

March 13, 2020

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Re: Docket No. FHWA-2017-0047

Dear Administrator Nason:

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) is pleased to submit the following comments to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) for National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS) issued on November 12, 2019. ASCE applauds FHWA's efforts to address requirements set under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) in 23 U.S.C. 144 and update the NBIS. Through these actions, ASCE is eager to provide input to incorporate inspection advancements and address ambiguities identified since the last update to the regulation in 2009.

Founded in 1852, ASCE is the oldest engineering organization in the nation and represents more than 150,000 civil engineers in private practice, government, industry, and academia. ASCE members are dedicated professionals who hold paramount public health, safety, and welfare as they design, build, construct, operate, and maintain the built environment. It is through this commitment that our members recognize the important impacts of improving the safety and quality of our bridges, especially with the new advances in bridge inspection.

ASCE's *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*, which gave the nation's bridges a grade of "C+," states that infrastructure challenges remain significant, but solvable. We can address our infrastructure deficit through strategic and sustained investment, bold leadership, thoughtful planning, and careful preparation for the needs of the future. As we seek opportunities to rebuild our bridges, it is imperative that we appropriately adopt modernized processes and support technological innovation to improve the safety and quality of our bridges.

ASCE recognizes that inspection and safety efforts for public bridges requires regular inspection and evaluation programs that incorporate state-of-the-art investigative and analytical techniques. Implementing bridge inspection requirements must occur within adequately funded system-wide maintenance programs to ensure the safety and structural adequacy of existing bridges; include weight and speed limit posting requirements on structurally deficient and functionally obsolete structures; and utilize comprehensive efforts to prioritize and adequately fund the replacement of functionally obsolete and structurally deficient bridges.

Under the NBIS NPRM, ASCE believes that FHWA is making positive steps by eliminating and appropriately replacing the Fracture Critical (FC) and Fracture Critical Member (FCM) terminology. Replacing this terminology is beneficial because it avoids the mistaken assumption that a bridge under

the FC or FCM categories are dangerous and, therefore; should not be used. With these classifications, ASCE members continue to design FC bridges, but it is done with special inspection requirements and with improved details, materials, and/or increased safety factors.

ASCE also supports new provisions contained within the rulemaking that require the collection of element level data and permit state DOTs to reduce the frequency of inspections for certain low-risk bridges. Together, these provisions provide a framework for a rational, scientifically based inspection and bridge maintenance/management program. With limited funding available for all bridge-related activities, it is important to balance the requirements and costs of inspection with the maintenance and repair needs of the bridges. The proposed rulemaking achieves this goal, as element level data will permit bridge owners to improve planning and decision-making.

Despite some of these positive proposed changes, ASCE is concerned that licensed Professional Engineers (PE) are not immediately considered as the first choice to be team leaders. A team leader with a PE has the professional duty to maintain public safety which is essential for bridge inspection.

ASCE supports the FHWA's efforts to improve bridge inspections and encourages implementing technological innovation and modernized processes to improve the safety and quality of our bridges. As FHWA reviews comments submitted for the NPRM, ASCE urges thoughtful leadership and continued commitment for improving bridge inspection standards.