

Comparative Studies of Combinations of Treated and Untreated Bases and Subbases for Flexible Pavements

CHARLES W. JOHNSON, Materials and Testing Engineer, New Mexico State Highway Department

New Mexico's experimental Project No. F-051-1 (8) was constructed to compare "upside down" stabilization with other base construction. The term was applied to the design because it called for the subbase material to be treated with cement.

Nine experimental sections were constructed. The objective was to determine the effect of subbase stabilization compared to base course stabilization and the effect of a lower cement content in the base. Of particular interest is possible degradation of the mineral aggregates in all sections. The treated subbase sections should eliminate intrusion of subgrade soils into the base.

Through periodic inspections and check testing it is hoped that better knowledge can be obtained to determine which design provides the best protection for future distortion and roughness. An attempt will be made to evaluate the various designs relative to costs and serviceability.

● **THROUGHOUT NEW MEXICO** there has been a growing conviction that a subbase treated to obtain greater stability will solve many road construction problems. New Mexico's experimental Project F-051-1 (8) was constructed to compare "upside down" stabilization with other base construction. The term was applied to the design because it called for the subbase material to be treated with cement. The concept of building with great strength directly over weak subgrade soils reverses the accepted principle of building stability gradually upward for flexible base construction.

The basic design feature of placing untreated base materials over a rigid subbase was incorporated into several projects rebuilt in 1954. Several old concrete pavements in the vicinity of Albuquerque had become so cracked and distorted that reconstruction was necessary. The old pavements were covered with 6 in. of untreated base material compacted and reshaped to typical section. Over the reshaped sections 2 in. of asphaltic hot plant mixed surfacing were placed. After six years of heavy traffic the surfaces remain in remarkably good condition. No reflective cracking has developed and string line checks show little rutting or distortion. Prior to 1954, old concrete pavements were overlayed with asphaltic mixtures. The pavements continued to pump under traffic, and distortion rapidly developed. Usually within a year the crack patterns of the old concrete reflected through the asphaltic surface.

In 1958, New Mexico commenced to use cement extensively to treat base course aggregates. Pattern cracking which appeared in the surface course caused much concern among road builders.

INTERSTATE 010-1 (8) 6, ROAD FORKS—EAST

On one New Mexico Project, I-010-1 (8) 6, Road Forks—East, the contractor became alarmed when, after having completed approximately one-half the length of the project, pattern cracking appeared in the plant mixed surface course. He requested permission to change his operations and process the cement in the subbase aggregate. He pointed out good reasons for the change: immediate protection of the subgrade from

surface moisture, better compaction of the untreated base because of a firmer foundation, reflective cracking in the surface course alleviated by a cushioning intermediate layer, and in all probability a smoother-riding road. In New Mexico practically all cement treatments are processed by road mix methods. The time specified to process, compact, and shape the treated materials did not permit the necessary blade work to obtain the smoothness desired for surface course placement.

The New Mexico Highway Department had previously used variations of the upside down construction on urban projects where subgrade conditions were unfavorable to good construction. Unstable subgrade soils caused by leaky water pipes and poor drainage were bridged by treating the subbase with cement. In all cases performance under traffic appeared to be satisfactory. Because of the reasons stated by the contractor and the Department's previous experience, he was given permission to treat the subbase instead of the base.

Without any planning or much forethought all the features of an experimental project were born. The contractor, in the interest of better flexible base construction, agreed to construct other variations of base and subbase stabilization at no additional cost to the state. Variations paired were (a) untreated base and subbase; (b) base course treated with $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent cement and subbase treated with 3 percent cement; and (c) base course treated with $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent cement placed over an untreated subbase. Throughout the project 3 in. of asphaltic plant mixed surfacing were laid, except for the section of the interstate connection where $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. of plant mix were placed over an untreated base and a subbase treated with 3 percent cement.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS, F-051-1 (8)

The materials and testing laboratory recommended the upside down design for several projects. One of the projects so recommended was located on US 64 north of Santa Fe, between Tesuque and Pojoaque. Samples taken from the subgrade soils were found to be loaded with mica on which water acted rapidly and caused a greater loss of stability than normally expected for the soils encountered. It was thought that cement stabilization of the subbase would prevent any intrusion of the micaceous materials into the base.

Bureau of Public Roads engineers pointed out that the limited use of the design did not provide enough background for standard application. Following normal procedure they requested further justification and documentation before approval could be given for its use. Several conferences ensued and the facets of the design were discussed in some detail.

The discussions disclosed opinions which differed on whether or not reflective cracking was a forerunner of distress. Several engineers believed that cracking was undesirable but thought it could be alleviated by reducing the amount of cement used. Others thought that cement would be of little benefit unless slab strength were developed. Ideas about the upside down design centered on the untreated base course layer. One engineer felt strongly that the aggregates should be of top quality, well-graded, and the fines sandy and nonplastic. Samples tested from one of the Albuquerque projects, reconstructed in 1954, had plastic indexes ranging from five to seven. The same engineer pointed out that the dynamic forces from moving loads were more or less confined within a granular layer and could be causing degradation of the aggregates which may have caused the material to be plastic. Project records showed some plasticity, but the issue was not clear.

Another engineer introduced the subject of asphalt. He believed that asphaltic treated materials would perform equally as well as cement-treated aggregates. Upside down or right side up, reflective cracking would not be a problem. No one, so far as is known, brought up the subject of lime. However, some conjecture developed about the need of treating either base or subbase aggregates. Where was the proof that any benefits existed? One thing was certain: Factual information supported by scientific data were not available for many of the ideas expressed.

INFORMATION ABOUT EXPERIMENTAL SECTIONS

Eventually, treatment of the subbase with cement was chosen for the basic structural design of Project F-051-1 (8), but included were experimental sections each 2,000 ft long to make comparative studies of treated and untreated bases and subbases. The make-up of each experimental section was restricted to those discussed and about which the proponents seemed to have strong convictions. It might be said that the experimental Project F-051-1 (8) came about because of differences of opinion among engineers and a desire to know the truth.

