

**Bridge Load Testing**  
**State-of-The-Practice**

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1 **Bridge Load Testing: State-of-the-Practice**

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1    **Abstract**

2            Bridge load testing can answer a variety of questions about bridge behavior that cannot be  
3 answered otherwise. The current governing codes and guidelines for bridge load testing in the USA  
4 are the 1998 NCHRP *Manual for Bridge Rating through Load Testing* and Chapter 8 of the  
5 AASHTO *Manual for Bridge Evaluation*. Over the past two decades, the practice of load testing has  
6 evolved and its intersections with other fields have expanded. The outcomes of load tests have been  
7 used to keep bridges open cost-effectively without unnecessarily restricting legal loads, when  
8 theoretical analyses cannot yield insights representative of in-service performance. Load testing data  
9 can be further used to develop field-verified finite element models of tested bridges to understand  
10 these structures better. Additionally, structural reliability concepts can be used to estimate the  
11 probability of failure based on the results of load tests, and non-contact measurement techniques  
12 capturing large surfaces of bridges allow for better monitoring of structural responses.

13            Given these developments, a new TRB Circular, *Primer on Bridge Load Testing*, has been  
14 developed. This document contains new proposals for interpreting the results of diagnostic load  
15 tests, loading protocols, and the determination of bridge load ratings based on the results of proof  
16 load tests. In addition, included provisions provide an estimation of the resulting reliability index  
17 and the remaining service life of a bridge based on load testing results. The benefit of load testing is  
18 illustrated based on a cost-benefit analysis. The current state-of-the-practice has demonstrated that  
19 load testing is an effective means for answering many important questions regarding bridge behavior  
20 that are critical to decisions on bridge maintenance or replacement. Load testing has evolved over its  
21 history, and the newly developed TRB Circular reflects this evolution in a practical way.

22

1 **CE database subject headings**

2 bridge maintenance; bridge tests; codes and guidelines; instrumentation; field tests; load testing

3

4 **Introduction**

5 Load testing was originally used to convince the traveling public that a bridge was safe for use  
6 (Schacht et al., 2016). While some countries still require a load test on all or certain cases of newly  
7 constructed bridges, now load testing is mostly used for the assessment of existing bridges where  
8 routine analysis methods fail to represent their in-service performance. Recent applications of load  
9 testing also include developing of field-verified finite element models (Barker, 2001), evaluating the  
10 effect of material damage on bridge performance (Koekkoek et al., 2015), assessing bridges without  
11 design plans (Aguilar et al., 2015; Anay et al., 2016; Shenton et al., 2007), evaluating strengthening  
12 measures (Nilimaa et al., 2015; Puurula et al., 2015; Shifferaw and Fanous, 2013), analyzing  
13 heritage bridges (Coletti, 2002; Moen et al., 2013; Orban and Gutermann, 2009), evaluating the  
14 contribution of additional load-carrying mechanisms such as arching action (Taylor et al., 2007),  
15 evaluating new materials (Alampalli and Kunin, 2002; 2003; Alampalli and Hag-Elsafi, 2013; Hag-  
16 Elsafi et al., 2002; Hag-Elsafi et al., 2004), determining remaining fatigue life (Alampalli and Lund,  
17 2006), and verifying design assumptions of new bridges (Yannotti et al., 2000).

18         Depending on the load application, static and dynamic load tests can be distinguished. Two  
19 types of static load tests are generally used: diagnostic load tests and proof load tests (Lantsoght et  
20 al., 2017b). Diagnostic load tests (Fu et al., 1997; Hernandez and Myers, 2018; Jáuregui and Barr,  
21 2004; Kim et al., 2009) are used to measure structural responses under known (externally applied)  
22 loads. These responses can then be interpreted to gain insight in the overall behavior of the bridge,

1 determine specific elements of the bridge behavior (composite action with the deck, transverse  
2 distribution etc.), and/or to develop a field-verified model for its capacity/demand ratios or rating.  
3 Proof load tests (Aguilar et al., 2015; Anay et al., 2016; Casas and Gómez, 2013; Lantsoght et al.,  
4 2017a) apply a target load to directly demonstrate that a bridge can carry the code-prescribed live  
5 loads without signs of distress. If the bridge shows signs of distress before the target proof load is  
6 reached, then the bridge may still be able to remain in function for lower load levels, depending on  
7 the maximum load that could be applied during the proof load test.

8         The provisions for load testing in the USA are given in Chapter 8 of the Manual for Bridge  
9 Evaluation, MBE (AASHTO, 2016), which is based on the 1998 Manual for Bridge Rating through  
10 Load Testing, MBRLT (NCHRP, 1998). The 1998 document in turn is based on research from the  
11 late 1980s and 1990s. Since then, the practice of load testing of bridges has changed significantly.  
12 Improvements related to cellular communications technology, wireless techniques, and sensing and  
13 data acquisition technology have made gathering, sending, and storing data (such as structural  
14 responses) more accessible. In addition, the more widespread use of finite element models in  
15 conjunction with higher-speed computing has resulted in vastly improved methods for combining  
16 analytical models and field tests. Advances in the development and use of sensors that take  
17 distributed measurements (or a large collection of point measurements to approximate a distributed  
18 measurement) have resulted in the ability of capturing the structural response of an entire line or  
19 surface of a structure during a load test, instead of a single measurement point. Finally, unifying  
20 codes based on a probability of failure of a structure also has resulted in combining the concepts of  
21 structural reliability with applied proof loads. The current provisions for load testing do not reflect  
22 this state-of-the-practice. Therefore, members of TRB Standing Committee on Testing and

1 Evaluation of Transportation Structures (AFF40/AKB40) have developed the *Primer on Bridge*  
2 *Load Testing* as an updated guidance document. This paper describes the need for a document such  
3 as the *Primer*, the current state-of-the-practice, recent advances in bridge load testing research, and  
4 how these elements are summarized in the *Primer* to form a practical guidance document.

5

## 6 **Current governing codes and guidelines**

### 7 ***Manual for Bridge Rating through Load Testing***

8         The Manual for Bridge Rating through Load Testing (MBRLT) (NCHRP, 1998) is based on  
9 research carried out during the late 1980s and the 1990s. This manual describes procedures for  
10 conducting a nondestructive load test and load rating of a bridge based on a load test. The aim of the  
11 MBRLT was to establish realistic safe service live load capacities for bridges. This goal can be  
12 achieved through diagnostic or proof load tests. The outcome of the test is then used for rating the  
13 bridge under consideration. The MBRLT discusses factors that influence the load-carrying capacity:  
14 unintended composite action, load distribution, participation of parapets, railings, curbs and utilities,  
15 differences in material properties, unintended continuity, participation of secondary members, the  
16 effect of skew, the effects of damage and deterioration, the unintended arching action due to frozen  
17 bearings, and the load-carrying capacity of the deck. The MBRLT also contains an extensive  
18 discussion of available equipment for measuring structural responses during a load test, reflecting  
19 the state of the practice in the 1990s. Examples are included, and the background for determination  
20 of the target proof load based on concepts of structural reliability is included as an attached technical  
21 report.

1 **Manual for Bridge Evaluation – Chapter 8**

2 The MBRLT forms the basis of Chapter 8 of the Manual for Bridge Evaluation (MBE)  
3 (AASHTO, 2016). Using the concepts of load and resistance factor rating (LRFR), the rating factor  
4  $RF$  becomes:

5 
$$RF = \frac{C - (\gamma_{DC})(DC) - (\gamma_{DW})(DW) \pm (\gamma_P)(P)}{(\gamma_{LL})LL(1+I)} \quad (1)$$

6 where the capacity  $C$  for the Strength Limit States is determined as:

7 
$$C = \phi_c \phi_s \phi R_n \text{ with } \phi_c \phi_s \geq 0.85 \quad (2)$$

8 In Eq. (2),  $R_n$  is the nominal member resistance as inspected. For the Serviceability Limit States, the  
9 capacity  $C$  is determined as:

10 
$$C = f_R \quad (3)$$

11 where  $f_R$  is the allowable stress specified in the LRFD Code (AASHTO, 2015).

12 For diagnostic load tests, the rating factor based on the test result is determined according to  
13 comparison of the analytically determined strain to the measured strain at the position of the  
14 maximum measured strain. The procedure for determining the rating factor based on diagnostic load  
15 test results  $RF_T$  is based on multiplying the rating factor prior to the test  $RF_C$  with an adjustment  
16 factor  $K$ :

17 
$$RF_T = RF_C \times K \quad (4)$$

18 The adjustment factor  $K$  is calculated by multiplying  $K_a$ , the benefit derived from the load test, and  
19  $K_b$ , a factor that accounts for differences between the actual behavior of the bridge and the revised

1 analytical model with regard to lateral and longitudinal load distribution and the participation of  
2 other members.

$$3 \quad K = 1 + K_a \times K_b \quad (5)$$

4 The benefit from the load test  $K_a$  is determined based on the ratio of the maximum measured strain  
5 during the test  $\varepsilon_T$  and the corresponding analytically determined strain  $\varepsilon_c$ .

$$6 \quad K_a = \frac{\varepsilon_c}{\varepsilon_T} - 1 \quad (6)$$

7 The factor  $K_b$  for the differences between the actual behavior of the bridge and the revised analytical  
8 model contains the contributions of  $K_{b1}$ , which reflects if the test measurements can be directly  
9 extrapolated to bridge performance at higher load levels,  $K_{b2}$ , which accounts for the ability of the  
10 inspection time to identify problems that could invalidate the test result, and  $K_{b3}$  for the presence of  
11 critical structural features which cannot be determined in a load test.

$$12 \quad K_b = K_{b1} \times K_{b2} \times K_{b3} \quad (7)$$

13 Alternatively, a proof load test may be used to update a load rating. The rating factor at the  
14 Operating Level  $RF_O$  after a proof load test is determined as:

$$15 \quad RF_O = \frac{OP}{L_R(1+I)} \quad (8)$$

16 with  $L_R$  the comparable live load due to the rating vehicle for the lanes loaded. The capacity at the  
17 operating level  $OP$  is determined based on the maximum applied load during the proof load test  $L_P$ ,  
18 with  $k_O = 1.0$  when the target proof load  $L_T$  is achieved and  $k_O = 0.88$  if the test was stopped  
19 prematurely because distress or nonlinear behavior was observed:



