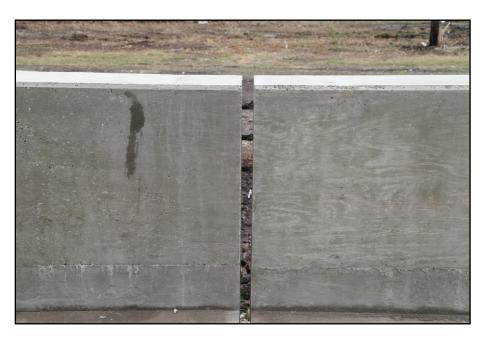


#### TRNo. 619651-01



# EVALUATION OF OPEN JOINTS IN CONCRETE BRIDGE RAIL SYSTEMS

Sponsored by Roadside Safety Pooled Fund

## **TEXAS A&M TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

Roadside Safety & Physical Security Texas A&M University System RELLIS Campus Building 7091 1254 Avenue A Bryan, TX 77807

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Concrete bridge rail syste	ms tested and ev	aluated accordin	a to MASH typic	ally include ioint
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# Evaluation of Open Joints in Concrete Bridge Rail Systems

by Nathan D. Schulz, Ph.D. Associate Research Scientist Texas A&M Transportation Institute

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> > Sponsored by the

Roadside Safety Pooled Fund

January 2024

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	SI* (MODERN	METRIC) CONV	ERSION FACTORS	
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Symbol	When You Know	Multiply By	To Find	Symbol
-		LENGTH		
in	inches	25.4	millimeters	mm
ft	feet	0.305	meters	m
yd	yards	0.914	meters	m
mi	miles	1.61	kilometers	km
		AREA		
in <sup>2</sup>	square inches	645.2	square millimeters	mm <sup>2</sup>
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yd <sup>2</sup>	square yards	0.836	square meters	m²
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\*SI is the symbol for the International System of Units

# **Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the adoption of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware (MASH) standard, many concrete bridge rails have been designed and evaluated. These bridge rail systems are often tested with an open joint in the barrier to simulate joints that may be present in actual bridge rail installations. The test vehicles are often impacted at or near these open joints to evaluate critical loading scenarios and the possibility of vehicle snagging on the opening. However, there can be joints with larger openings that what was evaluated in the full-scale crash test. This project aimed to develop guidance and recommendations for state DOTs to address these situations.

#### 1.1. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this research was to evaluate concrete bridge rail systems according to MASH evaluation criteria. The goals are to

- 1. Determine the width of the concrete bridge rail joints that maintain MASH compliance for the bridge rail system.
- 2. For widths of concrete bridge rail joints not meeting MASH compliance:
  - a. Determine if having compression joint material would prevent vehicle snagging and result in MASH compliance.
  - b. Determine details of cover plate and attachment to prevent vehicle snagging and result in MASH compliance.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND

The 2016 MASH edition is the latest in a series of documents that provided guidance on testing and evaluation of roadside safety features (1). The original MASH document was published in 2009 and represents a comprehensive update to crash test and evaluation procedures to reflect changes in the vehicle fleet, operating conditions, and roadside safety knowledge and technology (2). The MASH documents supersede the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 350, "Recommended Procedures for the Safety Performance Evaluation of Highway Features" standards (3).

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a January 7, 2016, memo mandating the AASHTO/FHWA Joint Implementation Agreement for MASH with compliance dates for installing MASH hardware that differ by hardware category. After December 31, 2019, all roadside safety devices must have been successfully tested and evaluated according to the 2016 MASH standard edition. FHWA will no longer issue eligibility letters for highway safety hardware that has not been successfully crash tested according to the MASH edition evaluation criteria.

Various concrete bridge rail systems have been tested and evaluated according to MASH since its implementation (4). These systems are often installed with an open joint in the concrete bridge rail to represent field conditions with open joints. The crash test vehicles are often impacted near the joint as this is often the critical location for structural loading and potential vehicle snag. Figure 1.1 shows an example of a 2-inch joint opening in a vertical concrete bridge rail system.



Figure 1.1. Example of Joint Opening in Concrete Bridge Rail (5).