It was agreed to construct each section to full stabilization, which in New Mexico is determined by the relationship between the traffic index and the California R. Values. Credit for gravel equivalent thickness of $1\frac{1}{2}$ times was taken for both the asphalt and cement stabiliza-

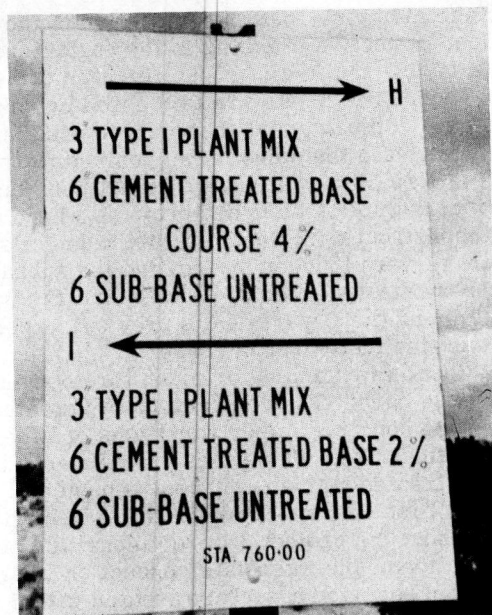


Figure 1. Information sign for Section H.

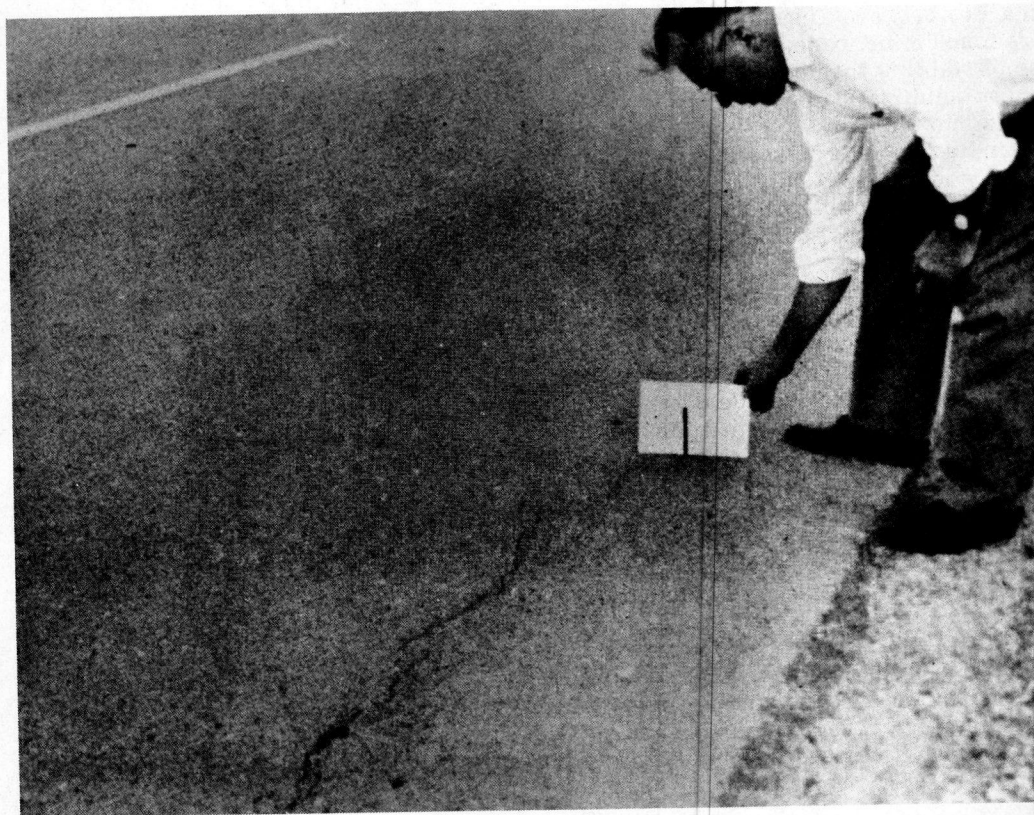


Figure 2. Station 360+00, longitudinal cracking 1 ft in from inner edge of passing lane, eastbound roadway, August 16, 1960.

ion where 4 percent additives were used and for the asphaltic surface course. No credit was taken for the Class C stabilization in the section using 2 percent cement.

The same company which built I-010-1 (8) 6, Road Forks—East, was awarded the contract. The company tried earnestly to comply with each letter of the specifications. R. L. Baker, project engineer, supervised the work. John Jaramillo, laboratory technician from the central laboratory, inspected the work, lifted the samples, and compiled the records. All record samples were taken after the work was completed and tested in the central laboratory. The top 6 in. of subgrade, the subbase, and the base courses were specified to be compacted to a minimum of 95 percent modified Proctor density. Density tests of the completed work show that compactions well above the minimum requirements were generally obtained.

Because of plastic and nonplastic requirements, two separate material pits were designated for production of mineral aggregates for base, subbase, and surface construction. One was located in the Pojoaque River, from which the nonplastic base and surface course materials were obtained. The other was from a hill deposit which contained natural fines compatible to obtain plastic indexes ranging from three to six.

To assist inspection of this project there are signs at the beginning and end of each design change with information giving the stations and how each section is constructed (Fig. 1). There are nine experimental test sections designated by letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I. Section A is the control section and is typical of both right and left lanes throughout the project, excepting the comparative experimental group B through I. All the comparative sections were constructed on the northbound lane.

The contractor's superintendent was asked which of the experimental sections he had found the easiest to construct. He replied that he preferred either the asphalt-



Fig. 3. Station 460+00, $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. rutting in outer wheel path of traffic lane, eastbound roadway, August 16, 1960.

