridge (Beaver, 2016). ....	60
Fig. 2-42	Arch System (Beaver, 2016).....	61
Fig. 2-43	Arch buried bridge (Beaver, 2016). ....	61
Fig. 2-44	Corrugated Metal Arch buried bridges (Beaver, 2016). ....	62
Fig. 2-45	High Profile Arch buried bridges (Beaver, 2016).....	63
Fig. 2-46	Example of the metal corrugated box (Beaver, 2016). ....	63
Fig. 2-47	Twin Concrete Pipe Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary,	

	& Ott, 2002).....	64
Fig. 2-48	Round Arch Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002). ....	65
Fig. 2-49	Pipe Arch Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	65
Fig. 2-50	Pipe Arch Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	66
Fig. 2-51	Concrete Box Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002)... ..	67
Fig. 2-52	Metal Box Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	67
Fig. 2-53	Multiple Cell Concrete Culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	68
Fig. 2-54	Three-sided frame culvert (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	69
Fig. 2-55	Precast spread footing as bridge foundation (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	70
Fig. 2-56	Driven pile (prestressed concrete) as bridge foundation (Hannigan, 2016). ....	70
Fig. 2-57	Continuous flight Auger pile as bridge foundation (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	71
Fig. 2-58	Prefabricated pile cap footing (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ....	71
Fig. 2-59	Typical Section of a GRS/IBS Bridge abutment (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	73
Fig. 2-60	Typical Mechanically Stabilized Earth Systems (MSE) Wall Details (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	74
Fig. 3-1	Prefabricated Bridge Connections Example (Culmo M. , 2009).....	79
Fig. 3-2	Prefabricated Bridge Connections (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	80
Fig. 3-3	Construction sequence for SDCL Bridge Systems (Taghinezhadbilondy, Yakel, & Azizinamini, 2016).....	82
Fig. 3-4	Grouted Reinforcing Splice Coupler (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	83
Fig. 3-5	Grouted Reinforcement PT Duct Layout (Culmo M. , 2009).....	84
Fig. 3-6	Grouted Void Placement (Culmo M. , 2009).....	84
Fig. 3-7	Lateral Post-Tensioning Details (Culmo M. , 2009).....	85
Fig. 3-8	Lateral Welded Plate Beam Connection Details (Culmo M. , 2009).....	85
Fig. 3-9	Examples of various types of ABC closure joints (Culmo M. , 2009), (Russell, et al., 2005).....	86
Fig. 3-10	Type 1 joint (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019).....	88
Fig. 3-11	Type 2 joint (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019).....	89
Fig. 3-12	Type 3 Sample Cross Section (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019). ....	89

Fig. 3-13	Type 4 joint (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019).	90
Fig. 3-14	Type 5 joint (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019).	91
Fig. 3-15	Common types of longitudinal and transverse joints in FDPC Deck Panel Database (Garber & Shahrokhinasab, 2019)	92
Fig. 3-16	Typical longitudinal PT joints: (a) female-to-female and (b) male-to-female match cast (Garber & Shahrokhinasab, 2019)	93
Fig. 3-17	Shear pocket used to create composite action between beam and deck (Culmo M. , 2009)	93
Fig. 3-18	Transverse connection at Live Oak Creek Bridge, Texas (Culmo M. , 2009)	94
Fig. 3-19	Closure joints detail using UHPC (Graybeal, 2014).	95
Fig. 3-20	Schematic of conventional concrete longitudinal joint over girder (Garber & Shahrokhinasab, 2019).	95
Fig. 3-21	Examples of shear pocket and connector details for (a) steel plate girders and (b) prestressed concrete girders (Garber & Shahrokhinasab, 2019).	96
Fig. 3-22	Simple for Dead and Continuous for Live connection detail (Taghinezhadbilondy, Yakel, & Azizinamini, 2016).	98
Fig. 3-23	ABC Application of SDCL in non-seismic areas (Sadeghnehad, 2018)	99
Fig. 3-24	Schematic view of developed SDCL connection details for seismic areas (Sadeghnehad, 2018).	99
Fig. 3-25	Semi-integral abutment (White, 2007).	100
Fig. 3-26	Prefabricated integral abutment (Culmo, et al., 2013).	101
Fig. 3-27	Integral Connection: UHPC Connection (Hosteng, Shafei, & DeJong, 2018).	102
Fig. 3-28	Plan View of UHPC-Joint specimen (Hosteng & Shafei, 2019).	102
Fig. 3-29	GRBC integral diaphragm completed (Hosteng, Shafei, & DeJong, 2018).	103
Fig. 3-30	Plan view of GRBC specimen connection (Hosteng & Shafei, 2019).	103
Fig. 3-31	Commonly used concrete bridge barrier profile shapes (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).	104
Fig. 3-32	Through-deck bolting detail developed by Florida DOT (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).	105
Fig. 3-33	Adhesive-bonded anchor detail (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018)	105
Fig. 3-34	Ryerson barrier-to-deck slab connection details	