The concrete bridge rail systems tested and evaluated according to MASH typically include joint openings between ½ to 2 inches. Bridge rail systems with larger joint openings have not been evaluated according to MASH. State DOTs do encounter situations with bridge rail systems having joints larger than 2 inches. They do not have clear guidance on the acceptance of these situations for MASH evaluation criteria. There is potential for components of the vehicles to snag on the joint opening during impact, which may cause excessive occupant risk indices. The solution is often to install a cover plate across the joint or use compression fill material to prevent vehicle snagging. This additional installation step may require additional time and resources.

The Midwest Roadside Safety Facility did develop cover plate details for a concrete bridge rail system with a 6-5/8 inch joint opening (6). The system was tested and evaluated according to MASH Test 5-12 as the main purpose was to evaluate the structural adequacy of the cover plate.

# 1.3. SURVEY

A survey questionnaire was distributed to members of the Roadside Safety Pooled Fund. The goal of the survey was to gather information on details such as joint widths, filler materials, and cover plates currently being used by state DOTs. The following questions were included in the survey:

- 1. What is the maximum width that your agency allows for joint openings in concrete bridge rail systems?
- 2. Does your agency use compression/filler material for joint openings in concrete bridge rail systems?
- 3. What type of compression/filler material does your agency use?

- 4. Does your agency use cover plates for joint openings in concrete bridge rail systems?
- 5. What is the specified minimum joint opening width for using a cover plate?
- 6. Please provide standard details for the cover plate and attachment to the concrete bridge rail system.

A total of twelve responses were received from state DOT personnel. The maximum width for joint openings that agencies allow ranges from two inches to five inches.

Six of the twelve states indicated usage of filler material. Appendix A includes some state standard details for the use of filler material. The types of materials used varied amongst the states and are summarized as follows:

- Elastomeric compression seal
- Silicone seal
- Expansion joint strip seal
- Rubberized flexible joint filler
- Backer foam
- Bituminous joint sealer
- Preformed joint filler
- Expanded Polyethylene

Eleven of the twelve states indicated usage of a cover plate for joint openings. The details of these cover plates varied and many states design the cover plate on a project-by-project basis. Appendix B includes some of the details which were provided by the states. General characteristics of the cover plates are summarized as follows:

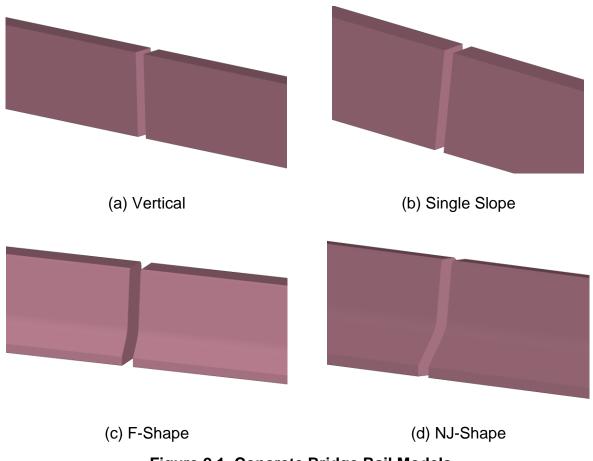
- Steel plate, <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inch thickness minimum
- Flat head countersunk screws
- Six inches of minimum overlap with concrete barrier
- Recessed into concrete barrier

# **Chapter 2. COMPUTER SIMULATIONS**

This chapter presents the details of the modeling and simulation effort related to the evaluation of open joints in concrete bridge rail systems. Different concrete bridge rail profile shapes (e.g., F-Shape) and rail heights were considered for the evaluation of the open joints. The research team utilized finite element (FE) simulations to aid with the evaluation of the systems according to MASH TL-3.

#### 2.1. MODEL

FE models of the concrete bridge rail systems were developed for evaluation according to MASH TL-3. The models consisted of a vertical shape, single slope (10.8-degree slope), F-Shape, and NJ-shape concrete bridge rail. Each concrete barrier was modeled using rigid material representation. The rigid material assumption was made to reduce simulation run time and focus the simulation efforts on potential vehicle snag with an open joint. The intent of the simulations was not to evaluate structural adequacy of the concrete bridge rail systems. Figure 2.1 shows the bridge rail models (32-inch height) with an open joint.