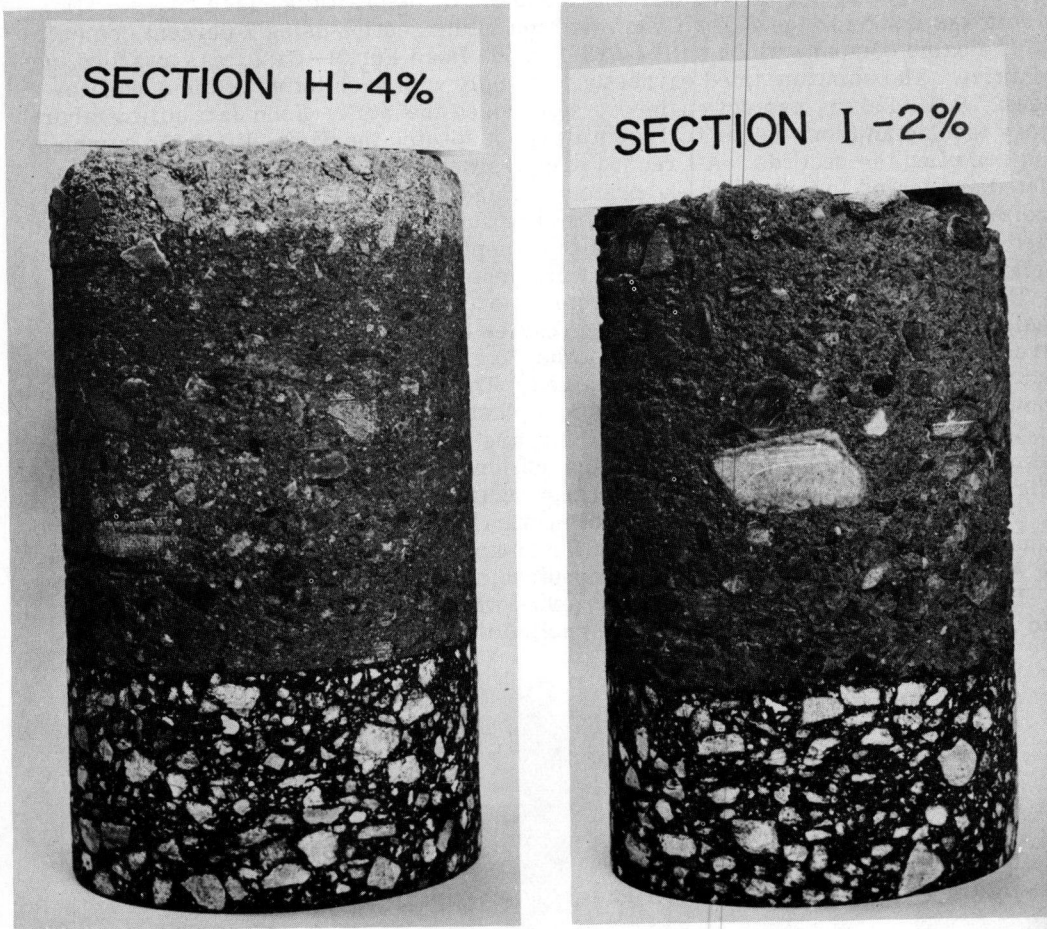


Figure 4. Cores taken from experimental project Sections H and I.

treated base or the upside down construction having a three to six plastic index in the intermediate layer. The sandy nonplastic material was difficult to hold to the typical section.

INSPECTION COMMENTS, F-051-1 (8)

On August 15, 1960, the first official examination of the completed experimental sections was made (Figs. 2 and 3). Observing the tests were W. L. Eager and L. H. Miller from the Bureau of Public Roads; and C. W. Johnson, and John J. Plese from the New Mexico State Highway Department.

Road roughnesses were measured with the Regional Bureau of Public Roads roughness indicator through the experimental sections. It was desired to obtain initial roughness readings before any change had occurred through traffic or natural conditions. All of the sections gave good readings, although there is some indication that sections which have treated base course materials immediately under the mat are rougher than other sections. These results will be compared with future tests during the life of the experimental work. Tabulation of the results obtained are attached to the Appendices of this paper.

String line checks were made on each section to determine if any rutting had developed from contractor's trucks hauling over the completed work. No rutting was found

on any of the experimental sections on F-051-1 (8), Tesuque-Pojoaque.

The only surface cracks found were in Sections Hand I, where the base was treated with cement immediately under the mat. Section H was treated with 4 percent cement and Section I was treated with 2 percent cement (Fig. 4). Transverse and pattern cracking were noted in both sections, but none were thought to be damaging as yet. The best indication of what to expect came from a previous survey of regularly-spaced transverse shoulder cracks where the plant mix was laid 1½ in. thick. One hundred and thirty-six transverse cracks were found in Section H, where 4 percent cement was used. One hundred and thirty-seven cracks were found in the shoulder of Section I, where 2 percent cement was used.

On November 10, 1960, Benkelman beam deflections were measured at three separate locations of each experimental section. Using 10,800-lb wheel loads the average results ranged from 14.4 to 24.0 thousandths of an inch, which was considered good. As could be expected, readings were higher for Sections E and F, where neither the base nor subbase were treated.

INSPECTION COMMENTS, I-010-1 (8) 6

After one year of heavy traffic, rutting in the surface had developed to a depth of ¼ in. on the Road Forks—East Project, I-010-1 (8) 6. No pronounced differences could be perceived in the upside down or conventional stabilizations. Longitudinal cracks about 1 ft from the paved shoulder are pronounced in the passing lane from station 326+15 to station 600+00, where the base was stabilized with 3 percent cement. From station 600+00 to station 800+00, where the subbase was treated with cement, the longitudinal cracks were located in the paved shoulder about 2 ft away, relative to the other crack position. Longitudinal cracks and rutting appear to be more associated with soil and moisture conditions than with the design of base and subbase courses. The road from



Figure 5. Typical high shrinkage clay soil in bed of dry lake, August 16, 1960.

station 326+15 to station 800+00 traverses a shallow lake with alternately dry and wet cycles (Fig. 5). Summer traffic seemed to have closed up most of the transverse reflective cracking from the cement-treated base. These cracks will no doubt tend to open up during colder weather. Roughness readings (tabulated in the Appendices) were somewhat rougher than the initial readings recorded on F-051-1 (8). Inasmuch as roughness measurements were not taken immediately after construction on I-010-1 (8) it is not known if traffic and weathering contribute to roughness.

Information about design requirements and tests data covering compaction densities, roughness measurements, and Benkelman beam readings for both I-010-1 (8) 6 and F-051-1 (8), experimental projects is in the Appendices.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the comparative sections were to determine the effect of subbase stabilization and the effects of other design variations.

Through periodic inspections and check testing it is hoped that better knowledge can be obtained to determine which design provides the best protection from future distortion and roughness. Of particular interest is possible degradation of the mineral aggregates in all sections. It is felt that the treated subbase sections should eliminate erosion of subgrade soils into the base and therefore provide a good opportunity to

determine if degradation is actually taking place. Assuming that it does take place, it would be desirable to know the rate and amount of degradation that can be expected before distress in the surface is indicated. Because reflective cracking has provoked so much discussion, the Department hopes to determine if this defect contributes to distortion and roughness developing in the riding surface.

Although economy was not considered in the original planning, everyone is interested in contract and maintenance costs. An attempt will be made to evaluate the various designs relative to costs and serviceability in the hope that a guide can be established to determine which is the best bargain for the money expended.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance rendered by O. G. Betancourt, of the central laboratory, in the preparation of this paper.