	(Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).....	106
Fig. 3-35	Clampercrete barrier system (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).....	106
Fig. 3-36	X-bolt connection concept (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018). ....	107
Fig. 3-37	Inclined bar connection between the precast barrier and deck (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018). ....	108
Fig. 3-38	U-bar connection between the precast barrier and deck (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).....	109
Fig. 3-39	Plan view of the barrier-to-barrier connection (Ecklund & Sritharan, 2018).....	109
Fig. 3-40	Column to cap beam connection using grouted sleeve method (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	111
Fig. 3-41	(a) precast footing with two circular sockets; (b) cap beam socket construction; (c) cap beam pocket-view from underneath; (d) inserting the columns into the footing sockets; (e) placing cap beam on the columns (Mohebbi, Saiidi, & Itani, 2017).....	112
Fig. 3-42	Precast cap beam and cast-in-place column using grouted socket (Culmo M. , 2009).....	113
Fig. 3-43	a) Seismic and b) non-seismic detail of UHPC connection of precast column and precast cap beam (Shafieifar & Azizinamini, 2018). ....	114
Fig. 3-44	Column to column connection (Culmo M. , 2009).....	115
Fig. 3-45	Pile to Cap Connection (Culmo M. , 2009).....	116
Fig. 3-46	Connection Details of Cap Beam Segments (Culmo M. , 2009). ....	117
Fig. 3-47	Grouted sleeve connection between footing and column (Culmo M. , 2009). ....	119
Fig. 3-48	Cast-in-place footing to precast column connection using mechanical couplers (Culmo M. , 2009).....	120
Fig. 3-49	Mechanical Reinforcing Bar Couplers (Tazarv & Saiidi, 2015). ....	120
Fig. 3-50	(a) precast footing with central pocket; (b) precast column with UHPC in the plastic hinge; (c) inserting column into the pocket; (d) filling the gap by UHPC (Mohebbi, Saiidi, & Itani, 2017).....	121
Fig. 3-51	Pocket connection of footing and column (Tazarv & Saiidi, 2015).....	122
Fig. 3-52	Closure pour connection in abutment (Dejong & Hosteng, 2018) .....	123
Fig. 3-53	Precast abutment stem to precast footing connection (Culmo M., 2009), (Hoesteng, Phares, & Redd, 2016).....	124

Fig. 3-54 Grouted couplers connection in prefabricated abutment (Hoesteng, Phares, & Redd, 2016). .....	125
Fig. 3-55 Abutment connection (Culmo M. , 2009).....	126
Fig. 3-56 Precast integral abutment connection to steel pile (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	126
Fig. 3-57 Precast integral abutment connection to steel pile (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	127
Fig. 3-58 Pile Connection Plate Detail (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	127
Fig. 3-59 Steel bar dowels connection in abutment (Dejong & Hosteng, 2018) .....	128
Fig. 3-60 Adjacent abutment segments connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	128
Fig. 3-61 Precast Arch Connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	129
Fig. 3-62 Connection of Adjacent Precast Arch Units (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	130
Fig. 3-63 Example of spandrel wall to arch connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	131
Fig. 3-64 Precast arch to precast wingwall connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	131
Fig. 3-65 Precast footing to arch connection (Culmo M. , 2009).....	132
Fig. 3-66 Precast footing to precast footing connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	132
Fig. 3-67 Details of Precast footing to subgrade Connection (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	133
Fig. 3-68 Installation of a precast concrete footing with grouted shear connection on concrete sub-footing (Culmo M. , 2009).....	134
Fig. 3-69 Connection between precast concrete footing and steel pile with uplift (Culmo M. , 2009).....	134
Fig. 3-70 Connection details between concrete square pile and pile cap (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	135
Fig. 3-71 Pile Cap Connection using Extended Reinforcing Steel (Culmo, et al., 2013) .....	136
Fig. 3-72 Pile Cap Connection using Embedded Pile (Culmo, et al., 2013) .....	136
Fig. 3-73 Connection of Pier Column to Large Diameter Drilled Shaft (Source: Washington State DOT Bridge Design Manual) (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	137
Fig. 3-74 Various types of pile splicing (Mehrabi & Farhangdoust, 2019) .....	138
Fig. 3-75 Connection between concrete square piles using splice (Culmo M. , 2009) .....	139

