Field Evaluation of Concrete Bridge Decks Reinforced with Epoxy-Coated Steel in Indiana

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A field evaluation of a representative sample of six bridges in terms of traffic and environmental and salt exposure conditions was conducted to assess the in-service condition of concrete bridge decks reinforced with epoxy-coated steel in Indiana. The field condition assessment included (a) identification of any delaminated and spalled areas; (b) detailed mapping of the observed cracking; (c) identification of the concrete cover and the underlying reinforcement; (d) core sampling with and without reinforcement to determine the compressive strength and unit weight, and (e) concrete powder sampling to determine chloride concentration at various depths. No signs of steel corrosion were found in the bar samples extracted from cores in the six bridges evaluated. The chloride concentration levels at the level of the reinforcement for all but two of the bridges were well above the commonly accepted threshold value at the level of the reinforcement. Evaluation of the field data revealed that, to date, the combination of adequate concrete cover and epoxy coating has provided a good corrosion protection system in Indiana. The sample included the first bridge in Indiana on which epoxy-coated reinforcement was used (1976).

This paper presents the field phase findings from a research study sponsored by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and FHWA. The field phase of this research study was aimed at the condition assessment of a representative sample of concrete bridge decks and slabs reinforced with epoxy-coated steel in Indiana.

A total of six bridges throughout Indiana were selected for the evaluation. The bridges selected represent a cross section of environmental conditions, traffic, and intensity of salt application. The sample included the first bridge deck in Indiana reinforced with epoxy-coated steel. This bridge was built in 1976. The field study addresses the performance of decks supported on a more flexible system (steel girder) as well as more rigid support conditions (precast, prestressed girders) and concrete slabs. None of the bridge decks included in the sample had been overlayed. The site selection was fully coordinated with personnel from INDOT. Evaluation of concrete core samples for compressive strength and concrete powder samples for chloride content was conducted by the Materials and Testing Division of INDOT.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

The location of the bridges selected is shown in Figure 1. The first bridge selected for evaluation was built in 1985. The bridge is located in downtown Indianapolis over the White River. The structure is a six-span continuous composite steel box-girder bridge with a maximum span length of 62.8 m (206 ft). This bridge represents the case of a deck on a flexible superstructure in the central part of the state subjected to heavy urban traffic and severe deicing and salt exposure. The second bridge is located in downtown South Bend. The structure was built in 1983 and has a maximum span length of 27.4 m (90 ft). The structure is a four-span continuous composite bridge deck supported on precast, prestressed AASHTO girders (Type IV). It represents a case of concrete bridge deck built on a more rigid support system. This structure is subjected to significant urban traffic and severe salt application. The third structure is located a few miles south of the city of South Bend. It was built in 1980 and consists of a three-span continuous welded girder bridge with composite deck subjected to heavy truck traffic and heavy salt exposure condition. The maximum span length is 18.9 m (62 ft). The fourth structure is a three-span skewed continuous reinforced concrete slab bridge built in 1985. The maximum span length is 14 m (46 ft). The structure is subjected to moderate traffic and moderate deicing salt application. The fifth structure is a three-span continuous bridge deck supported on continuous steel girders located in the city of Gary in the northern part of the state. This bridge was built in 1980 with a maximum span length of 19.7 m (64 ft 6 in.). The concrete deck was built using stay-in-place metal forms. The bridge is subjected to heavy industrial traffic with heavy deicing salt application. The sixth bridge deck selected is continuous for live load and supported on prestressed concrete I-beams (Type III). The bridge was built in 1976, has three spans with a maximum span length of 22.5 m (73 ft 9 in.), and is subjected to light to moderate truck traffic and moderate salt exposure. A summary of the bridge information and traffic data is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

**FIELD EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

The field evaluation included the following procedures:

1. Identification of any delaminated and spalled areas by close visual inspection and the use of the chain drag procedure;
2. Detailed mapping of the observed cracking on the top of the deck, as well as delaminated and spalled areas on the selected lane;
3. Evaluation of the concrete cover using an R-meter (focused electromagnetic field) to ascertain concrete cover and to locate the underlying reinforcement;
4. Core samples taken with or without reinforcement for evaluation of concrete compressive strength, concrete cover, unit weight, and visual inspection of the conditions of the epoxy coating; and
5. Concrete powder sampled at selected points and at various depths for laboratory determination of chloride content.

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TABLE 1 Summary of Bridge Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bridge No.</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Bridge Type</th>
<th>Span Max (m)</th>
<th>Traffic</th>
<th>Deicing Salt Exposure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49-7032</td>
<td>US-40</td>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>Six-span continuous composite steel box girder bridge</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>Heavy urban</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-71-6538</td>
<td>US-2</td>
<td>St.Joseph</td>
<td>Four-span continuous composite precast prestressed AASHTO girder</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>Significant urban</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50-2540</td>
<td>US-31</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>Three-span continuous welded girder bridge with a composite concrete deck</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>Heavy truck</td>
<td>Heavy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-03-6797</td>
<td>SR-7</td>
<td>Bartholomew</td>
<td>Three-span skewed continuous reinforced concrete slab bridge</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>Moderate truck</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>912-45-6599</td>
<td>SR-912</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>Three-span continuous composite steel girder bridge</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>Heavy industrial</td>
<td>Heavy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-40-6527</td>
<td>SR-7</td>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>Continuous precastessed concrete I-beam (Type III)</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>Light to moderate truck</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversion Factors: 1 m = 3.281 ft.
### TABLE 2 Traffic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49-7032</td>
<td>27,530</td>
<td>44,390</td>
<td>3,995</td>
<td>D.H.V. 4% A.D.T. 5%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-71-6538</td>
<td>11,015</td>
<td>19,825</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>D.H.V. 10% A.D.T. 17%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50-2540</td>
<td>17,080</td>
<td>29,480</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>D.H.V. 7% A.D.T. 12%</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-03-6797</td>
<td>5,680</td>
<td>9,770</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>D.H.V. 7% A.D.T. 12%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>912-45-6599</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>25,250</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>D.H.V. 7% A.D.T. 17%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-40-6527</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>4,420</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>D.H.V. 7% A.D.T. 17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.D.T. = Average Daily Traffic
D.H.V. = Design Hourly Volume