1 
$$OP = \frac{k_O L_P}{X_{PA}} \quad (9)$$

2 The target proof load  $L_T$  is determined on  $L_R$  and the magnification factor  $X_{PA}$ :

3 
$$L_T = X_{PA} L_R (1 + I) \quad (10)$$

4 with the magnification factor  $X_{PA}$  between 1.3 and 2.2. The factor  $X_{PA}$  equals  $X_P = 1.4$  multiplied by  
5 adjustments  $\Sigma\%$  as given by the MBE:

6 
$$X_{PA} = X_P \left( 1 + \frac{\Sigma\%}{100} \right) \quad (11)$$

### 7 ***International practice***

8 Several countries have national codes or guidelines for load testing. Some of these national  
9 guidelines are application specific. The German guideline (Deutscher Ausschuss für Stahlbeton,  
10 2000), was developed for proof load testing of plain and reinforced concrete structures that are  
11 flexure-critical. The guideline for load testing from the United Kingdom (The Institution of Civil  
12 Engineers - National Steering Committee for the Load Testing of Bridges, 1998) only deals with  
13 diagnostic load testing (called supplementary load testing in the UK guideline) as an integral part of  
14 the overall assessment procedure for existing bridges. This guideline was originally developed to  
15 assess existing bridges when the 40 tonne (88 kip) truck was introduced in the UK. Similarly, the  
16 Irish manual for load testing (NRA, 2014) considers diagnostic load testing of older metal and  
17 concrete bridges as an accompaniment to assessment calculations. In Switzerland, load testing is  
18 used for assessment of existing bridges and is included in the SIA 269:2011 code (SIA, 2011).  
19 Poland has guidelines (Research Institute of Roads and Bridges, 2008) to verify if a vehicle of  
20 “abnormal weight” above the design live load can be carried by a certain bridge (Halicka et al.,

1 2018). In Hungary, the serviceability of existing structures can be verified through load testing  
2 (Hungarian Chamber of Engineers, 2013).

3 In other countries, load testing is primarily used to demonstrate that an as-built structure  
4 performs as it was designed. In France, all new bridges (including pedestrian bridges) must be  
5 subjected to a diagnostic load test prior to opening (Cochet et al., 2004). Simplified procedures for  
6 rigid frame bridges, slab bridges, and girder bridges are provided. Similar requirements for load  
7 testing prior to opening and after widening or rehabilitation exist in Spain (Ministerio de Fomento -  
8 Direccion General de Carreteras, 1999; Ministerio de Fomento, 2009; 2010) for highway and  
9 pedestrian bridges. In the Spanish practice, static load tests are required for all bridges longer than  
10 12 m (39 ft), dynamic load tests are required for concrete bridges with a span length over 60 m (197  
11 ft), pedestrian bridges, bridges with an unusual design, and bridges using new materials. Diagnostic  
12 load testing of road bridges prior to opening is common in Italy as well (Veneziano et al., 1978;  
13 Veneziano et al., 1984a; b). In Switzerland, every major bridge is load tested prior to opening  
14 (Moses et al., 1994).

15 Extensive guidelines (Frýba and Pirner, 2001; Kopáček, 2003) for static and dynamic load  
16 testing of railway and road bridges (upon opening and for assessment purposes) exist in the Czech  
17 Republic (Český normalizační institut, 1996) and Slovakia (Slovak Standardization Institute, 1979).  
18 These guidelines contain both stop criteria and acceptance criteria, and apply to reinforced concrete,  
19 prestressed concrete, and steel bridges.

#### 20 ***Practical need for updating current codes and guidelines***

21 Most highway bridges in the United States are required by federal law (US Code of Federal  
22 Regulations, 2011) to be inspected on a biennial basis. The primary purpose of these bridge

1 inspections is to provide public safety through assuring that bridges have enough capacity to carry  
2 the loads allowed on them (Alampalli and Jalinoos, 2009). Hence, during these inspections, most  
3 owners document the changes to bridge condition (such as increased weight due to overlays) and  
4 bridge deterioration (such as section loss) that can affect the bridge capacity. Using this data, live  
5 load carrying capacity of the bridge is updated and compared to the effect of live loads allowed on  
6 it. In the case of demand exceeding capacity, a bridge is restricted to less than what would otherwise  
7 be legal loads for the highway it serves (known as “load posting”, or simply “posting”); or, if needed  
8 the bridge is closed to traffic until improvements are made to increase its capacity. Such disruptions  
9 can cause inconvenience and increased costs to public due to detours or congestion. Thus, estimating  
10 the capacity of the bridge in its existing condition is very important to assure the ongoing safety and  
11 mobility of the traveling public.

12         As noted in earlier sections, structural analysis is generally used for load rating existing  
13 bridges. In some cases, where owners believe that analysis does not represent the true capacity of the  
14 structure (due to, for example, limitations in ability to model a particular deterioration mode in  
15 software, or a lack of as-built plans or other documentation needed to build a usable computational  
16 model), load testing provides an alternative means to obtain the capacity of the structure in its  
17 current condition. A survey (Wang et al., 2009) conducted for the Georgia Department of  
18 Transportation in 2009 found that only fourteen of the forty-one responding states performed some  
19 form of load testing as part of bridge evaluation practice. Five other states reported that they had  
20 once performed very few load tests for the reason of academic research; the remaining states had  
21 never used load testing as a tool for bridge condition assessment. Most of the load tests mentioned in  
22 survey responses were performed (1) to re-evaluate the capacity of bridges in good condition, but

1 with sufficiently low capacity per typical analysis methods as to require load postings, (2) to  
2 evaluate bridges constructed using novel materials such as fiber reinforced polymers, or (3) on  
3 bridges without as-built plans or design documentation, or with serious deterioration that prevented  
4 an accurate theoretical strength calculation. The report also found that methods based on the  
5 NCHRP (1998) report were still in use by many respondents; only one state employed the AASHTO  
6 LRFR Guide Manual (2003).

7 Even though load testing is widely recognized as a load rating method, as noted above, its  
8 use has been relatively limited by many highway agencies. This suggests that an update is required  
9 to the NCHRP 1998 based methodology to incorporate knowledge gained since its writing and also  
10 to illustrate its use through case studies to encourage owners to perform load testing, as needed, as  
11 an alternate method of load rating. Furthermore, in the absence of a clear value proposition for load  
12 testing, the initial costs of testing may deter some owners. As previous guidance documents have  
13 not included a method to calculate the value of load testing, a simple, rational way to perform a  
14 benefit-cost analysis is needed. Given that all highway agencies use the LRFD approach and are  
15 moving towards the LRFR approach, guidance to update the reliability index after a load test,  
16 considering the uncertainties associated with the structure performance as well as load test, is also  
17 needed, along with a method to estimate remaining service life.

18

## 19 **Current practice of bridge load testing**

### 20 ***Diagnostic load testing***

21 In diagnostic load testing, see for example **Figure 1**, the actual responses of key structural  
22 components, in terms of measured strains, deflections, rotations, etc., to known test loads are

1 measured. Typically, an analytical model, based on best available information, is developed for  
2 comparison with the load test results. After the analytical model is adjusted and validated against the  
3 test results, it can be used to predict structural behaviors for a variety of purposes, including to  
4 assess the maximum load effects of dead load and all required rating vehicles. In order to calculate  
5 refined bridge load ratings through diagnostic load testing, member capacities must still be  
6 quantified based on section and material properties per construction documents, field measurements,  
7 or through in-situ material testing. Load factors must also be applied according to the applicable  
8 code.



9  
10 **Figure 1. Diagnostic load test on a rural one-lane concrete slab bridge**  
11 Diagnostic load testing has gradually gained wider acceptance among bridge owners as a  
12 refined method for bridge load rating, especially when simplified analytical methods suggest

1 unreasonably low ratings or the need for load posting in conflict with the actual condition and  
2 loading history of the structure. Diagnostic load testing has also been used to identify specific  
3 structural behavior concerns such as live load distribution, connection stresses, unintended  
4 composite actions, support conditions, and so on.

### 5 ***Proof load testing***

6         Proof load testing (see for example **Figure 2**) physically demonstrates the bridge's ability to  
7 carry its full dead load plus some magnified live load. Test loads are applied to the bridge in  
8 multiple steps using loading and unloading process in a progressively increasing manner towards a  
9 predetermined target proof load. The target proof load is established to be sufficiently higher than  
10 the rating vehicles in order to include a live load factor for the required margin of safety and to  
11 account for the effects of dynamic impact. During each loading and unloading step, key responses of  
12 the structure are measured and monitored for possible signs of distress or non-linear-elastic  
13 behavior. Upon successful completion of a proof load test, the highest applied load provides a lower  
14 bound on the true strength capacity, which leads to a lower bound bridge load rating after  
15 incorporating proper load factors and dynamic load allowance.

16         Compared with diagnostic load testing, proof load testing yields more reliable results on the  
17 load carrying capacity of the tested structure. It requires a reduced level of structural analysis  
18 without the need to calculate section capacities or the maximum force effects of dead and live loads.  
19 The primary result from a proof load test is to conclude whether the rating factor for a specific  
20 vehicle type exceeds 1.0 at the operating level of reliability. However, if load ratings for vehicle  
21 types other than the test vehicle are needed, a structural analysis will be required to compare the load  
22 effects of the rating vehicles with those of the test vehicle.



1

2

**Figure 2. Proof load test on bridge with cracks in overlay along joints of the box beams**

3

In-service application of bridge proof load testing is less common than diagnostic load testing, primarily due to the following reasons: first, test loads exceeding the service load level involve risks; second, implementation of a multi-step loading and unloading process using high loads requires proper planning, suitable equipment, close monitoring, as well as knowledge, experience and judgement.