Fig. 3- 76 FRP sheet splice system.....	140
Fig. 3- 77 FRP jacket splice system .....	140
Fig. 3-78 NSM FRP splice system .....	141
Fig. 4-1 SPMTs configuration (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011) .....	144
Fig. 4-2 Lateral bridge sliding (WisDOT, 2018).....	147
Fig. 4-3 Vertical axis pivot (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011)..	150
Fig. 5-1 Example of Florida Structural Inventory and Appraisal Sheet (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002). ....	153
Fig. 5-2 Tools for cleaning (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	159
Fig. 5-3 Tool for inspections (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002)....	159
Fig. 5-4 Tools for Visual Aid (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002)...	160
Fig. 5-5 Tools for Measuring (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002)..	160
Fig. 5-6 Element Level example inspection form (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	162
Fig. 5-7 Load Rating Summary Sheet example (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002).....	163
Fig. 5-8 Chain drag equipment (left) and hammer sounding tools (right) (Simon Laflamme, Freeseaman, Scott, Eisenmann, & Phares, 2018). ....	166
Fig. 5-9 Formation and detection of AE Signals. ....	167
Fig. 5-10 Flowchart-NDT methods suitable for each type of defect in ABC deck closure joints in order of priority (Farhangdoust, Mosawi, & Mehrabi, 2019).....	168
Fig. 5-11 Infrared Thermal Imaging; Use of IRT camera (left) and a thermal image (right) (Mehrabi A. , 2006).....	171
Fig. 5-12 Statistical representation of NDT methods most applicable to detect delamination (Left), and to detect corrosion (Right) (Farhangdoust, Mosawi, & Mehrabi, 2019).....	173
Fig. 5-13 Statistical representation of NDT methods most applicable to detect cracks (Left) and to detect voids (Right) (Farhangdoust, Mosawi, & Mehrabi, 2019).....	173
Fig. 5-14 Multitask robot for NDT inspection on bridge concrete deck (Ghasemi, Ibrahim, Gucunski, & Maher, 2013) .....	176
Fig. 5-15 Drone used for bridge inspection by Minnesota Department of Transportation (Zink & Lovelace, 2015).....	177
Fig. 5-16 DAA GPR platform in action, including AVA antenna and synchronized IMU/GPS (Simon Laflamme, Freeseaman, Scott, Eisenmann, & Phares, 2018). ....	177