Appendix A

F-058-1 (8) TESUQUE-POJOAQUE

EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT TEST SECTIONS

PROJECT F-051-1 (8)

TESUQUE - POJOAQUE

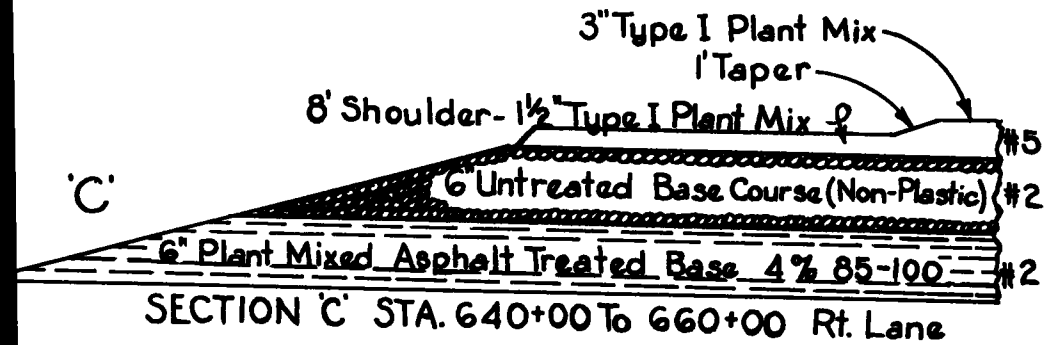
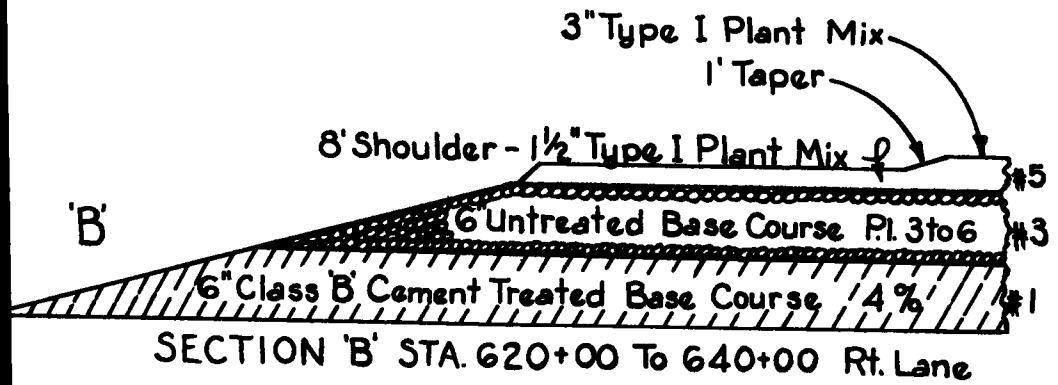
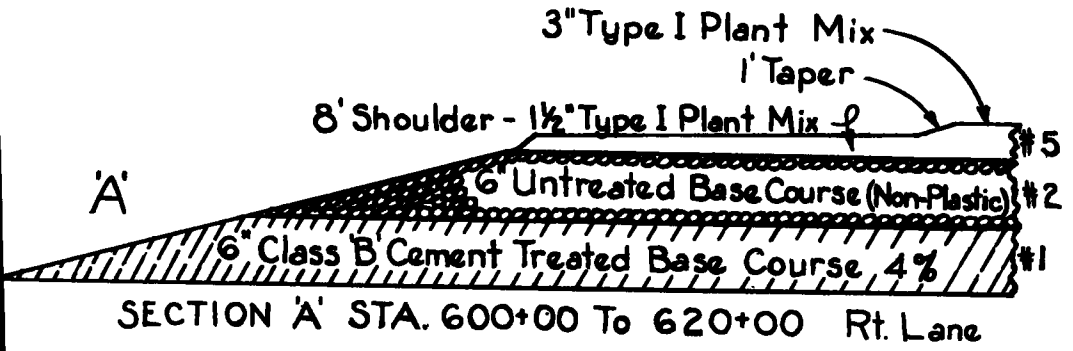
B. O. P. STA. 387+96 E.O.P. STA. 819+00
Test sections begin at Sta. 600+00 and end at Sta. 780+00

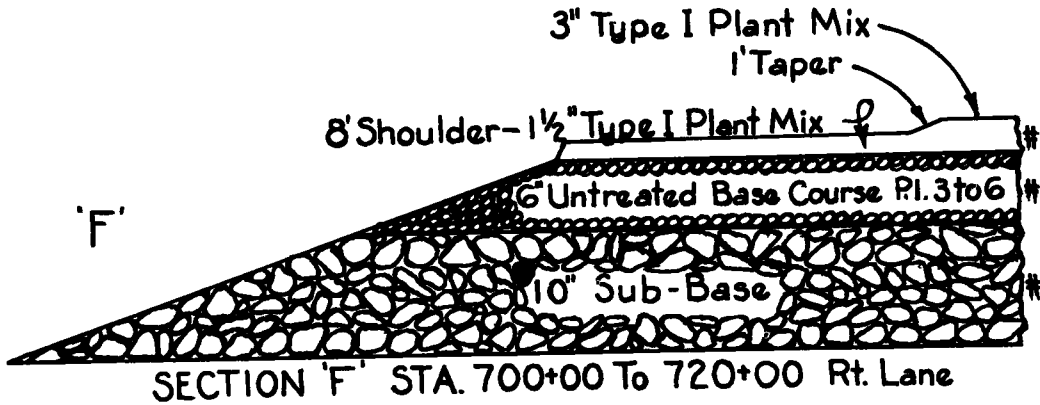
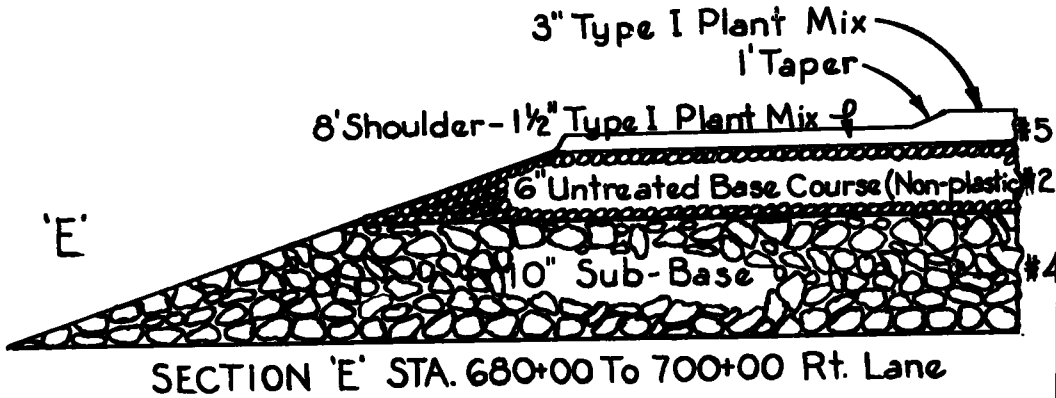
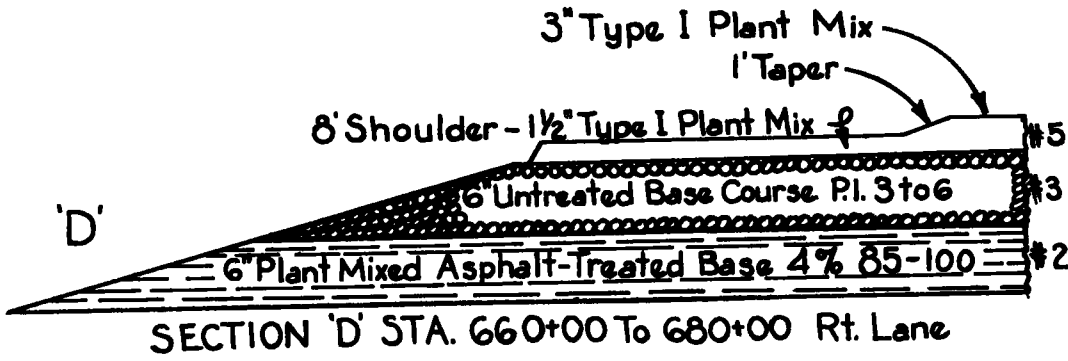
TEST SECTIONS: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I.