#### 2.2. SIMULATIONS

All simulations were performed using the finite element method. LS-DYNA, which is a commercially available general purpose FE software, was used for all the analyses. An 1100C small car and 2270P pickup truck vehicle model were used for the simulations. Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 show the vehicle models.

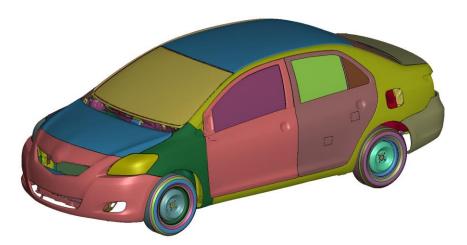


Figure 2.2. FE 1100C Small Car Vehicle Model.

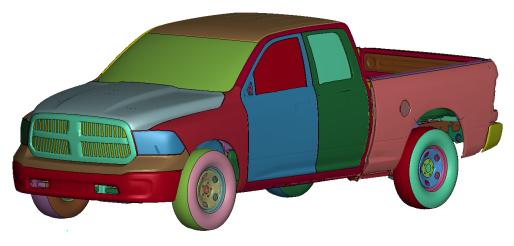
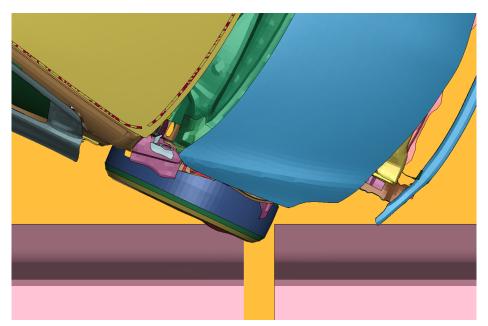


Figure 2.3. FE 2270P Pickup Truck Vehicle Model.

The research team performed impact simulations using MASH Test 3-10 and 3-11 impact conditions. This involves the vehicle models impacting the bridge rail system at an impact speed and angle of 62 mi/h and 25 degrees. The vehicle impacted the bridge rails with the centerline of the front impact side tire aligned with the downstream edge of the open joint. Figure 2.4 shows an example of the impact setup. This impact location was selected to maximize the potential for the vehicle wheel snagging on the bridge rail joint opening.



## Figure 2.4. Example of Impact Location (Vehicle Parts Removed for Clarity).

The initial simulations were conducted with MASH Test 3-10 impact conditions. The small car vehicle impact was expected to have higher occupant risk values due to excessive snagging on the open joint. MASH Test 3-11 impact simulations were also performed once the critical barrier shape, height, and joint width were determined.

# 2.2.1. Critical Concrete Bridge Rail Profile Shape and Height

Prior to evaluating different open joint widths, simulations were performed to determine the critical barrier profile shape and critical barrier height. Once determined, the critical barrier profile shape and height would be used to evaluate different joint opening widths.

MASH Test 3-10 simulations were conducted on each of the barrier profile shapes. The height of each barrier was 32 inches and the joint opening was 4 inches. Figure 2.5 shows sequential images for the single slope concrete bridge rail. The overall behavior of the small car vehicle was similar during impact with the other barrier shapes.

Figure 2.6 shows the maximum vehicle snag on the bridge joint for each concrete bridge rail. Table 2.1 summarizes the occupant risk results for each concrete bridge rail. The vertical concrete bridge rail resulted in the highest longitudinal OIV value. Thus, it was selected as the most critical barrier profile shape.