Fig. 5-17	Keg Creek Bridge full view (Simon Laflamme, Freeseaman, Scott, Eisenmann, & Phares, 2018). .....	178
Fig. 5-18	Keg Creek Bridge GPR data (Simon Laflamme, Freeseaman, Scott, Eisenmann, & Phares, 2018). .....	178
Fig. 5-19	Durability and residual service life assessment of bridge substructure (FHWA, 2018) .....	179
Fig. 5-20	Damage Sequence Tree (DST) for ABC closure joints (Farhangdoust, Mosawi, & Mehrabi, 2019).....	185
Fig. 5-21	Typical joint leakage at deck panels (I-84 WB over Weber Canyon with welded-tie connections from 2009 inspection) (UDOT, 2009). .....	186
Fig. 5-22	Typical transverse cracking in the overlay which worsened from 2013 to 2016 (UDOT, 2016).....	187
Fig. 5-23	Cracks with efflorescence in parapet over the deck panel joint and Poorly bonded grout in shear pocket (UDOT, 2016). ....	187
Fig. 6-1	Flowchart for High-Level decision on whether a prefabricated bridge should be used in a project (Tang, 2005).....	196
Fig. 6-2	FHWA Decision Making Matrix (Tang, 2005) .....	197
Fig. 6-3	Utah Department of Transportation ABC Decision spreadsheet available from <a href="https://drive.google.com/uc?export=download&amp;id=1URJLeOVqInbsLYAhYSTeEpKgTGdDRYN3">https://drive.google.com/uc?export=download&amp;id=1URJLeOVqInbsLYAhYSTeEpKgTGdDRYN3</a> .....	199
Fig. 6-4	Utah Department of Transportation ABC Decision Flowchart available from <a href="https://www.udot.utah.gov/main/uconowner.gf?n=16174704815355052">https://www.udot.utah.gov/main/uconowner.gf?n=16174704815355052</a> .....	202
Fig. 6-5	Final Decision Criteria Hierarchy (Doolen, Saeedi, & Emami, 2011).....	204
Fig. 6-6	Connecticut ABC Decision making table. Page 1 (CTDOT, 2017). .....	205
Fig. 6-7	Connecticut ABC Decision making table. Page 2 (CTDOT, 2017). .....	206
Fig. 6-8	Connecticut ABC Decision making table. Page 3 (CTDOT, 2017). .....	207
Fig. 6-9	Connecticut ABC Decision making table. Page 4 (CTDOT, 2017). .....	208
Fig. 6-10	Decision Making Matrix (WisDOT, 2018).....	210
Fig. 6-11	ABC Decision Making Flowchart (WisDOT, 2018) .....	211
Fig. 6-12	Example of Stage 1 form (MnDOT, 2017).....	213
Fig. 6-13	Example of stage 2 form, page 1 (MnDOT, 2017) .....	214

Fig. 6-14	Example of stage 2 form, page 2 (MnDOT, 2017) .....	215
Fig. 6-15	Example of stage 3 form (MnDOT, 2017).....	216
Fig. 6-16	Iowa DOT ABC Decision Making Process .....	218
Fig. 6-17	Iowa DOT ABC Decision Flowchart.....	219
Fig. 6-18	Colorado CDOT ABC Decision Workflow (CDOT, 2006)...	220
Fig. 6-19	Colorado CDOT ABC Decision Flowchart (CDOT, 2006)...	221
Fig. 6-20	ABC Construction Matrix (CDOT, 2006) .....	222
Fig. 6-21	Washington DOT ABC Decision Making Matrix (WSDOT, 2009) .....	223
Fig. 6-22	Parameters affecting selection of ABC components (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019) .....	226
Fig. 6-23	Decision Flowchart for Superstructure Construction over Roadway or Land (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011) ..	228
Fig. 6-24	Decision Flowchart for Superstructure Construction over Railroad or Transit (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).	229
Fig. 6-25	Decision Flowchart for Superstructure Construction over Water or Wetlands (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	230
Fig. 6-26	Suitability of bridge substructure to receive superstructure (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	235
Fig. 6-27	Decision flowchart for substructure construction (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).....	237
Fig. 6-28	Bridge substructure element selection parameters (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	239
Fig. 6-29	Flowchart for selection of substructure system (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	242
Fig. 6-30	Flowchart for selection of substructure elements for pier and abutment system (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	243
Fig. 6-31	Flowchart for selection of substructure elements for buried bridges (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	244
Fig. 6-32	Flowchart for selection of substructure elements for culverts.....	245
Fig. 6-33	Flowchart for selection of substructures w/r/t foundation type (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019). .....	246
Fig. 6-34	Reusing of foundation and substructure (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019) .....	252
Fig. 7-1	Bridge construction method selection based on the flowchart presented by FHWA- Design example .....	257
Fig. 7-2	FHWA Decision Making Matrix-Design Example .....	258
Fig. 7-3	Decision Flowchart for Superstructure Construction over Water or Wetlands- Design Example .....	259

Fig. 7-4	Decision flowchart for substructure construction - Design example .....	261
Fig. 7-5	Flowchart for selection of substructure system .....	262
Fig. 7-6	Flowchart for selection of substructure elements for pier and abutment system- Design example .....	263
Fig. 7-7	Bridge Section .....	265
Fig. 7-8	Bridge Pier Elevation.....	265
Fig. 7-9	Bridge Interior Module.....	265
Fig. 7-10	Bridge Exterior Module.....	266
Fig. 7-11	Four points lifting .....	271
Fig. 7-12	Finite element analysis for designing the deck .....	280
Fig. 7-13	Interior Module- Reinforcing Detail.....	284
Fig. 7-14	Exterior Module- Reinforcing Detail.....	284
Fig. 7-15	Shear Stud Detail .....	285
Fig. 7-16	Closure joint detail.....	285

