

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**TESTIMONY**

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**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Thank you, Chairman Padilla and members of the committee for the opportunity to report to you on Caltrans' responsibilities for safety inspections of in-service bridges. My name is Dolores Valls and I am the State Bridge Maintenance Engineer for Caltrans. I am here on behalf of Malcolm Dougherty, the Director of the California Department of Transportation.

Our network of bridges is crucial to the safety, economic prosperity and mobility of California. As the State Bridge Maintenance Engineer, I am responsible for directing the activities of the Caltrans Structure Maintenance and Investigations unit, which is charged with ensuring the safety and reliability of California's bridge inventory.

There are more than 26,000 state highway, city and county bridges in California. Each of those bridges undergoes regularly scheduled inspections by trained and experienced civil engineers with an expertise in bridges. All 50 states are required by a Federal mandate to perform bridge inspections and report the findings from those inspections in a report at regular intervals for all public road bridges.

The Department has State budget authority to use State resources to perform bridge inspections, which is 100% federally reimbursed.

## **BRIDGE INSPECTIONS**

The Federal Highway Administration sets the National Bridge Inspection Standards that Caltrans follows. During every bridge inspection, Caltrans engineers look for any signs of distress that could compromise the structural integrity of the bridge. We have 110 trained Caltrans engineers devoted to field inspections of bridges. These inspections are performed in two person teams.

The inspection teams assess the structural condition of each bridge, looking for any indications of potential problems. They examine the bridge deck – the riding surface – looking for cracks or other signs of distress and evaluate its condition. The same process is followed on the superstructure – the structural members that support the deck – and the substructure – the bridge support elements or foundation of the bridge. These are visual inspections unless the distressed condition requires a more in depth inspection, or material tests and an engineering analysis.

To ensure the safety of the inspection teams whenever they are near or over a railroad track, Caltrans coordinates with the railroad by applying for permits to inspect railroad bridges and requests and pays for railroad flaggers.

## **BRIDGES**

Of our more than 26,000 bridges in California, only a relatively small fraction – approximately 1,800 – cross paths with commercial railroad lines. Half of these are state-owned bridges, which Caltrans is responsible for inspecting typically every two years. The remaining bridges are owned by cities, counties and other governmental agencies and are located off the state highway system.

Caltrans is responsible and performs the same bridge inspection for local bridges that cross over railroads. Inspection reports for local bridges are transmitted to the local agency bridge owners.

For bridges that carry railroads over a roadway, the National standards do not require Caltrans to perform the same bridge inspection. For these bridges, Caltrans is only responsible for transmitting location and clearance data to the Federal Highway Administration. However, it is Caltrans policy to also inspect the supports or foundations that are located within state right of way or near a public roadway in consideration of the safety of the traveling public.

In addition to state and locally owned bridges, Caltrans also inspects and maintains portions of the supports or foundations of approximately 60 bridges owned by the railroads per signed Maintenance Agreements with railroad companies.

Caltrans has no authority over how railroads operate or how the railroads maintain their bridges. Our responsibility involving the inspection of bridges carrying railroads over state highways is limited and clearly defined.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you information on the Caltrans Bridge Inspection Program. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.