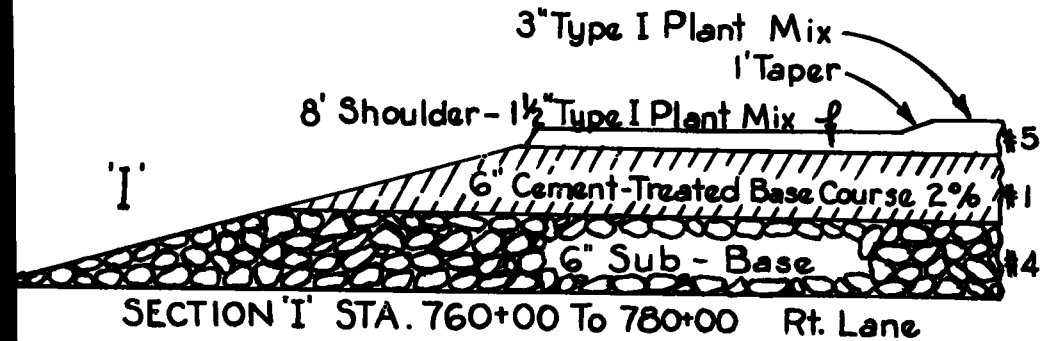
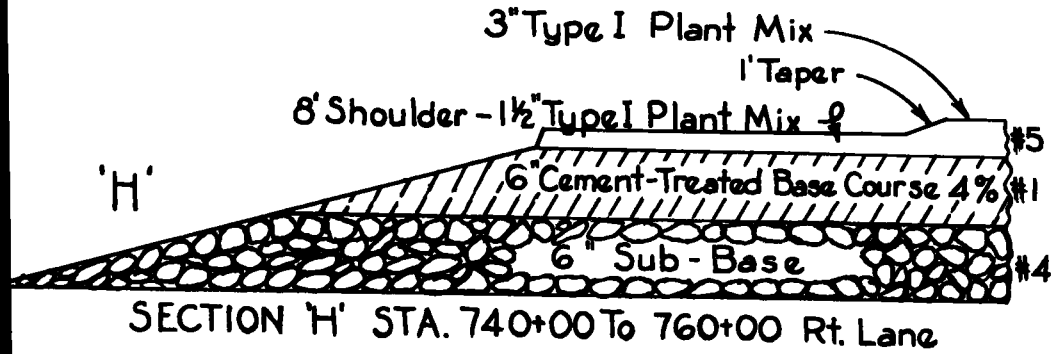
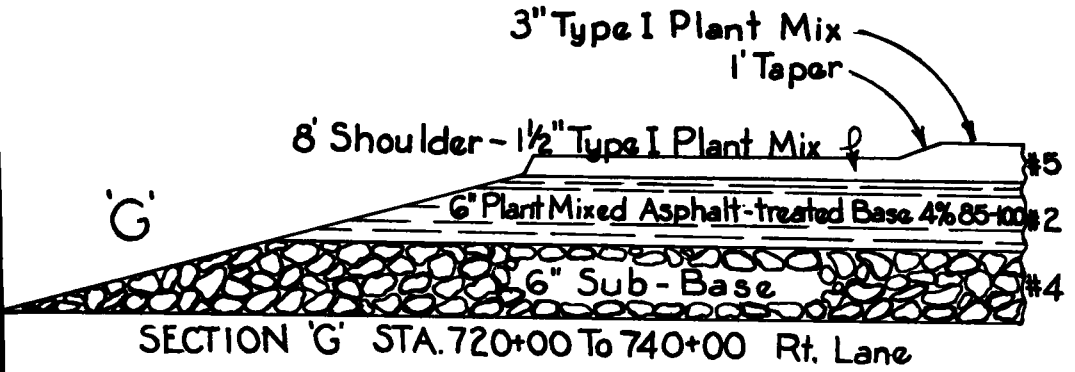
Note: Section A is typical of both right and left lanes for the entire project, excluding test sections B through I.

- #1 - Cement-treated base course produced from Pit No. 58-126-S.
- #2 - Untreated base course and asphalt-treated base course produced from Pit No. 58-124-S (non-plastic material)
- #3 - Untreated base course with P.I. from 3 to 6 produced from Pit. No. 58-126-S.
- #4 - Subbase controlled gradation produced from Pit No. 58-124-S and Pit No. 58-126-S.
- #5)
- #6) Plant mix and mineral aggregate for shoulder treatment produced from Pit No. 58-124-S.