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Prefabricated Deck panel systems (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	19
Table 2-2 Types of ABC deck panel systems alternative to concrete deck panels.....	20
Table 2-3 Different types of girders with potential for use in ABC short span bridges.....	28
Table 2-4 Attributes of Trapezoidal Box Girders (Source: Badie et al. 1999) (Aktan & Attanayake, 2013).....	41
Table 2-5 Buried Bridge Geometry (Beaver, 2016).....	58
Table 2-6 Summary of attributes of top PBES candidates (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012).....	77
Table 3-1 Different types of closure joints (Farhangdoust, Mehrabi, & Mowsavi, 2008) .....	87
Table 3-2 Different connections of cap beam and column.....	110
Table 3-3 Different connections of column and footing .....	118
Table 3-4 Abutment systems connections.....	123
Table 5-1 Nondestructive methods for inspections of ABC structures ..	165
Table 5-2 Preliminary assessment procedure (FHWA, 2018).....	180
Table 5-3 Field testing related to concrete elements (FHWA, 2018).....	181
Table 5-4 Durability tests of concrete elements (FHWA, 2018).....	182
Table 5-5 NDT technologies for concrete elements (FHWA, 2018) .....	182
Table 5-6 NDT technologies for steel members .....	183
Table 6-1 Superstructure system selection considerations.....	232
Table 6-2 Substructure system selection considerations (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019) .....	248

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Abstract**

Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) significantly reduces on-site construction time and minimizes traffic disruptions by employing prefabricated bridge elements and systems. This approach enhances life cycle costs through improved scheduling control and typically higher quality of elements, leading to enhanced long-term performance. ABC is particularly advantageous for short-span bridges, which are well-suited to standardized prefabrication techniques. In such cases, entire bridge spans can often be constructed using prefabricated deck elements, modular decks, or systems that span the full bridge width. Additionally, the substructures of these bridges can often be constructed using prefabricated elements without necessitating specialized treatments. For shorter spans, the option to prefabricate the entire bridge, including both substructure and superstructure, is also viable. The construction of short-span ABC bridges can utilize a range of methods, from traditional crane installations to innovative approaches like Self-Propelled Modular Transport (SPMT) units for moving entire superstructures, or slide-in construction techniques. Definitions of what constitutes a 'short span' vary, with some sources considering spans of 20-45 ft. as short (as per FDOT), others up to 70 ft., and some even extending to spans of 100 ft. This book introduces the concept of ABC and examines its application in the context of short-span bridge construction. It categorizes and details short-span bridges based on various criteria including access, topography, geographic conditions, roadway functional categories, span length, elements and systems, time constraints, and construction methods. The performance of these bridges is evaluated based on existing literature. Decision-making processes regarding the adoption of ABC, choice of elements, systems, and construction methods are also discussed. Additionally, the book covers the inspection of short-span bridges and includes a design example. The book's definition of short-span bridges aims to clarify the selection limitations of ABC

components and provide a clearer understanding of the project scope for involved parties.

## **Background**

The primary objective of ABC (Accelerated Bridge Construction) is to maximize the utilization of prefabrication techniques to minimize on-site construction processes and their associated impacts on traffic flow. In this context, bridges with short spans serve as an exemplary application for a broad spectrum of ABC methodologies. The definition of a 'short span' bridge varies: the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) categorizes bridges with spans between 20 and 45 feet as short-span, while other definitions extend this range up to 70 feet or even 100 feet. ABC strategies for these bridges can range from the prefabrication of individual elements and members to the complete pre-construction of the entire bridge structure. Typically, structures exceeding 20 feet in span are classified as bridges, whereas those under 20 feet are termed culverts, even if they bear direct vehicular load. However, it is important to recognize that certain structures exceeding 20 feet are designed both hydraulically and structurally as culverts (Ryan, Mann, Zachary, & Ott, 2002). Culverts exceeding 20 feet often incorporate design considerations for support from the surrounding soil. Structures that necessitate an analysis of static soil-structure interaction are referred to as "buried bridges." These can have spans up to 100 feet, demanding the same safety and design considerations as conventional bridges (Beaver, 2016). Many culverts and buried structures are constructed using ABC techniques, and thus, they are included in the discussion of ABC short-span bridges in this book. Examples of short-span and buried bridges, as well as other ABC elements and methods, are presented in Fig. 1-1 and Fig. 1-2, respectively.