Conversion factors: 1 km/h = 0.622 mph

During the field inspection, detailed mapping of delaminated and spalled areas as well as crack patterns were made. Crack widths were measured using a crack width comparator card. The delaminated and spalled areas were identified by close visual inspection and with the aid of chain drag procedure. Positions of reinforcement were identified by using an R-meter. Core samples with or without elements from the top layer of reinforcement were then taken for laboratory investigation. The chloride contents were determined through the laboratory analysis of pulverized concrete samples taken from the deck. The method used to determine chloride content approximated the automated titrator method duplicating ASTM-C114. Concrete powder samples were taken at various levels: Level A from 0 to 25.4 mm (0 to 1 in.); Level B from 25.4 to 50.8 mm (1 to 2 in.); Level C from 50.8 to 76.2 mm (2 to 3 in.); and Level D from 76.2 to 100.6 mm (3 to 4 in.). Diameters of the holes for each depth are 31.75 mm (1 1/4 in.), 25.4 mm (1 in.), 19.1 mm (3/4 in.), and 19.1 mm (3/4 in.), respectively.

### RESULTS

Figures 2 through 5 show the crack patterns and the core and concrete powder sample locations for one of the decks surveyed, Bridge 7-40-6527. Similar information for the other bridges evaluated can be found elsewhere (1). The test results of core strength, calculated cylinder strength, unit weight, concrete cover, maximum crack width, and chloride content for all the samples of each individual bridge can be found elsewhere (1). A summary of the average value of these results for each bridge is indicated in Table 3.

The average concrete cover ranged from 61 to 97 mm (6.1 to 3.82 in.), and the maximum crack width ranged from 0.64 mm to 1.52 mm (0.025 to 0.060 in.). Inspections of the conditions of steel extracted from cores show no indication of rusting or debonding on any of the bars. The coating was difficult to remove with a knife. From visual inspection of samples from which the coating was stripped mechanically, no sign of under-film corrosion was observed.

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

At the level of top reinforcement, except for the Marion and Bartholomew County bridges, the chloride content was found to be above the threshold value of 1.2 kg/m² (2.0 lb/yd²) (2). This indicates that a potentially active corrosive environment was present. Inspection of the steel samples from coring showed no signs of corrosion or debonding of coating. The chloride content substantially decreased with every inch of increment in depth. This finding confirms the importance of concrete cover in reducing the risk of steel corrosion. Similar results were reported by Mckeel (3). From the evaluation during construction and through 13 years of service of two bridges in Virginia, it was concluded that the combination of cover and epoxy-coated reinforcement provided excellent protection against corrosion. In Mckeel's study, no signs of significant corrosion and debonding of the coating were found despite the poor initial state of the coating and its exposure to the elements from the onset of construction until placement of the deck concrete.

In addition to the concern over reduced bond to concrete of epoxy-coated steel, other significant issues concerning epoxy-
FIGURE 2  Crack patterns, Bridge 7-40-6527, Span 1-2 east (crack widths shown $\times 10^{-3}$ in. 1 in. = 25.4 mm).

FIGURE 3  Crack patterns, Bridge 7-49-6527, Span 2-3 west (crack widths shown $\times 10^{-3}$ in. 1 in. = 25.4 mm).
FIGURE 4  Core and chloride sampling, Bridge 7-40-6527, Span 2-3 east.

FIGURE 5  Core and chloride sampling, Bridge 7-40-6527, Span 0-1 west.
2. Adequate concrete cover should always be ensured. The chloride content is substantially reduced with a small increase in cover, hence the corrosion risk substantially decreases. In addition, extra cover also provides improvement in the anchorage of the bars. Larger diameter ratios of cover to bar are recommended in harsh environments to reduce the crack opening and should not be reduced with the expectation that the epoxy coating will be the sole corrosion protection system.

2. Good construction practices, such as adequate inspection, and good finishing and curing techniques should be emphasized because they will lead to durable concrete. The use, proper manufacturing,
and handling of epoxy-coated bars are but a few of the aspects related to durable concrete bridge decks.

3. More research is needed to clarify the long-term effectiveness and durability issues of epoxy-coated steel as a corrosion protection system for highway and bridge structures. In particular, the close inspection of bridge structures in the field should be continued to effectively assess the long-term performance of coated bars as a corrosion protection system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The work described is part of a research study funded by INDOT and FHWA as a 3-year HPR-Part II Research Study.

REFERENCES


The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the sponsors.

Publication of this paper sponsored by Committee on Dynamics and Field Testing of Bridges.