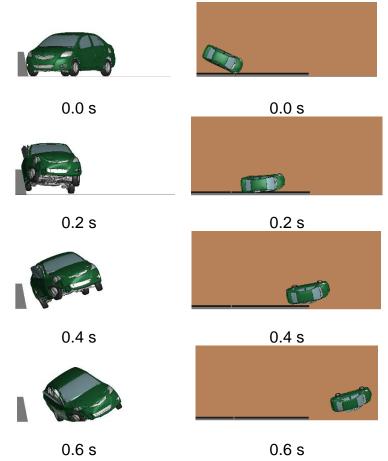
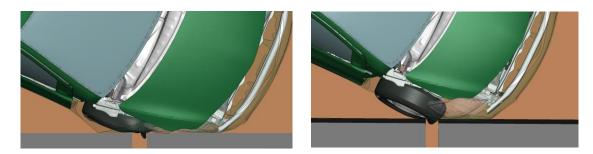


Figure 2.5. Sequential Images for MASH Test 3-10 Simulation – 32in Single Slope Bridge Rail with 4in Joint Opening.





(b) Single Slope







	Vertical	Single Slope	F-Shape	NJ-Shape
OIV, Longitudinal (ft/s)	25.2	20.7	16.7	18.1
OIV, Lateral (ft/s)	31.0	28.9	29.5	27.4
RDA, Longitudinal (g)	3.0	5.5	-11.4	-8.1
RDA, Lateral (g)	-11.4	-14.4	-13.4	-11.2
Roll (deg)	-4.6	35.6	17.2	-6.4
Pitch (deg)	-6.2	7.3	-9.1	9.9
Yaw (deg)	38.4	33.4	39.2	42.3

An additional simulation was conducted with a 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail to determine the critical barrier height. Table 2.2 summarizes the occupant risk results for the two vertical concrete bridge rails. There was not a significant difference between the two bridge rail heights but the 54 inch vertical concrete bridge rail did result in a higher longitudinal OIV value. Thus, it was selected as the most critical barrier height.

	Vertical – 32inch	Vertical – 54inch
OIV, Longitudinal (ft/s)	25.2	25.5
OIV, Lateral (ft/s)	31.0	30.4
RDA, Longitudinal (g)	3.0	4.2
RDA, Lateral (g)	-11.4	-11.6
Roll (deg)	-4.6	-5.2
Pitch (deg)	-6.2	-6.7
Yaw (deg)	38.4	36.6

Table 2.2. Occupant Risk Results for Concrete Bridge Rail Heights.

A 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail was determined to be the most critical bridge rail shape and height for vehicle snagging and occupant risk metrics. This system showed satisfactory performance with a 4 inch open joint. The next step was to evaluate other bridge rail joint openings.

#### 2.2.2. Open Joints

Evaluation of a 4 inch open joint in concrete bridge rails showed satisfactory performance for MASH Test 3-10 evaluation criteria. Computer simulations were conducted to evaluate a 6 inch and 8 inch open joint with a 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail.

#### 6 inch Joint Width

MASH Test 3-10 was conducted on a 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail with a 6 inch open joint width. Figure 2.7 shows sequential images of the impact event. MASH Test 3-11 was also conducted for this concrete bridge rail system. Figure 2.8 shows sequential images of the impact event. Table 2.3 shows the occupant risk results for both simulations runs.

During the MASH Test 3-10 simulation, there was observed occupant compartment deformation due to the wheel snagging on the joint opening and pushing back into vehicle. Figure 2.9 shows the wheel and vehicle damage after impact with the bridge rail. The deformation value was 4 inches in the toe pan region which is below the MASH limit of 9 inches.

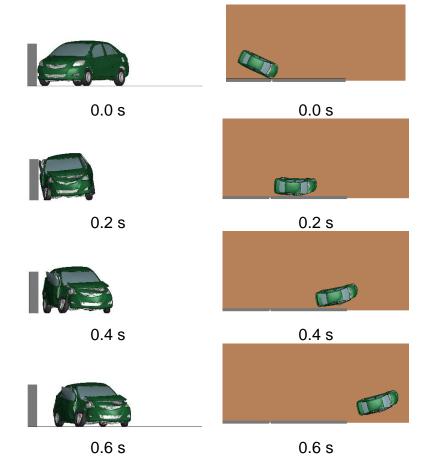


Figure 2.7. Sequential Images for MASH Test 3-10 Simulation – 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 6in Joint Opening.