Fig. 1-1 Examples of short-span and buried bridges (Beaver, 2016).

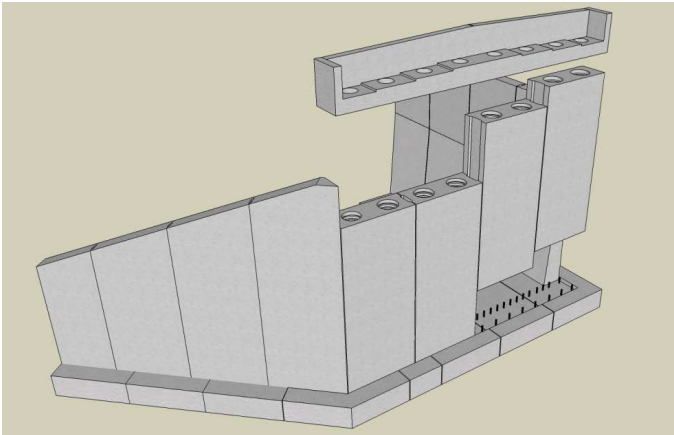


Fig. 1-2 Other elements and methods for short-span bridges (Azizinamini, 2018) (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).



The selection of elements and construction methodologies for Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) of short-span bridges is influenced by a multitude of factors, including accessibility, topographical and geographical conditions, the functional category of the roadway, span length, available elements and systems, and time constraints. It is crucial to provide users with a comprehensive array of available element types, subsystems, and systems suitable for short-span ABC bridges. A clear identification and description of these components, highlighting their respective advantages, potential applications, and limitations, will facilitate informed decision-making. Typically, the span length emerges as a pivotal determinant in shaping both the structural design and the economic aspects of bridge construction.

The design and detailing of bridges, particularly the establishment of structural integrity through on-site methods such as cast-in-place closures and other in-situ joints, present notable challenges. In this context, the role of ABC connections and joints is significant, and a thorough understanding of their application and limitations is imperative. A common issue observed in ABC bridge decks is cracking, often accompanied by efflorescence and leakage (Attanayake & Aktan, 2015). This defect is particularly prevalent in a specific ABC construction approach involving side-by-side box precast concrete beams. Survey data indicates that these issues predominantly occur at the interfaces between deck panels and at the connections of deck panels with piers or abutments. Consequently, there is an increased need for inspection and performance evaluation of joints, especially closure joints, in short-span bridges.

The process of decision-making regarding the implementation of Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC), encompassing the selection of specific elements, systems, and construction methodologies, is crucial for the successful initiation, management, and contractual handling of projects. A comprehensive examination of ABC methodologies is imperative, addressing key facets such as construction techniques, detailing, performance metrics, inspection protocols, and decision-making processes. These aspects must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders involved. This book aims to compile and present relevant information and materials specifically pertaining to short-span bridges within the context of ABC.

## **Objectives of the Book**

The primary objective of the development of this book is to provide comprehensive insights into the application of Accelerated Bridge

Construction (ABC) techniques for short-span bridges. This encompasses a broad spectrum of topics, including decision-making strategies, construction methodologies, an overview of available elements and systems, as well as aspects related to performance evaluation and inspection. Additionally, the book covers the design, detailing, and the intricacies of connections within the context of ABC for short-span bridges.

## **ABC – Definitions and Descriptions**

Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) represents a construction methodology that significantly reduces on-site construction duration. This approach involves the adoption of novel materials, design techniques, and construction methods in both the development of new bridges and the rehabilitation or replacement of existing structures. A key strategy in ABC is the use of Prefabricated Bridge Elements and Systems (PBES), which are manufactured off-site. The processes of construction, reinforcement placement, concrete pouring, and curing are all conducted off-site under controlled conditions, enhancing the quality, safety, and durability of the bridge components. This off-site fabrication is less susceptible to weather-related delays and generally exerts minimal impact on traffic flow, in stark contrast to traditional construction methods (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019).