8

### **Recent advances in bridge load testing**

9

#### ***Integration with structural reliability***

10

Structural reliability analysis provides a rigorous framework to quantify and compare the safety margins of different structural designs (Ang et al., 2007). It has been widely used to develop

11



1 and calibrate design guidelines for bridge structures. Uncertainties associated with structural  
2 capacity may arise from design models, material properties, and fabrication and construction  
3 processes, among others. Uncertainties associated with structural demand may stem from the weight  
4 and configuration of heavy vehicles, operating speed, and road surface, among others. Structural  
5 reliability analysis considers uncertainties involved in both structural capacity and structural demand  
6 to evaluate the probability of failure. Mathematically, this probability of failure can be expressed as

$$P_{fb} = \Pr[R - S < 0] = \int_0^{+\infty} (1 - F_S(r)) f_R(r) dr \quad (12)$$

7 where  $R$  and  $S$  are the random variables representing structural capacity and structural demand,  
8 respectively;  $F_S(\cdot)$  and  $f_R(\cdot)$  are the cumulative distribution function (CDF) and the probability  
9 density function (PDF) of  $R$  and  $S$ , respectively. Due to the low probability of failure of civil  
10 structures, this probability as determined in Eq. (12) is usually expressed as the reliability index  $\beta$ .  
11 The relation between the probability of failure and the reliability index is:

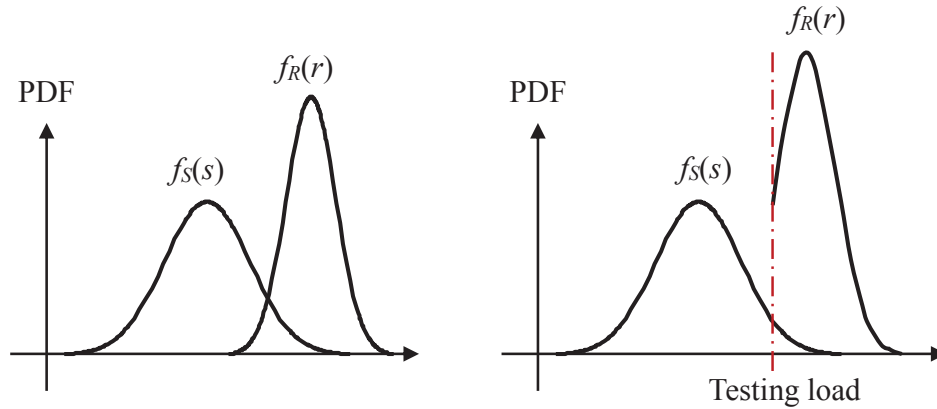
$$P_{fb} = \Phi(-\beta_b) \quad (13)$$

12 Where,  $\Phi(\cdot)$  is the CDF of standard normal distribution.

13 Traditionally, evaluation of existing bridges follows a deterministic approach where the  
14 aforementioned uncertainties are not explicitly considered. The MBE (AASHTO, 2016) allows for  
15 allowable stress rating (ASR), load factor rating (LFR), and load and resistance factor rating  
16 (LRFR). ASR and LFR are inherited from the 1994 edition of the Manual for Condition Evaluation  
17 of Bridges (AASHTO, 1994). These deterministic approaches lack structural reliability analysis and,  
18 consequently, may not ensure a consistent level of safety margins across different bridges and  
19 different limit states. On the other hand, LRFR, though still following a deterministic procedure, is a



1 semi-probabilistic approach that does consider uncertainties involved and uses structural reliability  
 2 analysis to calibrate load and resistance factors. The clear emphasis on LRFR in the 2018 MBE  
 3 indicates the intended integration of structural reliability and load rating.



4

5 **Figure 3. Effect of load testing from structural reliability standpoint**

6

7 The most direct effect of load testing on structural reliability is to reduce the uncertainty of  
 8 structural capacity. Passing a load test indicates that the structural capacity of the tested bridge is at  
 9 least equal to the load effect associated with the testing load. This information can be used to refine  
 10 the distribution of structural capacity (as illustrated in Figure 3) and ultimately update the  
 11 probability of failure of an existing bridge. The benefit of load testing to structural reliability can be  
 12 represented as follows (Frangopol et al., 2019):

$$P_{fa} = \Pr[R - S < 0 | R > s_p] = \int_{s_p}^{+\infty} (1 - F_S(r)) \frac{f_R(r)}{1 - F_R(s_p)} dr \quad (14)$$

13 where  $P_{fa}$  is the probability of failure after passing a load test;  $s_p$  is the load effect associated with  
 14 the testing vehicle.

1 ***Cost-benefit analysis of load testing***

2 Comparing Eqs. (12) and (14), it can be realized that by providing confirmative information  
3 on structural capacity, a load test can reduce the probability of failure of a bridge. This increased  
4 confidence in structural safety can be converted to an economic benefit using risk analysis. In  
5 particular, the value of passing a load test ( $V_{LT}$ ) can be quantified as:

$$V_{LT} = Ri_b - Ri_a = (P_{fb} - P_{fa})C_F \quad (15)$$

6 where  $Ri_b$  and  $Ri_a$  are the risks of structural failure before and after passing a load test;  $C_F$  is the  
7 failure cost. Other benefits of load testing may include validation and calibration of structural  
8 models and gaining public confidence in structural safety.

9 Despite the various benefits of load testing, it may bring in additional cost in the form of  
10 direct operation cost and indirect failure/damage risk. The former includes expenses associated with  
11 preparation, execution, and analysis of a load test, while the latter represents expected losses due to  
12 potential structural damage/failure during a load test. The overall cost associated with a load test can  
13 be expressed as:

$$C_{LT} = C_{op} + \sum_{i=1}^{n_d} p_{d,i}C_{d,i} + P_{fd}C_F \quad (16)$$

14 where  $C_{op}$  is the direct operation cost associated with a load test;  $n_d$  is the number of damage states  
15 that are likely to be reached after an unsuccessful load test;  $p_{d,i}$  is the probability of falling into  
16 damage state  $i$  after the load test;  $C_{d,i}$  is the remedy cost associated with damage state  $i$ ;  $P_{fd}$  is the  
17 probability of failure during a load test.

1 For a prescribed design service life, a proof load test during the service life of a bridge can  
2 be more informative than that at the beginning (Ellingwood, 1996; Faber et al., 2000; Olaszek et al.,  
3 2014). This is particularly true when a service load history is available, e.g. from weigh-in-motion  
4 (WIM) records (Fiorillo and Ghosn, 2014). Therefore, a cost-benefit analysis for planning load tests  
5 should be incorporated into the life-cycle cost analysis of a bridge. The total life-cycle cost of a  
6 bridge can be expressed as (Frangopol et al., 1997):

$$ELCC = C_T + EC_{PM} + EC_{INS} + EC_{REP} + EC_F \quad (17)$$

7 where  $ELCC$  is the expected life-cycle cost;  $C_T$  is the initial cost;  $EC_{PM}$  is the expected cost of  
8 routine maintenance;  $EC_{INS}$  is the expected cost of inspections;  $EC_{REP}$  is the expected cost of repair;  
9  $EC_F$  is the expected failure cost (i.e. failure risk). Decisions on maintenance activities in the  
10 structural service life should minimize the expected life-cycle cost while keeping or maximizing the  
11 safety margin of a structure. This optimization problem is usually analysed using an event-tree  
12 model and solved with multi-objective evolution algorithms (Yang et al., 2019). Load testing costs  
13 can be assimilated into inspection costs since both can provide information related to structural  
14 capacity. Nonetheless, the difference between a load test and an inspection action is that the former  
15 may induce structural damage or even failure. This possibility should be included in the event-tree  
16 model of life-cycle analysis.

17 In recent years, cost-benefit analysis of infrastructure projects has been moving towards a  
18 sustainability-informed approach in which social and environmental costs are also taken into  
19 account in addition to the traditional economic cost (Frangopol and Soliman, 2016; Frangopol et al.,  
20 2017). The social cost includes the delay and detour costs for traffic users as well as the derivative  
21 costs from the reduction in accessibility (e.g. loss of business). Estimation of social cost usually

1 requires analyses of road networks and the surrounding communities (Yang and Frangopol, 2018).  
2 The environmental cost usually includes evaluation of climate change potential in terms of  
3 greenhouse gas emissions (García-Segura et al., 2017), energy consumption (Sabatino et al., 2015),  
4 as well as project-related pollution to soil, water, and air (Wang et al., 2019). Although there is a  
5 lack of consensus on how to conduct sustainability-informed asset management, multi-attribute  
6 utility theory has proven to be an effective tool to combine all three aspects of sustainability based  
7 on the risk perception and risk attitude of decision-makers (Liu et al., 2018; Sabatino et al., 2015;  
8 2016).

### 9 *Advances in measurement techniques*

10 Recently, significant advances have occurred in the areas of data measurement, collection,  
11 storage, and visualization. Many of these advances improve the process of performing a specific  
12 bridge test, and others help to minimize errors and general difficulties of field testing.

13 For example, self-identifying transducers and wireless transducers can aid in speed of setup  
14 for any test. Data acquisition systems have improved in both precision and speed of measurement.  
15 Perhaps of greatest aid to the field-testing engineer are improvements in analysis software and real-  
16 time visualization. On-the-fly data processing and analysis supported by these tools help to reduce,  
17 or even eliminate, common data collection or post-processing problems that may be otherwise  
18 revealed after demobilization from field testing.

19 It is useful to examine instrumentation, data acquisition, and data aggregation developments  
20 from related fields such as long-term structural health monitoring (SHM), geotechnical  
21 instrumentation, surveying/geodesy, geographic information systems (GIS) and so on for synergies  
22 with bridge load testing. Types of measurements required, and, accordingly, appropriate data

1 acquisition rates and intervals, may vary considerably between bridge load testing and these and  
2 other related fields, but many underlying principles are relevant. For example:

- 3 • **Consideration of long-term stability of sensors.** Typically, bridge load tests are  
4 conducted over relatively short time spans (hours) compared to long-term structural or  
5 geotechnical monitoring projects. Such long-term exposure to the elements and service  
6 loads may serve as a kind of overall durability test for sensors and sensing technologies  
7 employed in bridge load tests – with the caveat that long-term SHM deployments do not  
8 entail repeated application and removal of sensors as is likely to occur over years of  
9 periodic short-term bridge load tests. Statistical methods (e.g. (Chen et al., 2014) have  
10 been proposed to monitor performance of sensors themselves within the context of  
11 structural monitoring.
- 12 • **Development of robust data aggregation strategies.** Long-term structural/geotechnical  
13 monitoring systems for complex projects may include tens or hundreds of individual  
14 measurement devices based upon varied sensing technologies and data acquisition  
15 schemes. For example, an SHM system might include different sensors – or readings  
16 from the same sensors at different sample rates – to capture different kinds of structural  
17 outputs (e.g. strain, rotation, displacement), or quasi-static versus dynamic structural  
18 response (e.g. (Kosnik, 2012; Kosnik and Dowding, 2015)). Similarly, a load test on a  
19 complex structure, or with complex stop conditions, requires careful consideration of  
20 multiple signal types: for example, a test based mostly on strain, but with a deflection-  
21 based stop criterion, would require both strain and displacement measurements.  
22 Integration of these measurements into a synoptic view of structural response is not

1 particularly difficult if designed into the load test a priori. However, waiting until the  
2 data are taken and the field team is de-mobilized before considering a data aggregation  
3 plan may make data interpretation unnecessarily complicated, and could even make  
4 trends less visible to analysts.

