



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

November 28, 2012

In Reply Refer To:
HRDI-60

Mr. Ananth K. Prasad
Chair
Transportation Research Board
Long-Term Bridge Performance Committee
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Prasad:

Thank you for the August 3 letter report of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Long-Term Bridge Performance (LTBP) Committee's findings and recommendations from our May 30-31 meeting. We remain committed to meet regularly and look forward to your comments and suggestions as we consider the recommendations provided in your letter report. We appreciate your committee's continuing review and advice and both are quite valuable to the success of the LTBP program.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) appreciates your leadership as Committee Chair and the Committee's feedback. This letter has been prepared in response to the issues the Committee specifically referred to in your second letter report.

The FHWA appreciates the Committee's comments that pertain to expediting the release of the LTBP field testing protocols as well as other program-related reports, plans, and products. Also, we agree with your views that your productivity will increase as your knowledge of the goals, activities, accomplishments, and plans of the LTBP program broadens and deepens. We will continue to coordinate with the three TRB Expert Task Groups (ETG) to make sure these documents are reviewed in a timely manner and sent out as quickly as possible per FHWA's publishing standards.

One of the key elements of the LTBP program has been the development of a draft LTBP strategic plan in partnership with our stakeholders. We believe that the final strategic plan will provide the overall goals of the program in a well-defined plan of action, which will include the vision and mission statements, tactical roadmap, data collection plan and associated field testing protocols, data analysis plan, data management plan, communication and outreach plan, and the product delivery plan. We are currently working on a data collection plan similar to the "Tablecloth" utilized in the Long-Term Pavement Performance program that will help clarify the LTBP program's strategic plan and the relationship between the data and the expected products. The Committee can expect a presentation on the draft data collection plan at an upcoming meeting.

The ultimate goal of the LTBP program is to help bridge owners make the best decisions possible in managing and maintaining their bridge inventory. Therefore, the FHWA LTBP program will deliver data-driven, risk-based decisionmaking tools that support the needs of bridge owners with the assistance of the FHWA Resource Center and division offices, and the LTBP State Coordinators. The FHWA will continue to coordinate with the State bridge owners as we have done in the past, via face-to-face meetings, State coordinators meetings, and interviews to identify the most important bridge issues to address.

We understand your concern regarding the use of Department of Energy (DOE) climate zones in the selection or identification of potential bridges. The DOE climatic zones were used only as a screening tool to make sure that bridge clusters were selected to reflect a large variety of environmental exposures. We will gather the actual measured environmental conditions and data for each reference and cluster bridge site during the long-term data collection phase.

The LTBP program is currently in the process of refining both a quality control and a data integrity plan. These plans were initially established by the LTBP contracting team and were validated during the pilot phase of the program. These plans will be living documents and likely be further refined as we transition from the pilot phase into the long-term data collection phase of the program.

The FHWA also appreciates the Committee's recommendation regarding the inclusion of local bridges in each of the data collection clusters and corridors of the program. As we move forward with the selection of bridges for each cluster and corridor, we will consider - to the extent possible - the inclusion of both State and local bridges. We will ensure that each cluster and corridor adequately represents the whole population of bridges nationwide - regardless of ownership - with respect to configuration (length, width, connectivity, and number of spans), as well as materials, loads, environment, and maintenance strategy.

As you pointed out, the LTBP program will require communication and outreach as key components to succeed. For that reason, we have expanded our outreach efforts to include a much larger group as was shown during the last 10 months in nine meetings that included two main TRB committee meetings, three ETG meetings, a TRB workshop, an industry day, an American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Subcommittee on Bridges and Structures meeting, and two State coordinator meetings. In addition, we will continue to provide States and other stakeholder groups continual access to LTBP data and findings through conferences, Webinars, technical articles, workshops, and an industry day.

The FHWA appreciates the Committee's comments regarding the need to continually monitor progress of the program. As evidenced by the outcomes defined in the LTBP Strategic Plan, our expectations for the long-term impact that this program will have are significant for bridge safety, management, investments, and the mobility of highway users. At this time, the success of the program is measured through meeting the goals as set forth within the Strategic Plan. When appropriate, an impartial party will conduct a program assessment, with the assistance of the TRB LTBP Committee.

In terms of access to both measured and derived data housed within the LTBP Bridge Portal, there will potentially be multiple levels of user access to the database and associated tools. It is important to note that the General Public User Groups will have limited, read-only access to measured data on the portal and not derived data. It is not the goal of the LTBP program to make State-by-State comparisons of bridge performance, but rather to provide all measured and derived data to the bridge community in a responsible manner to improve the understanding of bridge performance.

Again, thank you and the members of your Committee for your support and dedication to the LTBP program. Should you have any questions regarding this response or the LTBP program, please feel free to contact Mr. Michael Trentacoste at (202) 493-3999, or Dr. Hamid Ghasemi at (202) 493-3042.

Sincerely,



Victor M. Mendez
Administrator