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## Triaxial behaviour of ballast and the role of confining pressure under cyclic loading

Joanne Lackenby  
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**TRIAXIAL BEHAVIOUR OF BALLAST AND THE ROLE OF  
CONFINING PRESSURE UNDER CYCLIC LOADING**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

from

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

by

**JOANNE LACKENBY**

BE Engineering (Environmental)

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING

2006

## CERTIFICATION

I, Joanne Lackenby, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Civil, Mining and Environmental Engineering, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

The following publications are related to the research work conducted in this study:

Indraratna, B., **Lackenby, J.**, and Christie, D., (2005). "Effect of Confining Pressure on the Degradation of Ballast under Cyclic Loading." *Géotechnique*, 55 (4), pp. 325–328.

**Lackenby, J.**, Indraratna, B., McDowell, G., and Christie, D., (2006). "Triaxial Behaviour of Ballast and the Role of Confining Pressure under Cyclic Loading." Submitted to *Géotechnique* for review in September 2005.

**Lackenby, J.**, and Premaratne, P., (2005). "Method of Noise Removal for the Calculation of Resilient Strain and Resilient Modulus." Chapter in "Mechanics of Ballasted Rail Tracks – A Geotechnical Perspective" by B. Indraratna and W. Salim, Taylor and Francis Group/ Balkema, The Netherlands.

Indraratna, B., Khabbaz, H., Salim, W., **Lackenby, J.**, and Christie, D., (2004). "Ballast Characteristics and the Effects of Geosynthetics on Rail Track

Deformation." *International Conference on Geosynthetics and Geoenvironmental Engineering, ICGGE*, Bombay, India, pp. 3-12.

**Lackenby, J.**, and Indraratna, B. (2004). "The Effect of Confining Pressure on the Behaviour of Railway Ballast under Cyclic Loading." *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Australia New Zealand Young Geotechnical Professionals Conference*, July, Gold Coast, Australia, pp. 115-120.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Traditional railway foundations or substructures, consisting of one or two granular layers overlying a subgrade or natural formation, have become increasingly overloaded in recent years due to the utilisation of faster and heavier trains. During this period, there has been little, if any, re-engineering of the substructure in Australia, resulting in maintenance cycles becoming more frequent and increasingly expensive. Finding economical and practical techniques for enhancing the stability and safety of the substructure, thereby ensuring a capacity for supporting further increases in load, is vital in securing the long-term viability of the railway industry.

The load bearing ballast is located directly below the sleepers and is responsible for limiting the stresses projected onto the weaker subgrade and preventing train-induced sleeper movement. Two significant ballast problems arising from increasing axle loads are differential settlement and degradation. It is thought that substructure enhancement can be attained and these problems largely curtailed through the manipulation of the level of effective confining pressure supporting the ballast layer.

To investigate this possibility, a series of large-scale, high-frequency, drained, cyclic triaxial tests were conducted to examine the deformation (permanent and resilient) and degradation response of railway ballast. It was identified that the level of lateral confining pressure should be considered as an important design parameter. Two of the major benefits arising from increased confinement are reduced lateral movement (spreading) and vertical settlement resulting in improved line and level, and superior track stiffness and associated enhancements in ride comfort for passengers. The major

drawback in the event of excessive confinement is unacceptable levels of particle breakage. The experimental results indicated, however, that insufficient confining pressure is as damaging in terms of particle breakdown as excessive pressure, and that minimal degradation will be achieved at some intermediate value. For maximum deviator stress magnitudes of 230, 500 and 750 kPa, 'optimum' breakage conditions were encountered within the confining pressure ranges 15 – 65, 25 – 95, and 50 – 140 kPa, respectively.

Practical methods of increasing the in-situ track confinement are suggested and evaluated in terms of ease of installation, effectiveness and cost. It is concluded that the more superior methods of achieving increased confining pressure are by reinforcing the ballast using geosynthetics, or by increasing the effective overburden pressure through increased shoulder and/or crib height or via the achievement of a higher initial ballast density (greater compaction).