- 5 • **Novel, or at least new-to-load-testing measurements.** Non-contact measurement  
6 devices from surveying and geodesy, such as total stations, differential GPS, and laser  
7 rangefinders, may facilitate acquisition of deflection data on bridges over deep gorges or  
8 other situations where there is not a convenient, stable reference for deflection  
9 measurement
- 10 • **Full-field measurement techniques.** As the resolution and performance of field-ready  
11 cameras and image processing equipment improves, it may be practical for full-field  
12 measurement techniques such as structured light imaging or digital image correlation to  
13 be widely adopted. These methods can provide two- or three-dimensional analyses of  
14 strains or displacements, as well as characterize cracking or spalling – a useful  
15 complement to the point measurements provided by strain gauges or displacement  
16 sensors. Full-field techniques may be particularly useful on concrete and masonry, where  
17 material heterogeneity makes it necessary to employ long gauge lengths to obtain  
18 reasonable measurements of average strain.
- 19 • **Visualizing results in space and time.** On large bridges, or on networks of bridges  
20 serving a given transportation corridor, it may be useful to visualize the load test data  
21 using GIS tools or other spatially-aware database systems. In the GIS scheme, sensors (or  
22 their corresponding measurements) are associated with a particular physical location,

1 with measurements varying over time and displayed accordingly. This approach may  
2 promote faster identification of areas of note and may also promote interoperability with  
3 bridge owners' existing asset management software. Examples of highly scalable GIS-  
4 aware infrastructure and environmental monitoring include the US Army Corps of  
5 Engineers National Levee Database (US Army Corps of Engineers, 2019) and the US  
6 Geological Survey National Streamflow Information Program (Eberts et al., 2019),  
7 respectively.

- 8 • **Archival data and data interoperability.** Particularly with publicly-owned  
9 infrastructure such as highway bridges, test data should be reported and stored in well-  
10 documented open format that will be readily digestible by future users, as opposed to (for  
11 example) data formats unique to a particular proprietary software suite for which support  
12 might end before the data are used again. A variety of schemes based on XML, e.g.  
13 SensorML, promulgated by the Open Geospatial Consortium (Open Geospatial  
14 Consortium, 2014), or relational databases (e.g. (Kosnik and Henschen, 2013)) have been  
15 proposed, each with particular advantages and disadvantages. Whatever scheme is  
16 adopted for data archival, care should be taken to ensure that the next team to conduct a  
17 test on a particular bridge will have practical access to past instrumentation data.

## 18 **Introducing the *Primer on Bridge Load Testing***

### 19 ***Proposed approach for diagnostic load testing***

20 The diagnostic load testing approach presented in the *Primer on Bridge Load Testing* differs  
21 significantly from the current AASHTO MBE – Chapter 8 (AASHTO 2016) guidelines. The MBE

1 Chapter 8 approach is based upon calculation of an adjustment factor  $K$  from load test results.  $K$   
2 represents the ratio between the estimated analytical strain versus the measured strain, as was shown  
3 in Eq. (6). This “K-factor” approach was derived from an NCHRP study (Lichtenstein, 1993) that  
4 produced the MBRLT. The K-factor approach is relatively simple as it was based on a limited  
5 number of tests and a limited number of measurements per test. At the time most bridge analyses  
6 consisted of a beamline and distribution factor, digital data acquisition had more limited capabilities,  
7 and sensors were expensive. Load ratings obtained through load tests were therefore based on a few  
8 strain and deflection measurements. The “K-Factor” approach was not widely adopted within the  
9 industry as it was overly subjective. As discussed by (Commander, 2019), the load rating adjustment  
10 factor ( $K$ ) relies heavily on the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of the analytical approach with no generally  
11 accepted guidelines for identifying and verifying the discrepancies between the measured responses  
12 versus the analytically derived responses.

13 Now, with the abundance of advanced modeling programs, load ratings are often performed  
14 using planar and 3-D finite element models. Advances in field-ready instrumentation and data  
15 acquisition allow for load tests to produce higher quality and much higher quantity of response  
16 measurements. Processing and comparing the massive amount of data that can now be generated  
17 was unthinkable twenty years ago but can now be used to validate models using high powered  
18 computers and machine learning algorithms. The diagnostic load testing approach, outlined in the  
19 *Primer on Load Testing*, takes advantage of the technology available today.



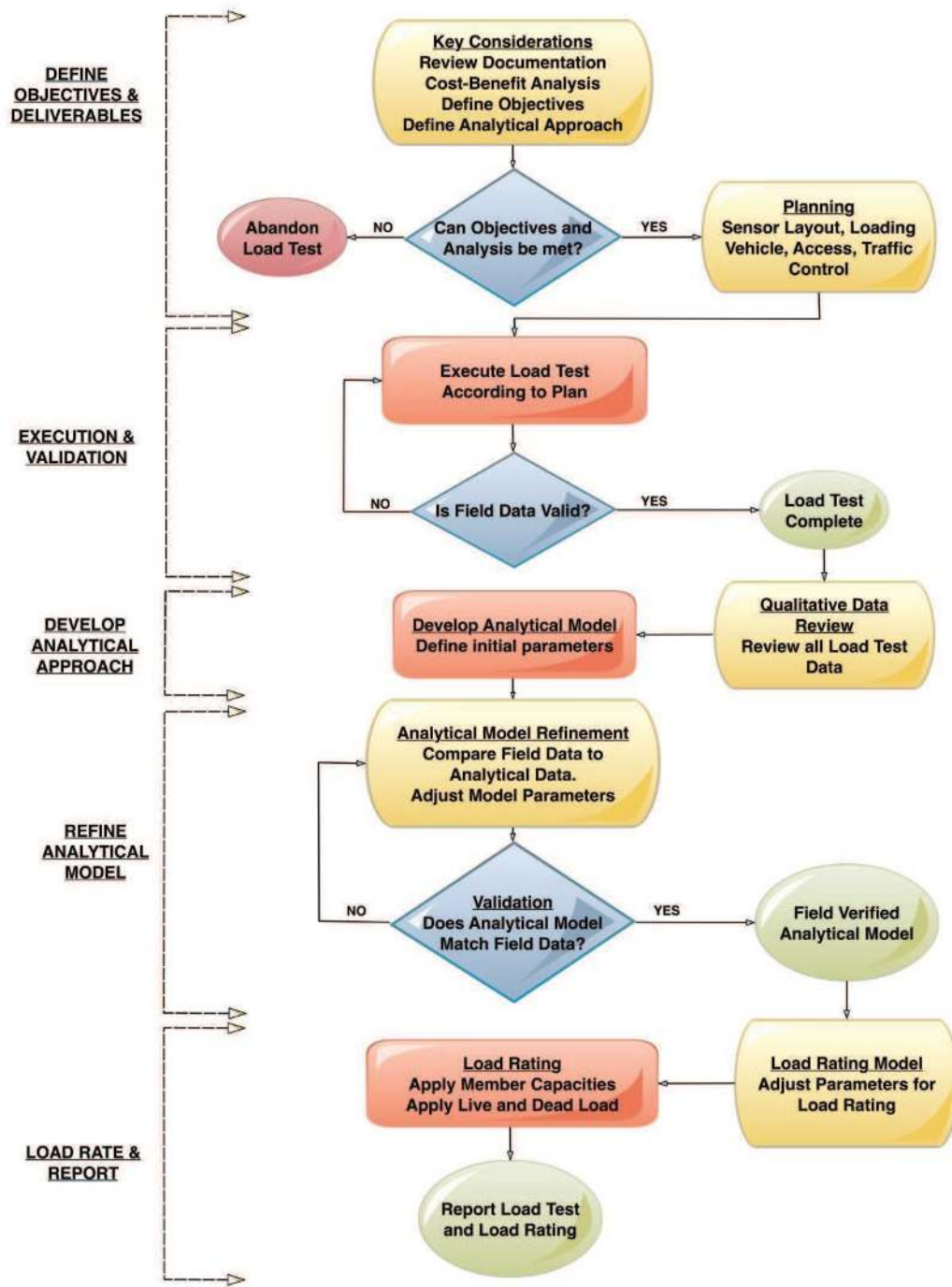


Figure 4: Diagnostic Load Testing Process

1           The diagnostic load testing approach is a more thorough integrated approach (Halfawy et al.,  
2 2002; Wipf et al., 2003) than the K-factor approach. The proposed approach compares measured  
3 structural responses (strain, deflection, rotation, etc.) to calculated or predicted responses with the  
4 expressed purpose of refining and validating the analytical approach. This is the core of the  
5 diagnostic load testing approach; however, there are several steps that need to be considered prior to  
6 undertaking a diagnostic load test. The entire diagnostic load testing process outlined in **Figure 4**,  
7 and described in more detail in the steps below is the current state of the practice.

8 *Step 1: Define Load Testing Objectives, Deliverables, and Planning*

9           While the most typical reason for conducting a diagnostic load test is to develop a more  
10 accurate load rating using structural response data, there are several other reasons for undertaking a  
11 diagnostic load test. They range from a full FEM based analysis resulting in an accurate load rating  
12 as well as better understanding of structural behavior to simply evaluating specific structural  
13 element responses to determining performance characteristics based on secondary element  
14 contributions such as parapet walls, sidewalks, guardrails, etc. Among these varied scenarios, the  
15 common element is to measure the structure's ability to carry and distribute load.

16           Whether undertaking a load test using in-house staff or hiring a consultant, the objectives  
17 and deliverables should be well defined upfront so that all stakeholders understand the purpose of  
18 the test. Once the objectives and deliverables are defined, a cost associated with the diagnostic load  
19 test can be established; this cost should be compared against all reasonable alternative solutions so  
20 that a cost-benefit analysis can be conducted before proceeding with the load test.

21           Assuming there is a net financial benefit to conducting the diagnostic load test, the next step  
22 is to develop a load testing plan. Planning a diagnostic load test involves a few items, the first of

1 which is the instrumentation plan. The instrumentation plan should be designed around the  
2 objectives of the test, so for example, if the objective is to use the load test results to refine and  
3 validate a FEM for the purpose of load rating, then the focus of the instrumentation should be in  
4 load response and distribution behavior. Alternatively, if the load test is intended to identify stress  
5 levels of a particular member, then instrumentation should be focused on that member (and possibly  
6 connected members as well) to help identify the in-service load paths.

7         The second step is to define the loads/loading-vehicle(s) and their positions. Since diagnostic  
8 load tests are generally employed to validating an analytical model, a vehicle near the legal weight  
9 limit is typically sufficient and is commonly used. The vehicle dimensions, along with the individual  
10 axle weights, should be recorded.