Conventional bridge construction, predominantly executed on-site, is heavily weather-dependent and can be considerably time-consuming. This method often necessitates detours or temporary structures to mitigate its impact on traffic, and may require additional remote sites as supporting location, potentially compromising transportation network efficiency and safety. In comparison, ABC methods are typically more economical and safer (Mehrabi, Ali, & Baqersad, 2019).

Traditional construction methods, such as Cast-in-Place (CIP) decks, are characterized by extended construction periods and intensive on-site labour (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011), (Garber, Chitty, & Freeman, 2018). In contrast, ABC may incorporate strategies like "Fast Track Contracting" with incentive/disincentive clauses, nighttime or off-peak hour operations, or entirely off-line work to minimize mobility impacts. The use of rapid-set or early-strength-gain materials, including Ultra-High-Performance Concrete (UHPC) for closure pours, is also a feature of ABC to expedite construction (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).

A notable aspect of ABC is the requirement for small closure pours to finalize some connections. Precast concrete construction, unlike cast-in-place methods, allows elements to cure with minimal restraint, reducing

internal stress and the likelihood of cracking. This is particularly relevant in the context of transverse cracking in bridge decks, a common issue in cast-in-place construction due to the restraint imposed by girders. Since precast elements are placed post-shrinkage, the risk of shrinkage-induced cracking is significantly mitigated, thereby decreasing water infiltration, and positively influencing the long-term durability of the structures (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).

For further detailed definitions and guidelines on ABC, the AASHTO LRFD (2018) - Guide Specification for Accelerated Bridge Construction provides an extensive resource (AASHTO, 2018).

### **Benefits of ABC**

The Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) methodology presents several advantages over traditional construction techniques. While any construction method impacts the traveling public, ABC significantly reduces this impact through decreased on-site construction activities. Early in the planning phase, potential limitations can be identified and addressed, ensuring continuous progress. The primary benefits of ABC are:

- Minimized traffic disruption and congestion
- Enhanced safety for the public and construction workers
- Improved quality control for precast elements
- Lowered life-cycle costs and maintenance requirements
- Reduced environmental impact
- Better control over costs and schedules, with less weather dependency
- Improved constructability

### **Applications**

ABC is versatile and can be applied in various bridge project scenarios:

- **New bridge construction**

While ABC is often associated with replacement of existing bridges, it offers substantial benefits in new bridge construction. Designers can select from a range of options to optimize project execution. ABC is particularly advantageous in environmentally sensitive areas, reducing construction time and environmental impact. When constructing over existing roadways, ABC minimizes disruption to traffic below (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). The method also enhances safety and reduces weather-related delays compared to conventional methods.

- **Repair and Rehabilitation**

ABC is commonly used to minimize traffic disruption during bridge repairs and rehabilitation. The safety of the traveling public and the flow of the transportation network are directly impacted by on-site construction-related activities; therefore, reducing construction time will provide for better safety (Culmo, et al., 2013). The aging infrastructure in the United States necessitates efficient rehabilitation methods (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). ABC applications in this context include:

- **Deck Replacement**

Traditional methods for bridge deck construction are labour-intensive and time-consuming, necessitating extensive on-site work. In the case of concrete bridges, this typically involves the use of temporary formwork to support reinforcement and wet concrete until it achieves the required strength. Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC) techniques, employing prefabricated precast deck elements, offer a solution to these constraints. ABC encompasses several deck replacement strategies, notably including partial depth and full-depth concrete deck panels. These panels are fabricated off-site in a controlled environment, allowed to cure, and then transported to the construction site as needed (Roddenberry & Servos, 2012). Additional types of prefabricated deck panels include open grid decks, concrete/steel hybrid decks, fibre-reinforced polymer decks, and timber deck panels.

Another ABC strategy involves the use of stay-in-place deck forms. These forms, typically made of corrugated metal panels, are designed to support both the reinforcing steel and the wet concrete of the deck. A key advantage of this approach is the elimination of the need to remove forms post-curing of the concrete. However, this method still requires the placement and curing of concrete and reinforcing steel, which may not substantially reduce construction time. Additionally, this approach precludes the possibility of future visual inspections of the deck's underside (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).