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xv
LIST OF NOTATION .....	xvii
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 General Background .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	3
1.3 Objectives and Scope of Research .....	4
1.4 Thesis Outline .....	6
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
2.1 Introduction .....	8
2.2 Track Components – The Superstructure and Substructure .....	8
2.2.1 The Ballast Layer .....	10
2.2.2 The Subballast (Capping) Layer .....	12
2.2.3 The Subgrade Layer .....	14
2.3 Train Loading and Track Forces .....	15
2.3.1 Estimation of the Rail Seat Load .....	15
2.3.2 Dynamic Impact Factors .....	16
2.3.3 Effective Sleeper Contact Area .....	17
2.3.4 Maximum Allowable Ballast Pressure .....	18
2.3.5 Estimates of Lateral Confining Pressure .....	18
2.4 Track Substructure Problems .....	20
2.4.1 Ballast Degradation .....	21
2.4.2 Differential Track Settlement .....	22
2.4.3 Track Fouling .....	24
2.5 Effect of Loading Characteristics on Permanent Deformation under Cyclic Loading .....	25
2.5.1 Deformation Mechanisms in Granular Materials .....	26
2.5.2 Effect of Maximum Cyclic Load .....	27
2.5.3 Effect of Minimum Cyclic Load .....	29
2.5.4 Frequency .....	29
2.5.5 Effect of Loading Path and Stress History .....	30
2.5.6 Effect of Number of Cycles .....	30
2.6 Degradation Behaviour of Single Rocks and Granular Materials under Static and Cyclic Loading .....	32
2.6.1 Degradation Mechanisms of Single Rock Particles .....	33
2.6.2 Degradation Mechanisms of Granular Materials .....	35
2.6.3 Deformation and Degradation Phases under Monotonic (Static) Loading .....	37

2.6.4	Deformation and Degradation Phases under Constant Amplitude Cyclic Loading .....	38
2.7	Factors Affecting the Degradation of Granular Materials .....	39
2.7.1	Particle Shape, Size and Grading .....	40
2.7.2	Loading Magnitude, Type and Number of Loading Cycles .....	42
2.7.3	Confining Pressure .....	43
2.8	Lateral Pressures Induced in Granular Materials .....	47
2.8.1	Horizontal Stress Accumulation During Compaction .....	48
2.8.2	Horizontal Stress Accumulation During Traffic Loading .....	49
2.9	Effect of Confining Pressure on Permanent Deformation Behaviour of Granular Materials .....	52
2.9.1	Static Loading Behaviour .....	52
2.9.2	Cyclic Loading Behaviour .....	53
2.10	Resilient Behaviour of Granular Materials .....	54
2.10.1	Factors Affecting the Resilient Deformation of Granular Materials .....	56
2.10.2	Aggregate Type and Geometry (Shape and Texture) .....	56
2.10.3	Aggregate Grading and Size .....	57
2.10.4	Placement Density .....	58
2.10.5	Stress History and Stress Sequence .....	59
2.10.6	Number of Loading Cycles .....	59
2.10.7	State of Stress .....	61
2.10.8	Resilient Modulus Relationships .....	62
2.10.9	Effects of In-Situ Ballast Resilient Modulus .....	64
CHAPTER 3 - LABORATORY PROCEDURES .....		66
3.1	Introduction .....	66
3.2	Large Scale Triaxial Apparatus .....	66
3.3	Characteristics of the Testing Material .....	69
3.4	Preparation of Ballast Specimens and Testing Procedure .....	74
3.5	Deviatoric Load Calculation Method .....	76
3.6	Data Analysis Methods .....	79
3.6.1	Permanent Strain (Axial and Volumetric) .....	79
3.6.2	Breakage Quantification .....	80
3.6.3	Resilient Modulus .....	83
3.7	Summary of Cylindrical Triaxial Experiments .....	84
CHAPTER 4 - PERMANENT AND RESILIENT STRAIN BEHAVIOUR OF BALLAST UNDER CYCLIC LOADING .....		85
4.1	Introduction .....	85
4.2	Specimen 'Failure' under Constant Amplitude Cyclic Loading .....	86
4.3	Permanent Axial (Shear) Strain Response .....	88
4.4	Permanent Volumetric Strain Response .....	98
4.5	Comparison between Static (Monotonic) and Cyclic Behaviour of Latite Basalt100 .....	
4.6	Effect of Particle Size Distribution on Straining Behaviour .....	109
4.7	Resilient Deformation Response (Resilient Modulus) .....	110
4.7.1	Resilient Strain Behaviour .....	110
4.7.2	Resilient Modulus .....	112
4.7.3	Accuracy of Existing Resilient Modulus Relationships .....	119