RECOMMENDED SPECIFICATIONS FOR SURFACING AGGREGATES - % PASSING						
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Sieve Size	Base Course Cement Treated	Base Course Untreated & Asphalt-Treated	Base Course Untreated P.I. 3 to 6	Subbase Controlled Gradation	Plant Mix Type I B	Mineral Agg. Shoulder Treatment.
2"				100		
1"	100	100	100	70-100		
3/4"	85-100	80-100	80-100		100	
5/8"						100
1/2"					70-100	
3/8"					55-85	
No. 4	40-70	30-60	30-60	30-55	40-65	0-20
No. 10	30-55	20-45	20-45	20-40	30-50	0-4
No. 40					15-30	
No. 80					8-20	
No. 200	6-15	4-12	4-12	4-12	4-9	
L. L.	25 or less	Sandy	25 or less	35 or less	Sandy	
P. I.	6 or less	Non-Plastic	3 to 6	6 or less	Nonplastic	
L.A. Wear	50 or less	50 or less	50 or less	—	40 or less	40 or less







AVERAGE DENSITIES OBTAINED DURING CONSTRUCTION
New Mexico Project F-051-1 (8)

Section	Subgrade	MODIFIED PROCTOR			Plant Mixed Surface Course			
		Average Densities			% Theo. Density		% Lab. Density	
		Treated Base	Treated Base	Untreated Base	Bottom Course	Top Course	Bottom Course	Top Course
A	97.1	97.0 ^a	-----	97.9	95.6	95.6	100.6	98.7
B	99.7	98.2 ^a	-----	103.2	95.5	96.8	100.2	101.2
C	98.8	91.8 ^b	100.5 ^c	101.1	97.1	95.3	99.3	100.1
D	96.3	91.7 ^b	99.2 ^c	98.7	97.1	96.1	96.9	100.5
E	97.9	99.5 ^d	-----	98.5	95.9	95.7	95.2	99.4
F	99.6	98.7 ^d	-----	99.8	96.8	96.4	100.0	99.6
G	97.0	92.3 ^b	99.2 ^c	98.2 ^d	96.6	95.4	99.98	98.2
H	96.4	99.5 ^d	96.0 ^a	-----	97.2	96.3	99.4	99.3
I	97.3	99.6 ^d	96.5 ^a	-----	97.6	95.7	98.6	99.3

^a cement-treated base^b asphalt-treated base; % theo. density^c asphalt-treated base; % lab. density^d subbase

Subgrade, subbase, untreated base, and cement-treated base: modified proctor density. Asphalt-treated base and plant mixed surfacing: Marshall hammer, 75 blows on each side.

SUMMARY OF SURFACE ROUGHNESS MEASUREMENTS

New Mexico Project F-051-1(8)

Tesuque-Pojoaque

August 15, 1960

Sect.	Station to Station	Subbase	Base	Roughness		
				Going North (1)	Going South (1)	Going South (2)
				In/Sect.	In/Mi.	In/Sect.
A	600-620	6" CTB - 4%	6" Untreated No PI	16	42	18
B	620-640	6" CTB - 4%	6" Untreated 3-6 PI	18	47	20
C	640-660	6" ATB - 4%	6" Untreated No PI	18	47	20
D	660-680	6" ATB - 4%	6" Untreated 3-6 PI	18	47	20
E	680-700	10" Subbase (2")	6" Untreated No PI	21	55	19
F	700-720	10" Subbase (2")	6" Untreated 3-6 PI	19	50	23
G	720-740	6" Subbase (2")	6" ATB - 4%	21	55	24
H	740-760	6" Subbase (2")	6" CTB - 4%	23	61	24
I	760-780	6" Subbase (2")	6" CTB - 2%	21	55	21

NOTES:

3" Type One plant mix, 2 courses, on all sections

CTB = Cement Treated Base

ATB = Asphalt Treated Base

(1) = Outside or traffic lane

(2) = Inside or passing lane

Subbase = 2" maximum size, PI 6 or less

BENKELMAN BEAM TEST RESULTS

Project No. F-051-1(8)

Tesuque to Pojoaque

Date: 11-8-60 & 11-9-60

Surface:

3" Plant Mix

Wheel Load: L = 10810, R = 10800

Experimental Section:

Sta. 600+00 to 780+00

All Tests Made in Driving Lane of North Bound Lane.

Station	Experimental Test Section	Deflection in Thousandth of an Inch			Cut or fill section
		Low	High	Average	
601+00	A	8	12	10.4	Cut
610+00	A	12	18	16.4	Fill
617+00	A	12	24	16.6	Cut
622+00	B	18	22	19.3	Fill
625+75	B	16	22	19.7	Fill
635+00	B	14	22	18.8	Cut
643+00	C	16	22	19.0	Cut
650+50	C	16	20	17.3	Cut
657+74	C	12	16	14.3	Cut
663+00	D	12	16	14.0	Cut to fill
668+00	D	14	20	16.7	Cut
674+83	D	20	24	22.4	Cut
682+00	E	24	32	28.4	Cut
688+50	E	20	22	20.4	Fill
696+00	E	22	24	23.2	Grade
703+00	F	22	28	25.4	Fill
710+00	F	20	24	22.0	Fill
716+00	F	20	26	23.4	Fill
722+00	G	16	20	17.0	Cut
730+50	G	18	20	19.6	Fill
736+11	G	14	16	15.6	Fill
742+84	H	14	22	19.7	Fill
749+25	H	16	20	17.6	Cut
757+00	H	6	10	7.0	Cut
763+60	I	12	16	14.2	Cut
772+50	I	12	14	13.0	Cut
778+44	I	22	26	24.0	Fill