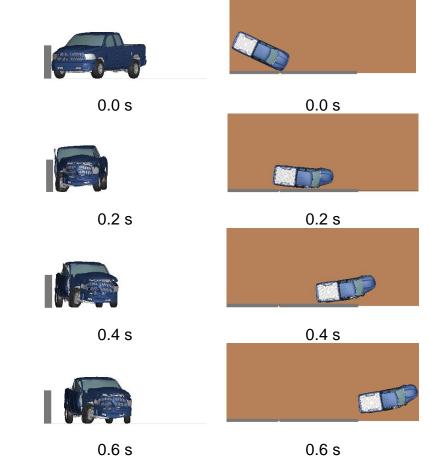


Figure 2.8. Sequential Images for MASH Test 3-11 Simulation – 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 6in Joint Opening.

• p •		
	MASH Test 3-10	MASH Test 3-11
OIV, Longitudinal (ft/s)	26.5	25.3
OIV, Lateral (ft/s)	29.2	27.8
RDA, Longitudinal (g)	-3.8	-4.3
RDA, Lateral (g)	-7.9	-12.8
Roll (deg)	-6.1	-5.5
Pitch (deg)	-6.9	5.3
Yaw (deg)	39.6	35.0

Table 2.3. Occupant Risk Values for 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 6in JointOpening.

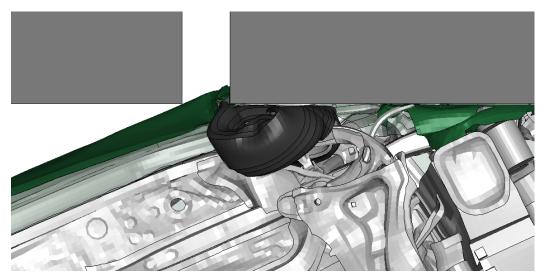
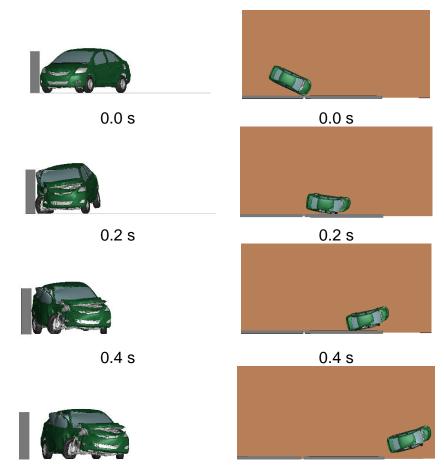


Figure 2.9. Wheel and Floor Pan Deformation after Snagging – 6in Joint.

Overall, the system showed satisfactory performance for MASH TL-3. Thus, a 6 inch joint opening in a concrete bridge rail would be considered acceptable for MASH TL-3 compliance.

#### 8 inch Joint Width

MASH Test 3-10 was conducted on a 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail with an 8 inch open joint width. Figure 2.10 shows sequential images of the impact event. Table 2.4 shows the occupant risk results for the simulations run. There was observed occupant compartment deformation due to the wheel snagging on the joint opening and pushing back into vehicle. Figure 2.11 shows the wheel and vehicle damage after impact with the bridge rail. The deformation value was 12.5 inches in the toe pan region which exceeded the MASH limit of 9 inches.



0.6 s



Figure 2.10. Sequential Images for MASH Test 3-10 Simulation – 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 8in Joint Opening.

Table 2.4. Occupant Risk Values for 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 8in JointOpening.

	MASH Test 3-10
OIV, Longitudinal (ft/s)	32.7
OIV, Lateral (ft/s)	28.8
RDA, Longitudinal (g)	-4.7
RDA, Lateral (g)	-6.9
Roll (deg)	-11.0
Pitch (deg)	7.2
Yaw (deg)	37.5

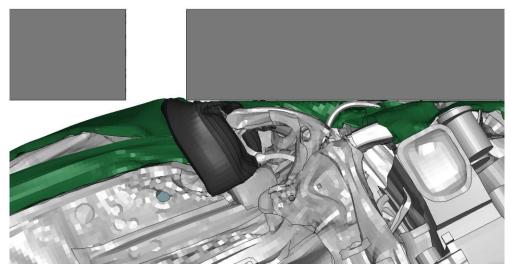


Figure 2.11. Wheel and Floor Pan Deformation after Snagging – 8in Joint.