4.7.4	Empirical Resilient Modulus Relationship .....	120
4.8	Chapter Summary.....	127
CHAPTER 5 - BALLAST DEGRADATION UNDER CYCLIC LOADING .....		129
5.1	Introduction.....	129
5.2	Review of Ballast Degradation under Static Loading.....	130
5.3	Effect of the Number of Loading Cycles on Ballast Degradation .....	131
5.4	Effect of Stress State (Confining Pressure and Deviator Stress Magnitude) on Ballast Degradation under Cyclic Loading.....	135
5.4.1	The Dilatant Unstable Degradation Zone (DUDZ).....	138
5.4.2	The Optimum Degradation Zone (ODZ) .....	141
5.4.3	The Compressive Stable Degradation Zone (CSDZ).....	142
5.4.4	Effect of Deviator Stress Magnitude on Ballast Breakage.....	143
5.4.5	Summary of the Degradation Zones .....	143
5.4.6	Expected Breakage Behaviour at Elevated Confining Pressures.....	144
5.5	Effect of Aggregate Particle Size Distribution on Breakage .....	146
5.6	Other Characteristics of Ballast Breakage .....	147
5.6.1	Influence of Coordination Number on Ballast Breakage.....	148
5.6.2	Particle Sizes Most Vulnerable to Degradation .....	149
5.6.3	Effect of Breakage on Resilient Modulus .....	150
5.6.4	Influence of Breakage Type on Track Behaviour .....	151
5.7	Chapter Summary.....	151
CHAPTER 6 - BEHAVIOUR OF BALLAST UNDER STEPWISE (VARIABLE AMPLITUDE) LOADING .....		153
6.1	Introduction.....	153
6.2	Method of Load Application.....	153
6.3	Ballast Response to Stepwise Loading .....	154
6.4	Effect of the Number of Cycles per Interval on Ballast Response .....	156
6.5	Comparison between Static and Cyclic Loading Response.....	157
6.6	Chapter Summary.....	160
CHAPTER 7 - PRACTICAL METHODS AND IMPLICATIONS OF ALTERING THE IN-SITU EFFECTIVE BALLAST CONFINING PRESSURE.....		161
7.1	Introduction.....	161
7.2	Summary of Experimental Findings .....	162
7.3	Consequences of Altering the In-Situ Effective Confining Pressure.....	165
7.3.1	Track Response Corresponding to a Decrease in Lateral Confinement ..	166
7.3.2	Track Response Corresponding to an Increase in Lateral Confinement..	166
7.4	Methods of Increasing the Effective In-Situ Confining Pressure .....	168
7.4.1	Lateral Restraints .....	168
7.4.2	Geosynthetics .....	169
7.4.2.1	Confinement Mechanisms Offered by Geosynthetics.....	171
7.4.2.2	Optimum Operational Environments .....	172
7.4.2.3	Benefits to the Track Substructure.....	172
7.4.2.4	Design Considerations .....	174
7.4.3	Sleeper Characteristics (Shape, Spacing, Friction).....	175

7.4.4	Effective Overburden Pressures.....	178
7.4.5	Summary of Improvement Methods .....	180
7.5	Chapter Summary.....	181
CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		182
8.1	Introduction.....	182
8.2	Permanent (Plastic) Deformation Behaviour .....	182
8.3	Recoverable (Resilient) Deformation Behaviour.....	183
8.4	Degradation Behaviour .....	184
8.5	Stepwise Loading Behaviour .....	186
8.6	Practical Implications.....	186
8.7	Recommendations for Further Study .....	187
REFERENCES.....		190
APPENDIX A - DYNAMIC IMPACT FACTORS .....		213
APPENDIX B - BREAKAGE QUANTIFICATION METHODS.....		216
APPENDIX C - PROPERTIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DYNAMIC ACTUATOR.....		222
APPENDIX D - METHOD OF NOISE REMOVAL FOR THE CALCULATION OF RESILIENT MODULUS.....		225
APPENDIX E - CURVE FITTING PROCEDURE TO FIND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESILIENT MODULUS AND VOLUMETRIC STRAIN .....		234