11         The third item, site-specific planning, is easily overlooked but quite important. Specific  
12 aspects of site planning include access to the structural elements of interest and maintenance and  
13 protection of traffic; the latter must follow local regulations or requirements. With instrumentation,  
14 load testing, site access, and safety plans developed, all stakeholders in the project should approve  
15 the plan before proceeding with executing the diagnostic load test.

16 *Step 2: Execute Load Test and Validate Results*

17         With proper planning in-place, executing the load test should be reasonably quick depending  
18 on the size of the load test (both bridge size and instrumentation quantity) and access/traffic  
19 constraints. Experience has shown that for most short to medium-span bridges, a diagnostic load test  
20 can be carried out in a single day. Instrumentation installation is typically 60% of the work, while  
21 conducting the load test and removing the instrumentation is the remaining 40% of the field work.

1           When conducting the load tests, traffic will need to be temporarily shut down, so no other  
2 loads are on the bridge at the time of load testing. Diagnostic load tests are typically conducted with  
3 the loading vehicle traveling at crawl speed ( $< 5 \text{ mph} = 8 \text{ km/h}$ ), to mimic a static test, so as to not  
4 induce any dynamic effects. The load tests are also conducted with the test vehicle starting position  
5 being completely off the bridge and end again with the vehicle completely off the bridge (or far  
6 enough down so there is no loading influence on the spans that are being tested) at the other end of  
7 the bridge. The vehicle position should be recorded so that data can be presented in terms of loading  
8 vehicle position (i.e., as influence lines) rather than exclusively in terms of elapsed time.

9           This loading process is important for several reasons: 1) it allows for a quality check on the  
10 data being collected with respect to values starting at zero and ending again at zero, and 2) the data  
11 is a complete response history that will indicate how the structure is responding to the loading  
12 vehicle at all longitudinal positions. If there is some sort of non-linear response (e.g., non-composite  
13 behavior when directly loaded), that behavior might be missed if the data isn't collected  
14 continuously. Since each test itself is generally of short duration, traffic can be cleared between test  
15 runs, reducing the overall impact to the traveling public. Data must be collected at a frequency not to  
16 miss the peak values of parameters being measured.

17           If dynamic (high speed) live-load tests are desired for the purpose of measuring the dynamic  
18 impact on the structure, careful consideration is required to ensure that the load test results in a  
19 reasonable estimate of the dynamic allowance. The impact generated for a higher speed test is  
20 typically more related to the road roughness and bridge approach than to the geometry of the bridge.  
21 This type of test does not account for the possibility of a live-load impact due to sudden braking or

1 some other action on the structure. Once again, sound engineering judgment must be employed  
2 when assessing dynamic allowance.

3 It is valuable for the test engineer to be able to validate the data in real-time. The data  
4 acquisition system and software should be configured to present sensor data in an useful manner,  
5 i.e., in terms of engineering units rather than the raw reading of the sensor. Rapid visualization  
6 enables the test engineer to evaluate incoming data not only in terms of the data quality but also in  
7 terms of structural response, such that the engineer can recognize unusual responses or possibly non-  
8 linear behaviors that would warrant changes to the load testing process or even halting the load test.

9 *Step 3: Develop the Analytical Approach*

10 The analytical approach itself was identified in Step 1; this step refers to initial revisions of  
11 the analytical model based on the qualitative assessment of the load test data. Typically, the load test  
12 data is reviewed by the person conducting the analysis for the purpose of identifying the data files  
13 that will be used to refine the analytical model and validate the quality of the data. This may include  
14 some post-processing of the data to eliminate noise or temperature effects identified during  
15 execution phase of the project. During this qualitative review, the engineer should be evaluating the  
16 structural responses which might affect the analytical modeling parameters so that reasonable initial  
17 parameters can be established.

18 With an initial qualitative review being completed, the initial analytical model (such as  
19 FEM) can be developed and initial modeling parameters entered. The main goal in this analytical  
20 approach is to recreate the diagnostic test within the analytical approach so that a direct comparison  
21 can be made between the load test data and the analytical model data. If a FEM is the chosen route  
22 for the analytical approach, the model geometry is developed based on field-verified as-built plans.

1 The loading plan should be recreated to mimic the continuous loading vehicle positions. Data should  
2 be extracted from the model at the same locations where sensors were installed in the field so that a  
3 visual and analytical comparison can be made.

#### 4 *Step 4: Refining Analytical Model*

5 Refining of the analytical approach is often the more difficult process in a diagnostic load  
6 test and takes an experienced engineer to not only understand the differences between an initial  
7 model prediction and the measured responses but to also understand what parameters should and can  
8 be adjusted to yield a truly accurate field-verified model. Since the development of the analytical  
9 approach includes setting up the model to output data (such as strain, deflection, and rotation), at the  
10 same location and orientation as where the sensors were installed on the bridge during the load test,  
11 the data generated by the model can be plotted with the data that was collected during the load test.  
12 Additionally, the data can be analytically compared in terms of errors between the data sets and  
13 correlation coefficient between the data sets. It is very common that the initial model predictions do  
14 not agree closely with the load test measurements in magnitude; however, if there are significant  
15 differences in the data alignment, there may be issues with the model geometry or load application  
16 that need to be addressed prior to beginning the parameter adjustments.

17 With the initial model geometry and loading validated, it is then down to adjusting  
18 parameters within the model so that the model predictions match the load test data. This is generally  
19 accomplished through an iterative process based on engineering judgement. Modeling parameters  
20 identified in the *Primer* as being commonly adjusted are listed in **Table 1**; this list is by no means  
21 exhaustive, but provides a reasonable starting point for refining a model.

1 **Table 1: Common Adjustment Parameters for Refining an Analytical Model (Alampalli et al., 2019)**

<b>Adjustment Parameters</b>	<b>Refinement of Analytical Model for Improved Agreement with Load Test Results</b>
Element Type and Mesh Size	Strain or stress output, depending on the element type and mesh size at sensor locations, must be comparable to the gage length and orientation of strain sensors used in load test.
Secondary Members	Secondary members such as barriers, sidewalks, diaphragms, etc., need to be properly included for their geometrical, material, and stiffness properties.
Bearing Support Conditions	Typical bridge bearings, of fixed or expansion, provide a rectangular patch support to the superstructure. Expansion bearings usually have frictional resistance. Use of idealized fixed or roller point or line supports in the analytical model may cause discrepancies with load test measurements due to simplifications.
Elastic Modulus of Concrete ( $E_c$ )	$E_c$ is usually estimated from concrete compressive strength ( $f_c'$ ) using an empirical formula. In reality, most concrete mixes are placed at a higher strength than design requirements; and concrete continues to gain strength over time. When modelling the sectional stiffness, both the effect of the concrete strength and the provided reinforcement are considered. If test data is available, using the actual material properties instead of nominal values will improve the fidelity of results from the model.
Link Members for Eccentricities	Use of line or planar elements in a FEM requires the use of link members to address the eccentricities between intersecting or connecting bridge members. Proper definitions of the stiffness properties of the link members are important to properly simulate the overall behavior of the structural system, including intended or unintended composite actions between adjacent members.

2

3 While several methods exist for refining a model, it is critically important to use engineering

4 judgment throughout this process so that when a final field-verified model is achieved, all final

5 parameters are realistic values and the method for arriving at those values is backed up by sound

6 engineering principles and can be repeated. It must be noted that depending on the structure and the

7 mechanism that is being verified through diagnostic load testing, development of an analytical

8 model may also be completely unnecessary. Type of analytical model, effort required for developing

9 and refining the model, and its value should be carefully evaluated during the test planning as it can

10 add to the project cost considerably. Several transportation agencies have structural analysis models

1 developed using software such as AASHTOWare Bridge Rating (BrR), and these can be used  
2 instead of analytical models, where appropriate, instead of developing detailed finite element type of  
3 models.

4

5 *Step 5: Load Rating and Reporting Results*

6 A field-verified analytical/structural model is a powerful tool that can be used for many  
7 purposes such as determining in-service load paths, forces in all elements, bending moments, shear  
8 stresses, and ultimately evaluate how the structure will respond when other loads are applied to the  
9 model. When using the model for load rating, it is important to determine the reliability of the  
10 refined parameters in terms of whether the final parameter values should be used in the load rating  
11 process or if they should be adjusted to reflect a potential future condition of the bridge. For  
12 example, if a partially-fixed support is lowering the mid-span moment of a girder significantly,  
13 should that support fixity be counted on in the load rating process if there is a chance this situation  
14 might change at higher loading events or due to possible maintenance/rehabilitation in the future. It  
15 would seem imprudent to rely on fixity in this example; the final parameters should be revisited and  
16 adjusted based on the engineer's judgment.

17 One of the differences between a proof load test and a diagnostic load tests with regard to  
18 calculating the load rating is that the capacity of all elements to be load rated must still be calculated  
19 based on the applicable code and current condition of the bridge element. If as-built plans are not  
20 available, nondestructive testing techniques can help identify material properties and a variety of  
21 field techniques are available to measure the bridge geometry.



1 Another consideration is application of live load versus dead load when load rating the  
2 bridge using an analytical model. Depending on how the bridge was constructed, certain dead loads  
3 may need to be applied to an adjusted model (e.g., dead load of a concrete deck should be applied to  
4 a non-composite model while dead load of an asphalt overlay should be applied to a composite  
5 section). When applying the live load to the model, the live load paths, multiple-lane paths along  
6 with all load factors are all applied according to the applicable code (e.g., AASHTO MBE). The  
7 output from the analytical model should be load ratings along with factored responses for each  
8 element that a capacity was assigned. This provides a great deal of resolution into the critical  
9 locations of the bridge.

10 The report following a diagnostic load test should include a summary of the results of the  
11 analytical approach, which typically takes the form of an updated load rating identifying the  
12 controlling elements within the structure. Additionally, all pertinent information regarding the load  
13 testing procedure, analytical approach, model refinement methodology, and final model results  
14 should be included. The report should allow other engineers to follow through the process and  
15 understand the decision making and judgments along the way. There should be clear and concise  
16 justifications for all the modeling parameters that were developed and used in the analytical  
17 approach.

18 It is again important to note that a diagnostic test is not intended to replace standard NBIS  
19 type inspections or traditional load rating; it is a tool that can be implemented in cases where  
20 inspections and/or traditional load ratings result in load posting the structure. Hundreds of diagnostic  
21 load tests have been conducted over the last 20+ years and it is a proven method for developing a

1 more accurate load rating for a bridge. **Table 2** outlines the estimated improvement in load carrying  
 2 capacity of common bridge types.