Overall, the system showed unsatisfactory performance for MASH Test 3-10. Since the system showed unsatisfactory MASH Test 3-10 performance, MASH Test 3-11 was not conducted. Therefore, an 8-inch joint opening in a concrete bridge rail would not be considered acceptable for MASH TL-3 compliance. Alternative solutions are needed to protect joint openings 8 inches or greater. These are discussed in the next section.

## 2.2.3. Joint Protection Alternative Solutions

#### Joint Filler Material

Joints in bridge decks and bridge rails are often filled and sealed with a material. These materials can range in type, specification, and usage. These joint fill materials offer many advantages when used with bridges. One advantage is the protection of open joints during vehicle impacts.

A simulation was conducted to evaluate the effect of filler material with an open joint on MASH TL-3 compliance. As demonstrated previously, an 8-inch open joint leads to unsatisfactory MASH TL-3 compliance.

Figure 2.12 shows a 54 inch vertical concrete bridge rail with an 8 inch open joint and filler material. The filler material was modeled using MAT\_057-LOW\_DENSITY\_FOAM. The properties were obtained using MatWeb material information (7) and were selected on the lower end of the spectrum.

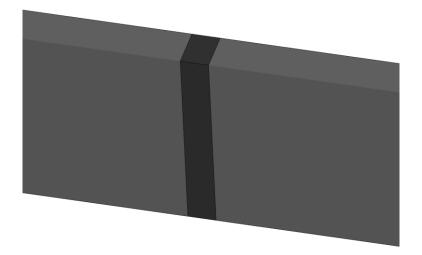


Figure 2.12. Joint Opening with Filler Material.

MASH Test 3-10 was conducted on a 54 inch tall vertical concrete bridge rail with an 8 inch open joint width and filler material. Figure 2.13 shows sequential images of the impact event. Table 2.5 shows the occupant risk results for the simulations run. There was no observed occupant compartment deformation with the filler material.

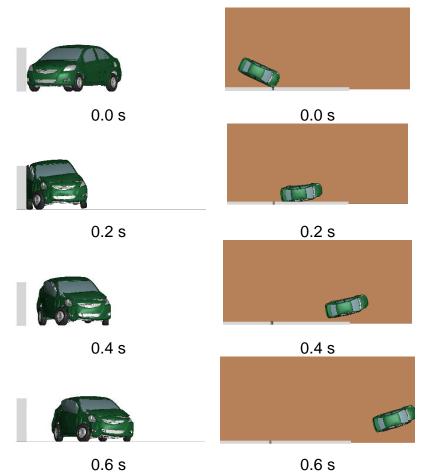


Figure 2.13. Sequential Images for MASH Test 3-10 Simulation – 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 8in Joint Opening and Filler Material.

Table 2.5. Occupant Risk Values for 54in Vertical Bridge Rail with 8in JointOpening and Filler Material.

	MASH Test 3-10
OIV, Longitudinal (ft/s)	19.8
OIV, Lateral (ft/s)	31.0
RDA, Longitudinal (g)	-3.2
RDA, Lateral (g)	-19.0
Roll (deg)	-5.9
Pitch (deg)	-5.2
Yaw (deg)	41.4

Overall, the system showed satisfactory performance for MASH Test 3-10. Thus, the use of joint filler material should be considered an acceptable solution to protect open joints during vehicle impacts. For reference, some examples of the use of filler materials and details being used by state DOTs are included in Appendix A. The use of any general filler material should be considered acceptable from a MASH crashworthiness material. A list of filler materials currently being used by some state DOTs can be found in Section 1.3 of this report.

#### Cover Plates

Another method in which bridge rail open joints are protected is the use of steel cover plates. There are different types of designs for the use of cover plates and can vary based on the site and project needs. Full-scale crash testing was previously conducted on a concrete bridge rail system with a steel cover plate (6). The crash was performed according to MASH 5-12. The cover plate provided adequate protection of the opening. While the small car and pickup truck crash tests were not conducted, the use of a cover plate should be considered an acceptable solution for protecting joints and maintaining MASH TL-3 compliance. For reference, some example cover plates details being used by state DOTs are included in Appendix B.