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Australia’s railway network (after Salim, 2004) .....	2
Figure 2.1 Superstructure and substructure components of a railway line, (a) lateral view, and (b) longitudinal view (after Selig and Waters, 1994) .....	9
Figure 2.2 Ballast particle size distributions currently employed by railway organisations .....	13
Figure 2.3 Typical in-track wheel load distribution (after Selig and Waters, 1994) .....	16
Figure 2.4 Lateral ballast spreading due to low ballast confinement (after Baessler and Ruecker, 2003) .....	20
Figure 2.5 Inadequate lateral confinement can contribute to track buckling .....	20
Figure 2.6 Tracks suffering from inadequate drainage .....	21
Figure 2.7 Track suffering from ballast degradation .....	22
Figure 2.8 Track suffering from differential track settlement (after Suiker, 1997) .....	23
Figure 2.9 Contribution of ballast to track settlement, and the influence of tamping (after Brown and Selig, 1991) .....	23
Figure 2.10 Sources of ballast fouling (after Selig and Waters, 1994) .....	25
Figure 2.11 Effect of deviator stress magnitude on axial and volumetric strain (after Olowokere, 1975) .....	28
Figure 2.12 Material responses under cyclic loading (after Collins and Boulbibane, 2000) .....	31
Figure 2.13 Failure modes of brittle rock cylinders under axial compression $\sigma_1'$ as a function of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ , (a) Low $\sigma_3'$ , (b) intermediate $\sigma_3'$ , (c) high $\sigma_3'$ , and (d) low $\sigma_3'$ (after Sammis and Ashby, 1986) .....	35
Figure 2.14 Relationship between breakage (increase in surface area) and number of cycles (after Miura and O’Hara, 1979) .....	44
Figure 2.15 Effect of number of cycles on percentage of broken particles for potassium sulphate (after Goder <i>et al.</i> , 2002) .....	45
Figure 2.16 Effect of confining pressure on the breakage of dense Cambria sand during drained high pressure triaxial tests (after Lade <i>et al.</i> , 1996) .....	45
Figure 2.17 Effect of confining pressure on breakage of dolomite ballast during cyclic loading tests (after Raymond and Williams, 1978) .....	46
Figure 2.18 Effect of applied cyclic stress ratio and confining pressure on breakage of silica sand (after Hyodo <i>et al.</i> , 2002) .....	46
Figure 2.19 Behaviour of soil during plate shrinkage and confined compression tests, (a) Phases of deformation, and (b) Effect of axial pressure on induced lateral stresses (after Earl, 1997) .....	49
Figure 2.20 Effect of maximum vertical stress amplitude and number of cycles on residual lateral stresses (after Sawicki and Swidzinski, 1995) .....	50
Figure 2.21 Effect of horizontal to vertical stress ratio $\nu$ on lateral pressure with lateral distance from the loading plate (after Freeman and Harr, 2004) .....	51
Figure 2.22 Effect of number of cycles on horizontal stresses in ballast (after Norman and Selig, 1983) .....	52
Figure 2.23 Effect of confining pressure on the permanent strain behaviour of crushed granite (after Brown, 1974) .....	55
Figure 2.24 Permanent and resilient deformation components of granular materials under cyclic loading (after Selig and Alva-Hurtado, 1982) .....	55

Figure 2.25 Relationship between resilient modulus and mean grain size (after Janardhanam and Desai, 1983) .....	58
Figure 2.26 Effect of large-scale permanent deformation on the resilient response of granular materials (after Raad and Figueroa, 1980).....	60
Figure 2.27 Evolution of resilient modulus with number of cycles (after Khedr, 1985)	60
Figure 2.28 Effect of deviator stress and number of cycles on the evolution of resilient modulus (after Brown and Selig, 1991) .....	61
Figure 2.29 Effect of deviator stress and confining pressure on resilient modulus, (a) after Zeghal (2004), and (b) after Brown (1974) .....	62
Figure 2.30 Effect of increased granular layer stiffness on deviator stress levels in the subgrade (after Brown and Selig, 1991) .....	65
Figure 2.31 Effect of bulk stress on resilient modulus of granite ballast, subballast and subgrade (after Selig and Alva-Hurtado, 1982).....	65
Figure 3.1 Large-scale triaxial apparatus, (a) Schematic, and (b) Photograph .....	67
Figure 3.2 Additional details of the testing apparatus, (a) The triaxial chamber and membrane, (b) The dynamic actuator, (c) The confining pressure system, and (d) The volume change measurement device.....	70
Figure 3.3 Physical appearance of latite basalt .....	71
Figure 3.4 Specimen particle size distribution, and current industry distributions.....	72
Figure 3.5 Particle size distributions used to investigate the effect of grading.....	73
Figure 3.6 Cyclic stress state and loading path in the current tests.....	77
Figure 3.7 Evaluation of the Ballast Breakage Index (BBI) .....	81
Figure 4.1 Axial strain $\epsilon_a$ as a function of the number of cycles $N$ .....	89
Figure 4.2 Rate of axial strain $\epsilon_a$ accumulation $d\epsilon_a/dN$ , (a) natural scale, and (b) logarithmic scale, for $q_{max,cyc} = 750$ kPa and selected confining pressures $\sigma_3'$ .....	90
Figure 4.3 Effect of deviator stress magnitude $q_{max,cyc}$ on axial strain $\epsilon_a$ for $\sigma_3' = 30, 60, 120$ and $240$ kPa .....	91
Figure 4.4 Axial strain $\epsilon_a$ values at the end of 500000 cycles .....	92
Figure 4.5 Relationship between coefficient $C$ and the number of cycles $N$ .....	94
Figure 4.6 Relationship between coefficient $D$ and the number of cycles $N$ .....	94
Figure 4.7 Correlation between the measured (lines with symbols) and predicted (solid lines) axial strain $\epsilon_a$ values for selected specimens for maximum deviator stress $q_{max,cyc} = 230$ kPa.....	96
Figure 4.8 Correlation between the measured (lines with symbols) and predicted (solid lines) axial strain $\epsilon_a$ values for selected specimens for maximum deviator stress $q_{max,cyc} = 500$ kPa.....	96
Figure 4.9 Correlation between the measured (lines with symbols) and predicted (solid lines) axial strain $\epsilon_a$ values for selected specimens for maximum deviator stress $q_{max,cyc} = 750$ kPa.....	97
Figure 4.10 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ on axial strain $\epsilon_a$ and shear strain $\epsilon_s$ under drained cyclic loading conditions .....	98
Figure 4.11 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ and number of cycles $N$ on volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ behaviour of selected specimens of latite basalt .....	99