3 **Table 2: Estimated percent improvement in Load Rating based on bridge type<sup>11</sup>**

<b>Bridge Type</b>	<b>Influencing Factors</b>	<b>Estimated Percent Improvement</b>
Reinforced Concrete Slab	Greatest benefit, end conditions, edge stiffening, no longitudinal joints	30 to 60%
Beam/Slab	Ratings controlled by moment, Beam lines > wheel lines, End conditions and edge stiffening	20 to 40%
Beam/Slab	Ratings controlled by shear, No. of beam lines, edge stiffening.	0 to 15%
Culverts & Arches	Function of fill depth, end-conditions, span length	20 to 30%
Truss	Members in line with floor system	0 to 30%
Two Girder	No improvement in distribution. End conditions may influence ratings.	0 to 15%

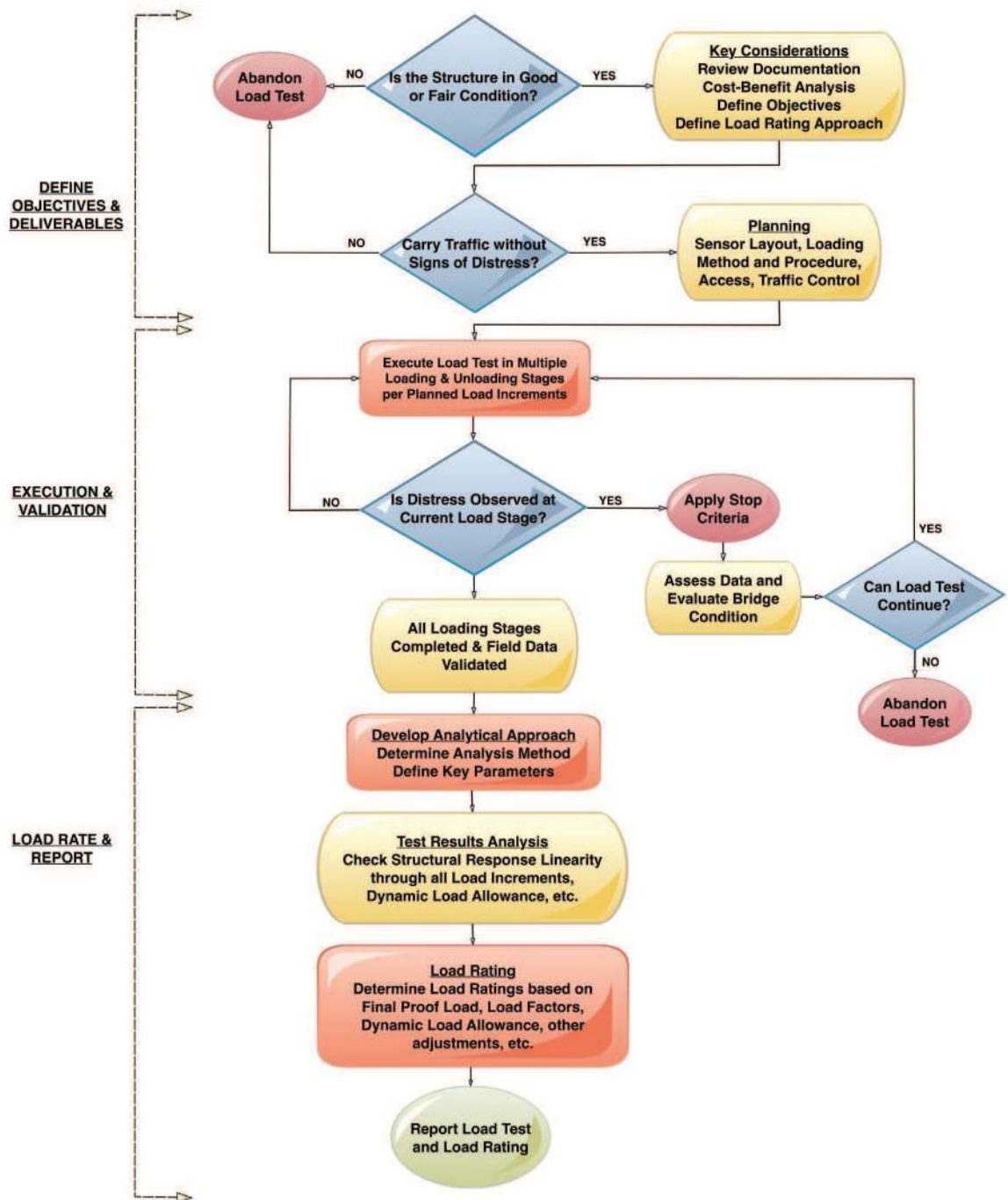
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5 ***Proposed approach for proof load testing***

6 The following steps describe the proposed approach for bridge proof load testing in test  
 7 implementation and results interpretation for load rating in accordance with the concepts and  
 8 principles prescribed in the AASHTO MBE. The proof load process is summarized in the flowchart  
 9 in **Figure 5**; a detailed description of each step follows.

---

<sup>11</sup> Estimated presented in this table are based on the experience of BDI.



1

2

Figure 5: Proof load test procedure

1 *Step 1: Test Planning and Preparation*

2 Test planning, preparation, and assessing whether the subject bridge is suitable for proof load  
3 testing are very important. Preparation will require multiple considerations including: reviewing  
4 bridge structural information and performance history; understanding the primary and secondary  
5 load carrying mechanisms; developing an instrumentation plan for sensor layout, data collection and  
6 review including the timely capture of signs of distress; determining loading and unloading of  
7 equipment and logistics; establishing a traffic control plan at the bridge site; and last but not least,  
8 identifying potential risks and developing test stop criteria and an action plan.

9 *Step 2: Establishing a Target Proof Load.*

10 The target proof load is established in accordance with the procedures provided in the  
11 AASHTO MBE. The resulting target proof load  $L_T$  determined by Eq. (10) and Eq. (11) is for the  
12 governing load effect in bridge load rating, e.g., maximum bending moment at mid-span, maximum  
13 shear force at a support, etc. Before the execution of a proof load test using test vehicles, the target  
14 test vehicle weight,  $W_T$ , corresponding to the target proof load,  $L_T$ , must be determined in order to  
15 accomplish the proof test goals.

16 If the test vehicle has identical axle configuration (spacing and weight distribution) as the  
17 rating vehicle, the target test vehicle weight,  $W_T$ , is simply:

18 
$$W_T = X_{pA} W_R (1 + I) \quad (18)$$

19 where  $W_R$  is the gross weight of rating vehicle,  $X_{pA}$  the factor explained with Eq. (11), and  $I$  the  
20 dynamic load allowance.

21 However, this is usually not the case in reality; there is often the need for assessing load  
22 ratings for multiple rating vehicles. As a result, it is necessary to determine a vehicle adjustment

1 factor,  $f_V$ , for each rating vehicle to account for the axle configuration difference between the rating  
2 vehicle and the test vehicle. Thus, the target test vehicle weight should be determined as:

$$3 \quad W_T = X_{pA} f_V W_R (1 + IM) \quad (19)$$

4 A structural analysis using a line model is generally sufficient to determine  $f_V$  for the test  
5 vehicle for equivalent governing live load effect  $L_R$  in load rating to each rating vehicle. The factor  
6  $f_V$  is equal to 1.0 if the test vehicle is identical to the rating vehicle in axle configuration (spacing  
7 and weight distribution).

### 8 *Step 3: Verifying Bridge Capacity*

9 Verifying physical capacities of the subject bridge and developing test stop criteria are  
10 needed. As high loads are applied during proof load tests, an analysis should be performed to  
11 correlate the test load with the critical force effect for the predicted governing failure mode. The  
12 extent of this analysis should depend on the goals of the load test, the expected behavior of the  
13 bridge, and the level of maximum proof load relative to service load. For example, a more thorough  
14 analysis may be required for a shear-critical concrete girder bridge than a flexure-critical reinforced  
15 concrete slab bridge for assessing the maximum critical force due to test load with respect to  
16 estimated capacity.

17 The estimated critical forces due to test loads need to be compared with estimated  
18 corresponding physical capacities of the bridge based on known or assumed material properties.  
19 This assessment serves as a check against possible failures of load carrying members, or possible  
20 collapse of the structure under the target proof load. If the difference between the calculated capacity  
21 and the target test load is small, real-time measurements and data interpretations during the test must  
22 closely monitor the bridge response and condition change, and have a detailed plan for stopping the

1 test if necessary. Stop criteria, in terms of limit values of measured strains, displacements, or other  
2 physical parameters should be established before the start of a proof load test. For in-service bridges,  
3 an examination of the weights and types of vehicles that cross the bridge provides reference  
4 information on the actual loading condition experienced by the structure. Such information can also  
5 serve as a reality check to the calculated physical capacities.

6 *Step 4: Execution of the Proof Load Test*

7 Execution of a proof load test involves applying the test load through a multiple-step loading  
8 and unloading process. Load levels are increased until the target proof load is reached while  
9 structural responses are closely monitored using sensors. Key considerations for executing proof  
10 load tests include: method of applying test load (test vehicles or a fixed loading system with  
11 hydraulic jacks); beginning level of test load based on actual traffic condition or analytical supports;  
12 load increments for all loading steps before reaching the target proof load; key response parameters  
13 of the governing failure mode(s) identified by analysis; instrumentation plan (sensor layout, data  
14 collection/processing/display methods, etc.); measurements evaluation criteria for proceeding to the  
15 next loading level (zero-return of individual sensor responses, linearity of response-test load  
16 correlations, etc.); and stop criteria for aborting the load test before reaching the target proof load.

17 For bridge proof load testing, the application of the loading protocol with loading and  
18 unloading steps can be carried out typically by repeating test truck positions, or by using a loading  
19 system with hydraulic jacks. Multiple loading and unloading steps of increasing load levels allow  
20 the engineer to check the linearity of the structural response to increasing load. A larger response to  
21 the same load increase on subsequent applications indicates that nonlinear behavior is occurring in  
22 the structure, or that the applied sensors are not properly functioning. In either case, the test should

1 be stopped to investigate the cause of the observations. Small fluctuations in the response as the  
2 result of the influence of temperature and humidity can take place during the test. Engineering  
3 judgment is required to evaluate what constitutes a true nonlinear structural response versus  
4 response due to environmental changes.