Appendix B

I-010-1 (8) 6 ROAD FORKS—EAST

EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT TEST SECTIONS

PROJECT I-010-1 (8)6

ROAD FORKS - EAST

B.O.P. STA. 326+15.47

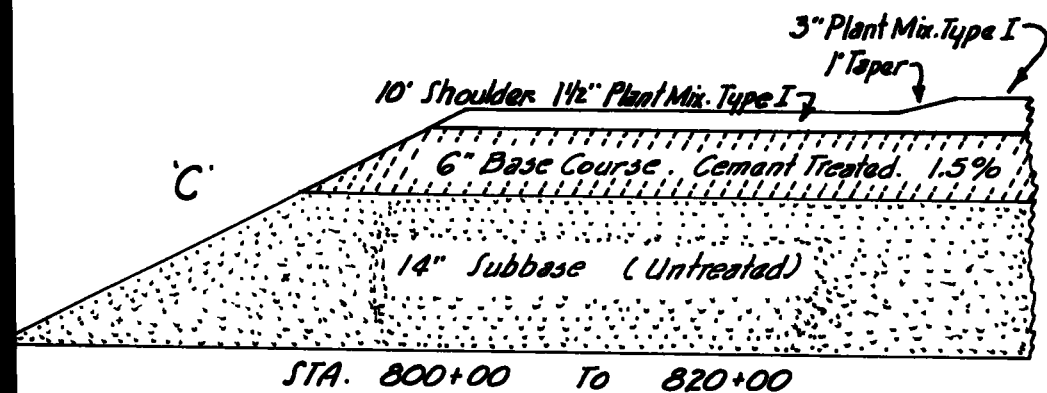
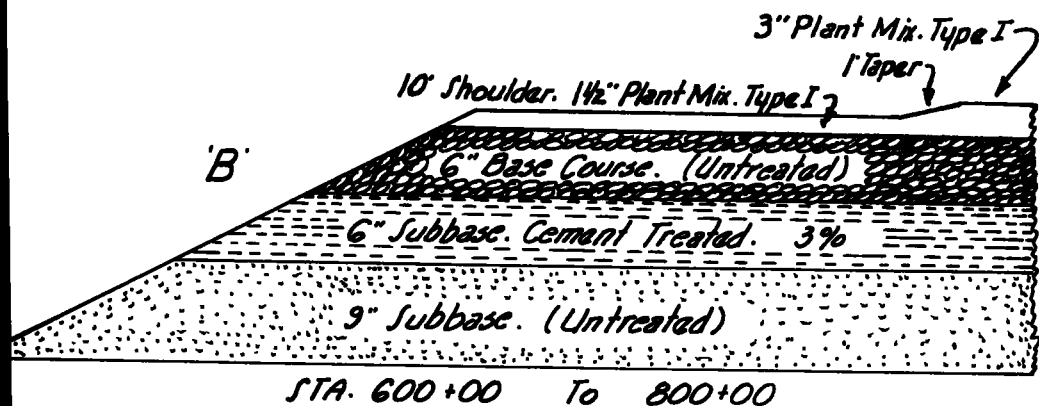
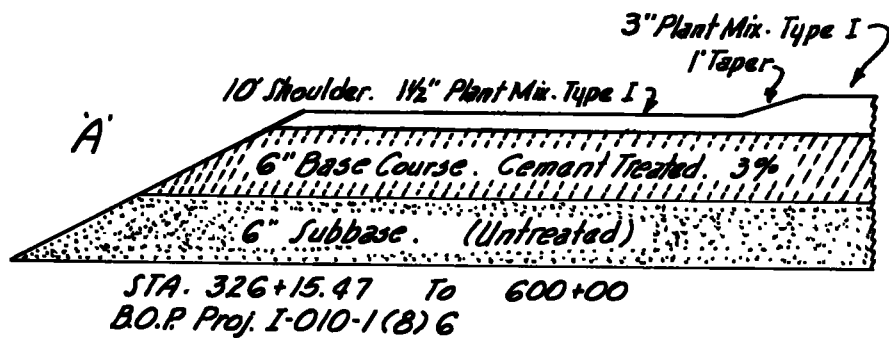
E.O.P. STA. 1088+28.4

TEST SECTIONS A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H.

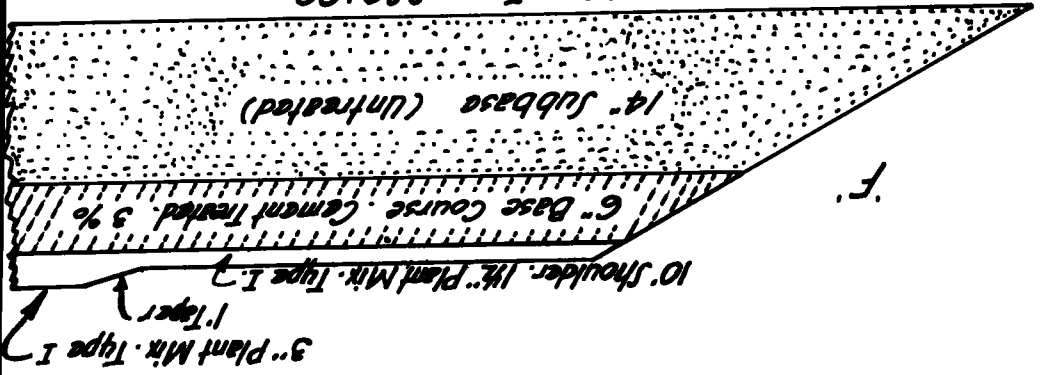
Subbase Material produced from Pit No. 58-29-S.

Base course, plant mix, and surface treatment aggregate produced from Pit No. 58-G2-S.

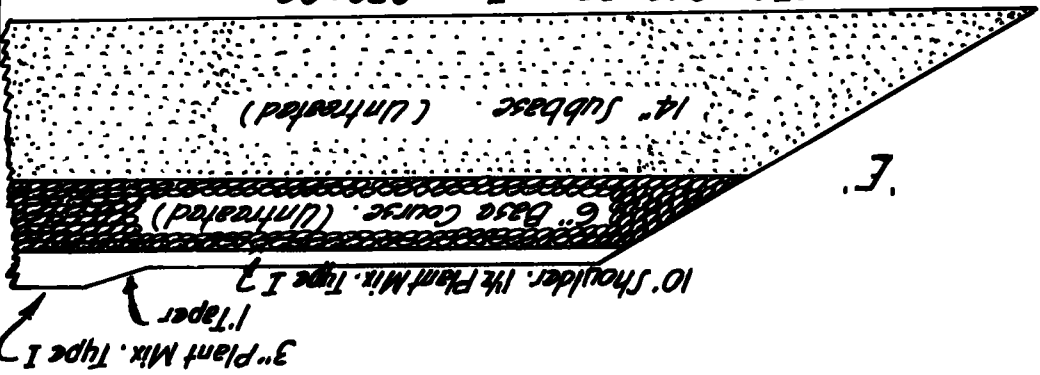
RECOMMENDED SPECIFICATIONS FOR SURFACING AGGREGATES: % PASSING						
Sieve Size	Subbase Controlled Gradation	Base Course	Mineral Agg. Plant Mix Type I	Mineral Agg. Surface Treat.	Mineral Aggregate Surface Treatment	
					1st. Course	2nd Course
2"	100					
1"		100				
3/4"		80 - 100	100		100	
5/8"				100		
1/2"			75 - 100			100
3/8"			67 - 85		0 - 25	
No. 4	25 - 70	30 - 60	50 - 65	0 - 20		0 - 20
No. 10	20 - 55	20 - 45	34 - 47	0 - 4	0 - 4	0 - 4
No. 40			14 - 24			
No. 80			8 - 16			
No. 200	4 - 15	4 - 12	4 - 8			
L.L.	35 or less	25 or less	Sandy			
P.I.	6 or less	6 or less	Non Plastic			
L.A.Wear	-	50 or less	50 or less	40 or less	40 or less	40 or less