Figure 4.12 Effect of deviator stress magnitude $q_{\max,\text{cyc}}$ on volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ behaviour .....	101
Figure 4.13 Final volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ values after 500000 cycles .....	102
Figure 4.14 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ on the static peak deviator stress at failure $q_{\text{peak,sta}}$ for latite basalt, and the volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ at $q_{\text{peak,sta}}$ and $\varepsilon_a = 20\%$ (data from Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 1998 and Salim, 2004) .....	102
Figure 4.15 $\psi$ values for the current cyclic triaxial tests .....	103
Figure 4.16 Final strain values after 500000 cycles and $\psi$ and $q_{\max,\text{cyc}}/p'$ contours as a function of $q_{\max,\text{cyc}}$ for: (a) Axial strain $\varepsilon_a$ , (b) Radial strain $\varepsilon_r$ , and (c) Volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ .....	105
Figure 4.17 Effect of $\psi (= X)$ on axial $\varepsilon_a$ and volumetric $\varepsilon_v$ strain behaviour of Coteau dolomite ballast (after Raymond and Williams, 1978) .....	106
Figure 4.18 Prediction of axial strain $\varepsilon_a$ based on the ratio $\psi$ .....	107
Figure 4.19 Axial $\varepsilon_a$ versus volumetric $\varepsilon_v$ strain behaviour for monotonic loading of latite basalt (data replotted from Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 1998).....	107
Figure 4.20 Axial $\varepsilon_a$ versus volumetric $\varepsilon_v$ strain behaviour for cyclic loading of latite basalt .....	108
Figure 4.21 Effect of specimen particle size distribution on axial strain $\varepsilon_a$ behaviour. ....	111
Figure 4.22 Effect of specimen particle size distribution on volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ behaviour.....	111
Figure 4.23 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ and the number of cycles $N$ on the resilient (recoverable) strain $\varepsilon_{a,\text{rec}}$ for selected specimens .....	113
Figure 4.24 Effect of deviator stress magnitude $q_{\max,\text{cyc}}$ ( $\Delta q_{\text{cyc}}$ ) on the resilient strain $\varepsilon_{a,\text{rec}}$ .....	114
Figure 4.25 Final resilient strain $\varepsilon_{a,\text{rec}}$ after 500000 cycles as a function of the effective confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ .....	114
Figure 4.26 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ and the number of cycles $N$ on the resilient modulus $M_R$ for selected specimens .....	115
Figure 4.27 Estimation of the coefficient $g$ in Equation 4.10 .....	118
Figure 4.28 Estimation of the coefficient $h$ in Equation 4.10 .....	119
Figure 4.29 Effect of deviator stress magnitude $q_{\max,\text{cyc}}$ ( $\Delta q_{\text{cyc}}$ ) on the resilient modulus $M_R$ as a function of the number of loading cycles $N$ .....	121
Figure 4.30 Final resilient modulus $M_R$ values after 500000 cycles as a function of the effective confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ .....	122
Figure 4.31 Relationship between coefficient $G$ and the number of cycles $N$ .....	126
Figure 4.32 Relationship between coefficient $H$ and the number of cycles $N$ .....	127
Figure 5.1 Review of the method of calculation of the ballast breakage index BBI ....	132
Figure 5.2 Effect of the number of loading cycles $N$ on (a) Axial strain $\varepsilon_a$ (b) Volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ (c) Radial strain $\varepsilon_r$ (d) Ballast breakage index BBI, and (e) Resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	133
Figure 5.3 Relationships between volumetric strain $\varepsilon_v$ , BBI and $N$ , (a) $\varepsilon_v$ and BBI as a function of $N$ , and (b) BBI as a function of $\varepsilon_v$ (after Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 2005) .....	134
Figure 5.4 Effect of the number of loading cycles $N$ on the change in surface area $\Delta SA$ for a decomposed granite soil (data replotted from Miura and O'Hara, 1979) .....	136