5 For multiple-lane bridges, including those carrying one lane in each direction, a minimum of  
6 two loading vehicles should be used. The following loading protocol is recommended:

- 7 • Obtain two vehicles of the same axle configuration that are as close as possible to the rating  
8 vehicle of interest.
- 9 • Mark the bridge deck surface with lateral vehicle positions to properly check all loading  
10 position components.
- 11 • Determine a realistic weight for the loading vehicle ( $W_{Real}$ ) that the bridge experiences on a  
12 regular basis based on a traffic survey, legal weights, any postings, or site observations.
- 13 • Establish a maximum vehicle weight increment to be one third of the difference between the  
14 target proof load and the realistic load, or  $\Delta W = 0.33(W_T - W_{Real})$
- 15 • Repeat the following steps at each increasing vehicle weight ( $W_{Real}$ ,  $W_{Real} + \Delta W$ ,  $W_{Real} + 2\Delta W$ ,  
16  $W_{Real} + 3\Delta W$ , etc.):
  - 17 ○ Use one truck to cross the bridge at a crawl speed, or position it at a stationary  
18 location at all pre-marked lateral positions.
  - 19 ○ Review sensor measurements and visually inspect the structure for any signs of  
20 distress.

- 1           ○ Use two trucks side-by-side to cross the bridge at a crawl speed, or position them at  
2           stationary locations at different combinations of lateral positions as allowed by deck  
3           geometry.
- 4           ○ Review sensor measurements and visually inspect the structure for any signs of  
5           distress.
- 6       • If allowed by site condition and agreed by the vehicle owner and driver, repeat select single  
7       truck crossings by running the same truck at the speed limit, at the same lateral position, for  
8       assessing dynamic load allowance. This is usually practical and safe only at the lowest load  
9       level.

10 *Step 5: Monitoring of Bridge Behavior During the Test*

11           It is essential to monitor bridge behavior and be safety conscious during proof load testing.  
12       Since proof load tests need to apply test loads higher than the service load, the loading protocol and  
13       the limiting values for the stop criteria have to be determined prior to the beginning of the load test  
14       and communicated with all parties involved. Real-time monitoring of test measurement for timely  
15       discovery of non-linear structural behavior due to cracking, buckling or other physical damage is  
16       essential. The following quantities can be monitored: load vs. displacement diagrams to identify if  
17       non-linear behavior is occurring; strain responses in instrumented members to assess if elastic limits  
18       may be exceeded; width of existing cracks to see if cracks are activated in concrete bridges; and  
19       comparisons of test measurements with analytical predictions.

20           If non-linear behavior is observed, the test should be paused for additional checks. In  
21       particular, the instrumentation engineer should check for any indications of sensor malfunction. In  
22       the absence of indications of sensor malfunction, non-linear behavior may have taken place



1 suggesting onset of irreversible damage to the structure and may warrant immediate termination of  
 2 the load test. Quantitative stop criteria based on measurements should be determined prior to the  
 3 test. Since loading beyond such stop criteria may result in irreversible damage, it is important that  
 4 the load test be terminated immediately upon reaching any stop criterion, even if the target proof  
 5 load has not been achieved. In exceptional cases, and only with the consent of the bridge owner and  
 6 an analysis of the possible risks involved, further loading can be permitted.

7 *Step 6: Interpretation of Results*

8 The results of a proof test are used to determine the bridge load rating in accordance with the  
 9 AASHTO MBE. A lower-bound bridge load rating for a rating vehicle based on the results of a  
 10 proof load test can be determined using the following equation:

$$11 \quad RFP = (kO)(WP/WR)(fV)/[(\gamma_{LL})(1+IM)] \quad (20)$$

12 Where  $RFP$  is a lower-bound rating factor derived from a proof load test,  $WR$  is the gross vehicle  
 13 weight (GVW) of rating vehicle,  $WP$  is the final GVW of test vehicle upon completion of proof load  
 14 test,  $\gamma_{LL}$  is the live load factor that varies with the load rating method and determines the load rating  
 15 level of  $RFP$ , as shown in Table 3.

16 **Table 3. Live Load Factor ( $\gamma_{LL}$ ) of AASHTO LRFR and LFR Methods**

Load Rating Method	Load Rating Level	Live Load Factor $\gamma_{LL}$	AASHTO MBE
Load and Resistance Factor Rating (LRFR)	Design Inventory	1.75	Table 6A.4.3.2.2-1
	Design Operating	1.35	
	Legal	1.45 (ADTT $\geq$ 5,000)	Table 6A.4.4.2.3a-1 (linear interpolation)
		1.30 (ADTT $\leq$ 1,000)	
Permit	1.10 to 1.40	Table 6A.4.5.4.2a-1	
Load Factor Rating (LFR)	Inventory	2.17	Article 6B.4.3
	Operating	1.3	

17

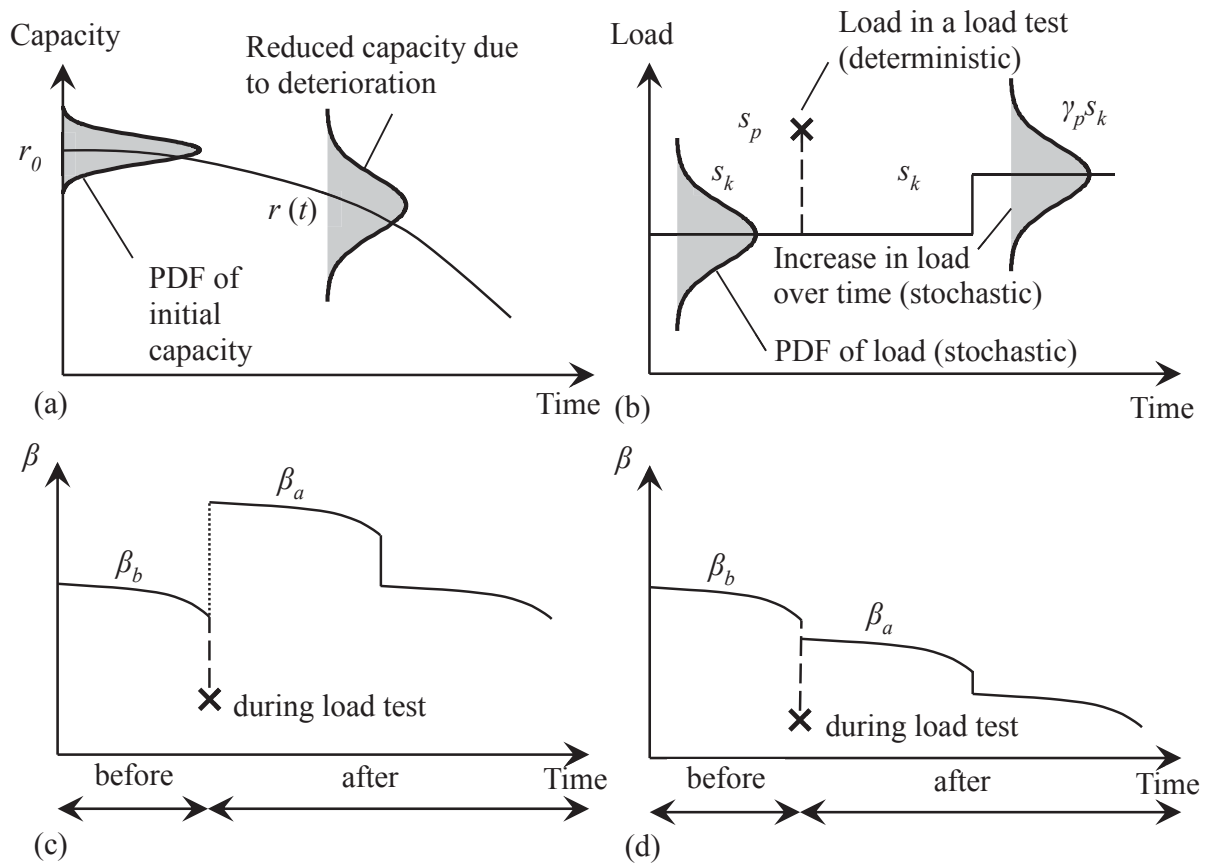
1           The rating factor for a specific rating level for any rating vehicle based on equivalent  
2   maximum load effect to the final proof load in moment or shear is given by Equation (20). It should  
3   be noted that the current AASHTO MBE intends to use proof load testing to determine bridge load  
4   ratings at the LRFR Design Operating, LRFR Legal, or LFR Operating level, of a 2.5 reliability  
5   index, but not at the LRFR Design Inventory or LFR Inventory level, of a 3.5 reliability index.

### 7   ***Introduction of structural reliability concepts in the Primer on Bridge Load Testing***

8           The *Primer* considers three reliability indices related to a load test (i.e. the reliability indices  
9   before, during, and after the test) in order to plan the load testing to minimize the expected life-cycle  
10   cost and to conduct cost-benefit analysis of a planned load test. In addition, the effects of structural  
11   deterioration (e.g. due to corrosion and fatigue) and increasing load effects can also be considered in  
12   the reliability analysis.

13           It should be noted that the increase of load effects can be gradual (e.g. due to increasing  
14   average daily traffic) or sudden (e.g. due to repurposing or posting of nearby bridges). To  
15   differentiate structural deterioration and increasing load effects, the latter is represented herein as a  
16   sudden increase at a future point-in-time, e.g. due to a repurposing of the roadway where the tested  
17   bridge is located.

18           Based on this simplification, Figure 6(a) and (b) illustrate the deteriorating structural  
19   capacity and a typical load history with one load test. The associated reliability index profiles are  
20   also shown in Figure 6 considering the effect of structural deterioration. Figure 6(c) represents the  
21   case where the bridge passes the load test without any signs of distress, while Figure 6(d) illustrates  
22   the opposite case where the load test causes structural damage.



1  
2 **Figure 6. Change in reliability index before, during, and after load test: (a) reduced capacity due to**  
3 **structural deterioration; (b) load before, during, and after a load test; (c) reliability index profile if the**  
4 **bridges passes a load test; (d) reliability index profile if the load test causes damage**

5  
6 Based on the reliability index profiles, the remaining service life of the tested bridge up to a  
7 major corrective intervention or rebuilding can be estimated based on the target reliability index.  
8 The target reliability index in a reference period (e.g. five years in load rating at operating level) is  
9 related to consequences of failure and relative cost of safety improvement (Fischer et al., 2019). For  
10 existing structures, the target reliability index is lower than that used in the design specification

1 since the relative cost of safety improvement is much higher than that in the design stage. Ideally, a  
2 cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to decide the optimal target reliability index. The *Primer*  
3 referenced the Dutch code (Rijkswaterstaat, 2013) and the Eurocode (Koteš and Vican, 2013) for the  
4 target reliability index used in load testing and load rating. Specifically, rating at the operating level  
5 may use a target reliability index of 2.3 (5-year reference period), while rating at the inventory level  
6 may use a target reliability index of 3.5 (75-year reference period).