- **Superstructure Replacement**

Employing a prefabricated superstructure in bridge construction or replacement significantly accelerates the process compared to traditional methods. ABC techniques are particularly advantageous for superstructure replacement projects, as they eliminate the need for the typically lengthy process of constructing foundations and substructures (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). Technologies such as Self-Propelled Modular Transporters (SPMT) and skidding/sliding methods facilitate the removal

and installation of entire superstructures. These superstructures can be assembled offsite and then relocated to their final position in a considerably shorter timeframe. Additionally, ABC allows for the construction of modular bridge segments or the integration of various prefabricated bridge elements, further enhancing efficiency and reducing construction time.

- **Substructure Replacement**

The integration of prefabricated substructure elements in conjunction with ABC methods presents substantial opportunities for further reducing the overall duration of construction projects. Typically, these prefabricated substructure components are engineered to emulate the properties and functions of cast-in-place concrete structures concrete (Culmo, et al., 2013). The selection of specific substructure elements is influenced by a variety of factors, including project time constraints, associated risks and costs, environmental and geometric considerations, site conditions, accessibility, design requirements, and critically, the compatibility with the existing superstructure and foundation.

A practical application of this approach is the replacement of aged pier columns and caps with prefabricated pier elements, provided that the existing footings and foundations are structurally sound and adequate. To integrate the old and new structures, closure pours can be utilized at the base of the columns, effectively connecting the existing footings with the new prefabricated pier elements. In cases where an existing pier is supported by a spread footing, it is feasible to construct the new pier adjacent to the existing bridge on rails and subsequently jack it into position, similar to the lateral movement of a superstructure (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011).

- **Replacement of existing bridges**

The process of replacing entire bridges or constructing new ones presents distinct challenges compared to deck or superstructure replacement, primarily due to the necessity of replacing substructures and foundations. Additionally, these projects often involve managing existing traffic that traverses the current bridge, introducing an added layer of complexity (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). In scenarios where an existing bridge requires replacement, accommodating ongoing traffic is a critical consideration. The implementation of ABC techniques can effectively mitigate traffic disruption. This can be achieved through strategies such as constructing a new bridge adjacent to the existing traffic flow or establishing a detour. ABC methodologies facilitate various replacement approaches, enabling a reduction in the duration of each construction stage.

Moreover, the adoption of ABC practices significantly enhances safety at the construction site.

## **ABC Bridge Elements**

In the context of Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC), bridge elements are typically categorized into superstructure, substructure, and foundation. The superstructure encompasses the deck, girders, and all components situated above the deck (Culmo, Lord, Huie, & Beerman, 2011). The substructure includes elements that support the superstructure, such as piers, abutments, and wing walls, essentially constituting the segment between the superstructure bearing and the foundation. The foundation, a critical part of the substructure, is responsible for transmitting the loads from the bridge to the underlying earth and geological strata. This can include various forms, either shallow or deep, such as footings, pile caps, and piles. An illustrative overview of ABC bridge elements is provided in Fig. 1-3.

Culverts and buried bridges, often integrating superstructure with substructure (like in 3-sided boxes or arches) or representing the entire structure (as in box culverts), can be classified as either complete bridge systems or subsystems. The various elements and components within ABC bridges are interconnected through joints and connections, typically established in-situ (Culmo M. , 2009), (Aktan & Attanayake, 2013), as shown in Fig. 1-2. Chapter 2 will offer a more comprehensive definition, classification, and discussion of the uses of these components, particularly in the context of short-span bridges.

## **Short Span Classification**

This book focuses on ABC Bridge Systems specifically tailored for short-span bridges. The span length is a critical determinant in determining both the structural design and the economic aspects of a bridge. In this context, the book adopts a definition of short-span bridges as those with spans up to 70 feet and a maximum prefabricated bridge module weight of 90,000 pounds (Hntb Corporation, U.S. TRB National Research Council and U.S Second Strategic Highway Research Program, 2013). This definition aids in clarifying the constraints in selecting ABC components and provides a clearer framework for project scope.

Within this defined span range, structures spanning less than 20 feet are typically classified as culverts. These culverts, often embedded in soil, are primarily utilized to enable water passage under roads, railways, or similar structures, and are designed with hydraulic considerations in mind.