Figure 5.5 Effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ and maximum deviator stress $q_{\max, \text{cyc}}$ on the ballast breakage index BBI .....	137
Figure 5.6 Relationship between $\psi$ ( $= q_{\max, \text{cyc}}/q_{\text{peak, sta}}$ ) and confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ , and the location of the breakage zones DUDZ, ODZ and CSDZ .....	142
Figure 5.7 Effect of maximum cyclic deviator stress $q_{\max, \text{cyc}}$ on the ballast breakage index BBI .....	144
Figure 5.8 Predicted breakage behaviour BBI at confining pressures beyond the range considered in the current study (conceptual only) .....	146
Figure 5.9 Effect of aggregate particle size distribution ( $C_u$ , coefficient of uniformity) on breakage using (a) Area A, (b) $B_r$ (Hardin, 1985), (c) $B_g$ (Marsal, 1973), and (d) BBI (Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 2005).....	148
Figure 5.10 Examples of ballast breakage, (a) particle splitting in the CSDZ, and (b) corner degradation from the DUDZ.....	149
Figure 6.1 Behaviour of ballast under stepwise loading for $\sigma_3' = 60$ and 120 kPa and $N_{\text{int}} = 5000$ , (a) loading magnitude $q_{\max, \text{cyc}}$ , (b) axial strain $\epsilon_a$ , (c) volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ , (d) radial strain $\epsilon_r$ , and (e) resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	155
Figure 6.2 Effect of the number of cycles/interval on the behaviour of ballast for $\sigma_3' = 120$ kPa and $N_{\text{int}} = 5000$ and 10000 (a) loading magnitude $q_{\max, \text{cyc}}$ , (b) axial strain $\epsilon_a$ , (c) volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ , (d) radial strain $\epsilon_r$ , and (e) resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	158
Figure 7.1 Conceptual diagram illustrating the effect of increasing confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ on axial strain $\epsilon_a$ , volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ , ballast breakage BBI, and resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	163
Figure 7.2 Conceptual diagram illustrating the effect of increasing deviator stress magnitude $q_{\max, \text{cyc}}$ on axial strain $\epsilon_a$ , volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ , ballast breakage BBI, and resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	163
Figure 7.3 Increasing the lateral confining pressure using intermittent lateral restraints (after Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 2004) .....	169
Figure 7.4 In-track installation of geosynthetics (after Selig and Waters, 1996) .....	170
Figure 7.5 Reduction in settlement due to various types of geosynthetics (after Salim, 2004) .....	174
Figure 7.6 Increasing the lateral confining pressure using (a) tapered, or (b) winged sleepers (after Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 2005) (not to scale).....	177
Figure 7.7 Example of roughening of the sleeper base for increased friction between sleeper and ballast (after Profillidis, 1995) .....	177
Figure 7.8 Increasing lateral resistance by the incorporation of sleeper anchors (after Profillidis, 1995) .....	178
Figure 7.9 Effect of sleeper spacing on the degree of lateral track resistance (after Profillidis, 1995) .....	178
Figure 7.10 Lateral track resistance at the sleeper ends based on the geometrical characteristics of the shoulder ballast (after Profillidis, 1995) .....	179
Figure 7.11 Effect of the number of cycles and crib compaction on the level of lateral (transverse) resistance (after Profillidis, 1995) .....	180