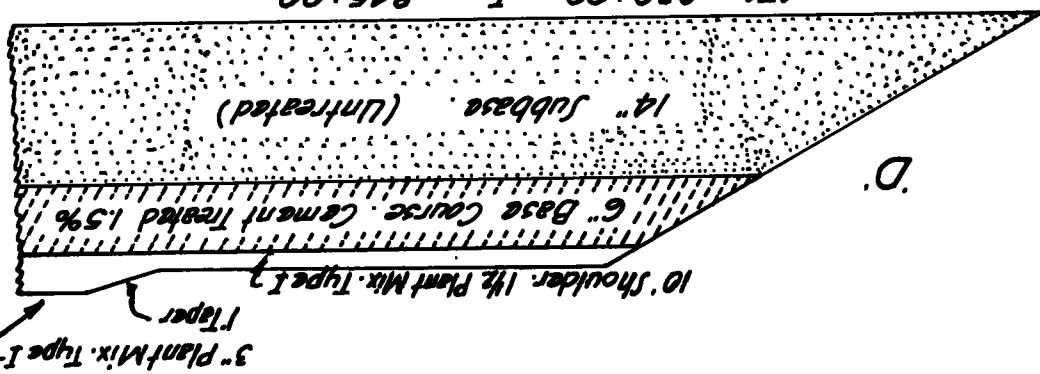
STA. 870+00 To 990+00

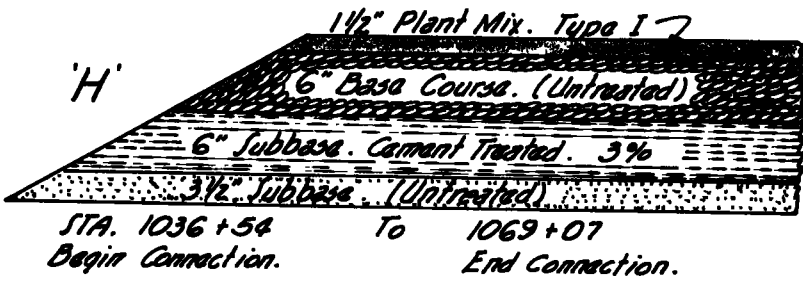
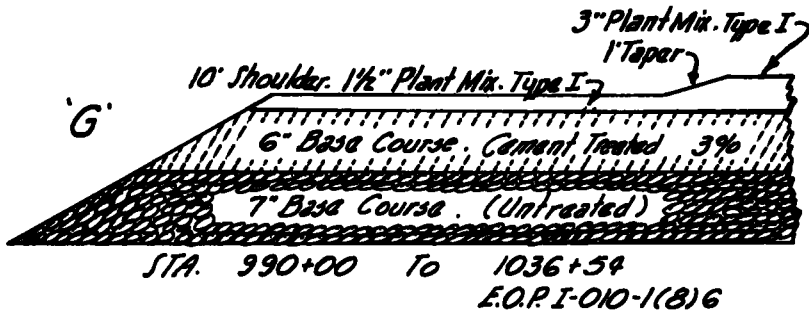


STA. 845+00 To 870+00



STA. 820+00 To 845+00





CONDITION SURVEY
New Mexico I-010-1(8)6
Road Forks - East
August 16, 1960

STATION TO STATION	SUBBASE	BASE	RUTTING ^a	Cracking ^b		ROUGHNESS INCH, M
				TRANSVERSE	LONGITUDINAL	
326+154 to 600	6" Untreated	6" CTB-3%	1/4"	Inner Edge & Shoulders	Inner Edge & Shoulders	64.6
600 to 800	9" Untreated 6" CT - 3%	6" Untreated	3/16"	None	Some Shoulders	62.7
800 to 820	8" Untreated 6" CT - 3%	6" CTB - 1 1/2%	1/8"	None	None	66.2
820 to 845	14" Untreated	6" CTB - 1 1/2%	1/4"	None	None	59.0
845 to 870	14" Untreated	6" Untreated	1/4"	None	None	63.0
870 to 990	14" Untreated	6" CTB - 3%	3/16"	None	None	68.0
990 to 1036+54	7" Untreated	6" CTB - 3%	1/8"	None	None	66.0
1036+54 to 1069+07 ^c	3 1/2" Untreated 6" CT - 3%	6" Untreated	1/8"	None	None	78.0
1069+07 to 1088+28	2" Untreated 6" CT - 3%	6" Untreated	1/8"	None	None	

a - In outer wheel path - traffic lane.

b - Where cracking marked "none" indicates could not be observed at this time - might be evident in cold weather.

c - 1 1/4" plant mix mat - 3" 2-course plant mix all other sections

BENKELMAN BEAM TEST RESULTS
N. M. Project No. 1-010-1 (8) 6,
Road Forks - East

DATE: 11-29-60

Wheel Load L = 10810, R-10800

Experimental Sections

Station	Experimental Test Section	Deflection in Thousandths of an Inch			Cut or Fill
		Low	High	Average	
350+00	A	8	18	13.6	Fill
390+00	A	24	30	26.8	Fill
440+00	A	20	26	22.4	Fill
490+00	A	12	16	14.8	Fill
560+00	A	14	30	19.6	Fill
260+00	B	14	22	18.4	Fill
660+00	B	14	18	16.3	Fill
700+00	B	18	22	20.0	Fill
740+00	B	12	16	15.2	Fill
797+00	B	6	14	10.7	Fill
805+00	C	6	16	12.8	Grade
810+00	C	10	14	11.7	Grade
815+00	C	8	10	8.7	Grade
825+00	D	12	18	15.0	Grade
832+00	D	12	20	16.7	Grade
840+00	D	10	18	14.7	Cut
850+00	E	14	18	16.4	Grade
857+00	E	16	24	20.6	Cut
865+00	E	18	20	18.0	Fill
885+00	F	6	10	8.3	Cut
900+00	F	10	12	11.3	Cut
951+00	F	10	18	13.2	Grade
985+00	F	4	8	6.8	Fill
1005+00	-	8	14	10.0	Fill
1020+00	-	8	14	12.3	Cut
1035+00	-	10	14	11.6	Cut
1045+00	-	18	22	20.0	Cut
1055+00	-	14	20	17.3	Grade
1065+50	-	12	18	14.8	Grade
1074+00	-	10	14	11.6	Grade
1079+00	-	14	18	16.0	Grade
1084+00	-	12	16	13.7	Grade