7 As previously mentioned, structural reliability analysis is usually conducted for limit states at  
8 the structural component level. For a majority of bridges, the structural capacity of the entire  
9 structural system is rarely controlled by a component failure due to load redistribution among  
10 components (Hendawi and Frangopol, 1994). This form of structural redundancy can be modeled  
11 using parallel-series system models that combine limit states associated with different structural  
12 components (Estes and Frangopol, 1999). The probability of failure of a bridge can then be  
13 determined with system reliability methods. The *Primer* includes such analysis in load rating  
14 through load testing, but it also states that further development is needed to streamline this system-  
15 level approach for reliability-based load testing analysis.

16 Based on results from structural reliability analysis, load testing can be integrated into the  
17 broader realm of optimal bridge management. As an intervention action, load testing can be planned  
18 in the service life of a bridge so that the expected life-cycle cost as defined in Eq. (14) is minimized  
19 while the safety margin of the bridge is maximized, or at least kept above the target value. For  
20 instance, reliability-based load testing planning can be formulated as the following optimization  
21 problem (Frangopol et al., 2019):

22

1 **Given**

2 Structural model of a bridge, deterioration conditions, and effects of maintenance actions,

3 **Find**

4 Time and technique of loading testing in the service life of the bridge

5 **Such that**

6 The total life-cycle cost is minimized

7 **Subject to**

8 (a) the lowest annual reliability index of the bridge in its life-cycle is higher than the target annual  
9 reliability index,

10 (b) the budget for load testing, and

11 (c) the budget for maintenance actions

12

13 **Discussion**

14 This paper gives the scientific background that lies at the basis of the recommendations in the  
15 *Primer for Bridge Load Testing*, and gives a brief summary of the recommended procedures. The  
16 reader is encouraged to consult the *Primer* to help identify whether a load test is the correct means to  
17 answer questions about a given bridge, to prepare for a load test, to select the correct load test type,  
18 and to interpret the load test results. In addition, the *Primer* contains example case studies of load  
19 tests. This paper is focused on the research behind the *Primer*, whereas the *Primer* itself is written to  
20 serve as practical guidance for an audience of practicing engineers and bridge owners.

21 When deciding the appropriateness of a bridge load test, it is important to make an informed  
22 choice. While recommendations are provided for the selection of test objectives and for the planning

1 stage of a load test, it is important to maintain open communication between all involved parties. In  
2 particular, it is important that the engineer responsible for the load test discusses the needs of the  
3 client and the open questions regarding the bridge at an early stage to make sure the test adequately  
4 addresses these open questions. It is also important to remind all parties involved during, before, and  
5 after the load test of the objectives of the test, so that preparation, execution, and analysis are carried  
6 out with a common perspective.

7 Two parts of the recommendations in the *Primer* require further research. The first element  
8 that requires further research is the factor  $X_{pA}$  as used to determine the target proof load. This factor  
9 from the MBE and originally the MBRLT has not been changed in the *Primer*. It is recommended  
10 that reliability-based analyses are pursued to evaluate the currently used values for  $X_{pA}$ . A second  
11 element that requires further research is to more fully integrate structural reliability concepts with  
12 load testing, including case studies and practical applications. The *Primer* approaches from a  
13 theoretical perspective how to determine the target proof load such that a certain reliability index is  
14 demonstrated after a proof load test. It also discusses concepts related to life-cycle cost optimization  
15 (including sustainability considerations) and system reliability. However, practical applications of  
16 these concepts through pilot case studies will be necessary to further develop these  
17 recommendations.

18

## 19 **Summary and Conclusions**

20 A working group from the TRB Standing Committee on Testing and Evaluation of Transportation  
21 Structures (AFF40/AKB40) developed the recently published *Primer for Bridge Load Testing*.  
22 Given that the recommendations for load testing in the extant AASHTO Manual for Bridge

1 Evaluation are based on research carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s, the *Primer* is intended as  
2 practical guidance revised in light of research and experience gained since then. Additionally, the  
3 *Primer* identifies applications of recent advances in bridge engineering to load tests, with particular  
4 attention to integration with structural reliability, cost-benefit analysis methods, advances in  
5 measurement techniques, and advances in finite element modeling. The *Primer* also contains  
6 examples that can serve as references for practicing engineers and bridge owners.

7         The methods for load testing in the *Primer* are mainly diagnostic and proof load testing.  
8 While the focus of the *Primer* is on bridge load testing for bridge rating, other applications are  
9 identified and illustrated with examples as well. Short discussions on parameter-specific diagnostic  
10 load tests and dynamic testing are also provided.

11         When selecting the type of load test, it is important to refer to the test objectives and the  
12 relationship between the objectives and the required load level. If relatively low load levels can give  
13 insight into the structural behavior and additional load paths, a diagnostic load test can be  
14 recommended. If uncertainties on the bridge structural behavior and reliability of additional load  
15 paths under higher load levels are large, a proof load test may be a better option.

16         Given the recent advances in measurement techniques and analytical modeling, the  
17 recommendations for diagnostic load testing and proof load testing in the *Primer* differ from those  
18 in the MBE. For diagnostic load testing, the MBE uses a *K*-factor approach, which is based on a  
19 pointwise measurement of strains. In the *Primer*, this approach is replaced using multiple sensors  
20 (either pointwise contact sensors or a selected number of datapoints from full-field non-contact  
21 sensors) and comparison of measured structural responses to those predicted by an analytical model.  
22 For several test objectives, the recommended analytical model is a linear finite element model.

1 Through model updating based on the measured structural responses, a field-validated model can  
2 then be developed. By changing average material parameters to characteristic values, using the  
3 relevant live load model, and removing load-carrying mechanisms that are not reliable under higher  
4 loads, a model for bridge load rating can then be derived. For proof load testing, the MBE does not  
5 provide guidance on how to relate the use of a certain vehicle during a proof load test and the rating  
6 vehicle. Many times, the axle weight and spacing of the test truck will be different from the rating  
7 vehicle. The *Primer* has addressed this topic by introducing a factor that quantifies the difference in  
8 load effect between the test vehicle and the rating vehicle. In addition, the *Primer* gives guidance on  
9 how to select the different load levels that should be used during a proof load test.

10 This paper has combined the research from recent years that lies at the basis of the *Primer*  
11 *for Bridge Load Testing* and provides a summarized overview of the recommendations in the  
12 *Primer*. As such, this work gives the current state of the practice regarding bridge load testing, and  
13 points to topics for future research.

14

## 15 **Notation List**

16 The following symbols are used in this paper:

17  $f_c'$  specified concrete compressive strength

18  $f_R$  allowable stress specified in the LRFD Code (AASHTO, 2015)

19  $f_R(.)$  probability density function of the resistance

20  $f_S(.)$  probability density function of the load effect

21  $f_V$  vehicle adjustment factor

22  $k_O$  factor that takes into account if target proof load or stop criterion was reached



1	$n_d$	number of damage states that are likely to be reached after an unsuccessful load test
2	$p_{d,i}$	probability of falling into damage state $i$ after the load test
3	$s_p$	magnitude of test load
4	$C$	capacity
5	$C_{d,i}$	remedy cost associated with damage state $i$
6	$C_F$	cost of failure
7	$C_{LT}$	cost of load test
8	$C_{Op}$	direct operation cost associated with a load test
9	$C_T$	initial cost
10	$DC$	dead load effect due to structural components and attachments
11	$DW$	dead load effect due to wearing surface and utilities
12	$E_c$	modulus of elasticity of the concrete
13	$EC_F$	expected failure cost (i.e. failure risk)
14	$EC_{INS}$	expected cost of inspections
15	$EC_{PM}$	expected cost of routine maintenance
16	$EC_{REP}$	expected cost of repair
17	$ELCC$	expected life-cycle cost
18	$F_R(.)$	cumulative distribution function of resistance
19	$F_S(.)$	cumulative distribution function of the load effect
20	$I$	dynamic load allowance
21	$K$	adjustment factor

- 1  $K_a$  benefit derived from load test
- 2  $K_b$  adjustment for differences between actual bridge behavior and revised analytical model
- 3  $K_{b1}$  factor for ability of test team to explain differences between load test observations and
- 4 analytical model, and to extrapolate test results to higher load levels
- 5  $K_{b2}$  factor for ability to determine problems in a timely manner with inspections
- 6  $K_{b3}$  factor for the presence of critical structural features which cannot be determined in a load
- 7 test
- 8  $LL$  live load effect
- 9  $L_P$  maximum load applied in proof load test
- 10  $L_R$  comparable live load due to rating vehicle for the lanes loaded
- 11  $L_T$  target proof load
- 12  $OP$  capacity at the operating level
- 13  $P$  effect from permanent loads other than dead loads
- 14  $P_{fa}$  probability of failure after a load test
- 15  $P_{fb}$  probability of failure before a load test
- 16  $P_{fd}$  probability of failure during a load test
- 17  $R$  resistance effect
- 18  $R_n$  nominal member resistance as inspected
- 19  $RF$  rating factor
- 20  $RF_C$  rating factor before load test
- 21  $RF_O$  rating factor at operating level after proof load test
- 22  $RF_P$  lower-bound rating factor derived from a proof load test

1	$RF_T$	rating factor after load test
2	$Ri_a$	risk of structural failure after load test
3	$Ri_b$	risk of structural failure before load test
4	$S$	load effect
5	$V_{LT}$	value of the load test
6	$W_P$	final gross vehicle weight of test vehicle upon completion of proof load test
7	$W_R$	gross vehicle weight of rating vehicle
8	$W_{Real}$	realistic weight for the loading vehicle
9	$W_T$	target truck weight for load test truck
10	$X_p$	target live load factor prior to adjustments, = 1.4
11	$X_{pA}$	target live load factor after corrections
12	$B$	reliability index
13	$\gamma_{DC}$	load factor for dead load
14	$\gamma_{DW}$	load factor for superimposed dead load
15	$\gamma_{LL}$	load factor for live load
16	$\gamma_P$	load factor for permanent loads other than dead load
17	$\varepsilon_c$	analytically determined strain
18	$\varepsilon_T$	strain measured during load test
19	$\phi$	LRFD resistance factor
20	$\phi_c$	condition factor
21	$\phi_s$	system factor
22	$\Phi(\cdot)$	cumulative distribution function of standard normal distribution

1

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