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Ballast specifications in Australia, Canada and the USA .....	12
Table 2.2 Variables that affect sleeper-ballast contact pressures (FIP, 1987; Jeffs and Tew, 1991; Standards Australia, 1997a) .....	15
Table 2.3 Empirical relationships used to calculate the maximum rail seat load (adapted from Jeffs and Tew (1991) with additional data added) .....	16
Table 2.4 Phases of deformation and degradation under gradually increasing loads .....	37
Table 2.5 Phases of deformation and degradation under constant amplitude cyclic loading (data from Ionescu <i>et al.</i> , 1998) .....	39
Table 2.6 Factors affecting particle breakage in granular materials .....	40
Table 2.7 Factors affecting the resilient modulus of granular materials .....	56
Table 2.8 Non-linear models relating resilient modulus to stress state .....	63
Table 2.9 Typical ballast and subgrade resilient modulus values for railway lines (after Li and Selig, 1998) .....	65
Table 3.1 Physical and durability characteristics of latite basalt (after Indraratna <i>et al.</i> , 1998 and Salim and Indraratna, 2002) .....	71
Table 3.2 Particle size distribution used in most tests, and industry practice upper and lower bounds (Standards Australia, 1996) .....	72
Table 3.3 Particle size distributions used to examine the effects of grading .....	73
Table 3.4 Summary of triaxial tests .....	78
Table 4.1 Regression coefficients from Equation 4.1 for the effect of confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ on axial strain $\epsilon_a$ .....	93
Table 4.2 Values of coefficients $C$ and $D$ and the coefficient of determination $R^2$ with evolving $N$ .....	93
Table 4.3 Example of the stress levels required for preconditioning of granular unbound pavement materials (after Standards Australia, 1995) .....	117
Table 4.4 Results of the curve fitting procedure for the relationship between volumetric strain $\epsilon_v$ and resilient modulus $M_R$ .....	118
Table 4.5 Models tested for suitability for use in predicting resilient modulus $M_R$ response during high speed drained cyclic loading of ballast .....	123
Table 4.6 Results of the evaluation of the Uzan (1985) model .....	123
Table 4.7 Results of the evaluation of the Brown <i>et al.</i> (1975) model .....	124
Table 4.8 Results of the evaluation of the Shackel (1973b) model .....	124
Table 4.9 Results of the evaluation of the Elliott and David (1989) model .....	124
Table 4.10 Example of calculated coefficients $G$ and $H$ for $q_{\max, \text{cyc}} = 500$ kPa at 2000 loading cycles .....	125
Table 4.11 $G$ and $H$ values for $q_{\max, \text{cyc}} = 230$ kPa .....	125
Table 4.12 $G$ and $H$ values for $q_{\max, \text{cyc}} = 500$ kPa .....	126
Table 4.13 $G$ and $H$ values for $q_{\max, \text{cyc}} = 750$ kPa .....	126
Table 4.14 Relationships between deviator stress, coefficient $G$ and $N$ , and deviator stress, coefficient $H$ and $N$ .....	127

Table 5.1 Upper confining pressure $\sigma_3'$ bounds of the DUDZ and ODZ for each respective deviator stress magnitude $q_{\max, cyc}$ .....	139
Table 5.2 $q_{\max, cyc}/p'$ ratios for the DUDZ, ODZ and CSDZ degradation zones.....	139
Table 5.3 Expected types of degradation for the three breakage zones, the DUDZ, ODZ and CSDZ, for a typical ballast section.....	145
Table 5.4 Relationship between the degradation zones and other investigated parameters .....	146
Table 6.1 Various $\psi$ and $q/p'$ ratios for the $\sigma_3' = 60$ kPa and $N_{int} = 5000$ specimen ....	159
Table 6.2 Various $\psi$ and $q/p'$ ratios for the $\sigma_3' = 120$ kPa and $N_{int} = 5000$ specimen ..	159
Table 6.3 Various $\psi$ and $q/p'$ ratios for the $\sigma_3' = 120$ kPa and $N_{int} = 10000$ specimen	159
Table 7.1 Benefits and pitfalls associated with increasing or decreasing the effective lateral in-situ ballast confining pressure .....	165
Table 7.2 Relative comparison of the various potential methods of increasing the lateral confining pressure .....	181

## LIST OF NOTATION

$\theta$	bulk stress = $\sigma_1' + \sigma_2' + \sigma_3'$
$\nu$	coefficient of lateral stress
$\phi$	friction angle
$\psi$	ratio of cyclic deviator stress to peak static deviator stress
$\eta$	speed factor
$\delta$	track condition descriptor
$\beta$	train loading state
$\alpha'$	coefficient
$\beta'$	coefficient
$\gamma'$	coefficient
$\phi'$	dynamic impact factor
$(\sigma_1'/\sigma_3')_p$	peak stress ratio
$\gamma_0$	coefficient
$\varepsilon_1$	axial strain after first loading cycle
$\gamma_1$	coefficient
$\sigma_1'$	major principal stress
$\sigma_1' - \sigma_3'$	deviator stress magnitude
$\sigma_2'$	intermediate effective stress
$\sigma_3'$	effective confining pressure
$\varepsilon_a$	axial strain
$\varepsilon_{a,rec}$	recoverable portion of axial strain
$\sigma_d$	magnitude of deviator stress
$\gamma_b$	specimen unit weight
$\Psi_{failure}$	$\psi$ ratio at failure during a stepwise cyclic test
$\Psi_{final}$	$\psi$ ratio at 20% axial strain during a stepwise cyclic test
$\varepsilon_N$	axial strain after a particular number of cycles
$\tau_{oct}$	$= \sqrt{2/3}(\sigma_1' - \sigma_3')$ (axisymmetric conditions)
$\sigma_{oct}$	$= 1/3(\theta)$
$\Delta q_{cyc}$	difference between the maximum and minimum cyclic load
$\varepsilon_r$	radial strain

$\Delta S$	change in total particle surface area
$\varepsilon_s$	shear strain
$\varepsilon_v$	volumetric strain
$\Delta W_k$	difference between $W_{ki}$ and $W_{kf}$
$A$	area between particle size distribution curves before and after loading
$a$	asperity diameter
$A$	material constant
$a$	regression coefficient
$a'$	settlement after one cycle
$a_0$	coefficient
$B$	material constant
$b$	regression coefficient
$B$	area between final particle size distribution and the arbitrary boundary of maximum breakage
$b'$	sleeper breadth
$b_0$	coefficient
$BBI$	ballast breakage index
$B_g$	breakage index
$b_p$	breakage potential
$B_p$	total breakage potential
$b_{pl}$	values of $b_p$ after loading
$b_{po}$	values of $b_p$ before loading
$B_r$	relative breakage
$B_t$	total breakage
$C$	regression coefficient
$c'$	coefficient
$CSDZ$	compressive stable degradation zone
$C_u$	coefficient of uniformity
$D$	particle diameter
$D$	regression coefficient
$d\varepsilon_a/dN$	rate of axial strain
$d_1$	diameter of largest particle retained on a particular sieve
$d_2$	diameter of smallest particle retained on a particular sieve

$d_{95}$	95% of the maximum sieve aperture $d_{\max}$
DFT	discrete Fourier transform
$d_h$	horizontal distance between rail centres
DIF	dynamic impact factor
$d_m$	mean particle diameter
$d_{\max}$	maximum sieve aperture
$d_{\min}$	minimum sieve aperture
$d_s$	superelevation deficiency
DUDZ	dilatant unstable degradation zone
$E$	regression coefficient
$e_0$	initial void ratio
$E_r$	rail modulus
$F$	axial force
$F$	regression coefficient
$g$	distance between rail centres
$G$	gap grading
$g$	regression coefficient
$G$	regression coefficient
$G_s$	specific gravity
$H$	regression coefficient
$h$	regression coefficient
$h$	vertical distance from rail top to vehicle centre of mass
$I_r$	rail moment of inertia
$k$	regression coefficient
$K_0$	coefficient of earth pressure at rest
$k_0$	initial permeability
$k_1$	material constant
$k_2$	material constant
$k_3$	material constant
$l$	total sleeper length
$L$	effective sleeper length
$M$	moderate grading
$m$	regression coefficient
$M_R$	resilient modulus

$n$	ballast porosity
$N$	number of loading cycles
$n$	regression coefficient
$n_1$	regression coefficient
$N_{\text{int}}$	number of loading cycles per interval
ODZ	optimum degradation zone
$P$	static wheel load
$p$	regression constant
$p'$	mean effective stress
PSD	particle size distribution
$Q$	wheel load
$q_{\text{max,cyc}}/p'$	stress ratio
$q/p'_{\text{failure}}$	stress ratio at failure during a stepwise cyclic test
$q/p'_{\text{final}}$	stress ratio at 20% axial strain during a stepwise cyclic test
$q/p'_{\text{peak,sta}}$	peak stress ratio during a static test
$Q_{\text{max,cyc}}$	maximum cyclic load
$Q_{\text{min,cyc}}$	minimum cyclic load
$Q_{\text{peak,sta}}$	static peak deviator stress
$q_r$	actual load transmitted to sleeper from static wheel
$R$	constant
$R$	ratio of cyclic deviator stress to static failure deviator stress
$R^2$	coefficient of determination
$S$	surface area
$s$	regression coefficient
SA	surface area
$S_N$	settlement after a particular number of cycles
$S_w$	specific surface area
$t$	probability of maximum allowable rail deflection not being exceeded
$t$	regression coefficient
$t'$	sleeper thickness
$u$	material constant
$U$	uniform grading
$u'$	track modulus

v	material constant
V	train speed
V'	volume
VU	very uniform grading
W <sub>kf</sub>	percentage by weight retained on each sieve after loading
W <sub>ki</sub>	percentage by weight retained on each sieve before loading
x	empirical coefficient
Y	coefficient
y <sub>r</sub>	rail deflection