# Chapter 3. CONCLUSIONS

#### 3.1. SUMMARY

Bridges are often constructed with open joints in the deck and bridge rail. Guidance was needed to determine when these joints can be left open and still maintain MASH compliance.

To evaluate a variety of concrete bridge rails and open joints, finite element computer simulations were performed. The computer simulations performed represented MASH Test 3-10 and 3-11 impact conditions. The results were evaluated according to MASH TL-3 longitudinal barrier criteria.

The concrete bridge rail shapes considered in the evaluation were vertical, single slope, F-Shape, and NJ-Shape. The range of heights considered were 32 inches to 54 inches.

The simulations indicated satisfactory MASH TL-3 performance for concrete bridge rails with a 4 inch and 6 inch joint opening. Minimal wheel snagging was observed during the simulations with the 4 inch joint opening. Moderate wheel snagging (i.e., half of the wheel engaged the blunt end) was observed during the simulations with the 6 inch joint opening. However, the MASH TL-3 evaluation criteria was still met.

The simulations indicated unsatisfactory MASH TL-3 performance for concrete bridge rails with an 8 inch joint opening. The front impact-side tire experienced severe snagging on the blunt end of the bridge rail and the occupant compartment deformation exceeded the MASH limits.

Additional simulations were conducted to evaluate the effect of a filler material for the 8 inch joint opening. The use of filler material indicated satisfactory performance for MASH TL-3. Thus, it should be considered an acceptable alternative to maintain crashworthiness with large joint openings.

#### 3.2. GUIDELINES

Recommendations were prepared for the implementation of the results found in this research study.

First, concrete bridge rails with a vertical, single slope, F-Shape, and NJ-Shape profile and an open joint up to 6 inches should be considered acceptable for MASH TL-3. The use of joint filler material or a cover plate would improve the crashworthiness of the system and reduce tire snagging.

Second, concrete bridge rails with a vertical, single slope, F-Shape, and NJ-Shape profile and an open joint greater than 6 inches require the use of filler material or a cover plate to maintain MASH TL-3 compliance. Based on current state DOT details and designs, the steel cover plate should meet the following recommendations:

1. Minimum thickness of 3/8 inch

- 2. Bolts or screws which do not protrude beyond the traffic face of the barrier.
- 3. Recessed into concrete barrier

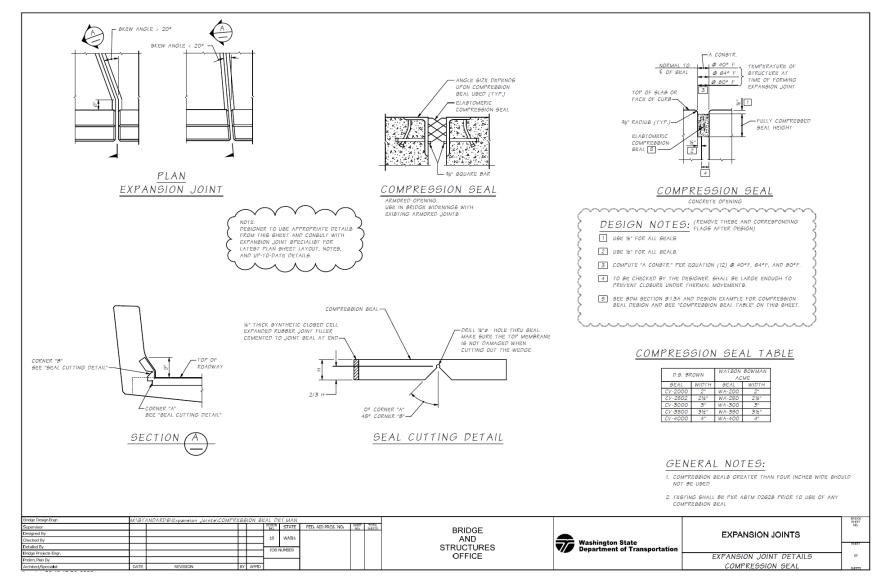
Other details of the cover plate may be designed based on site and project needs.

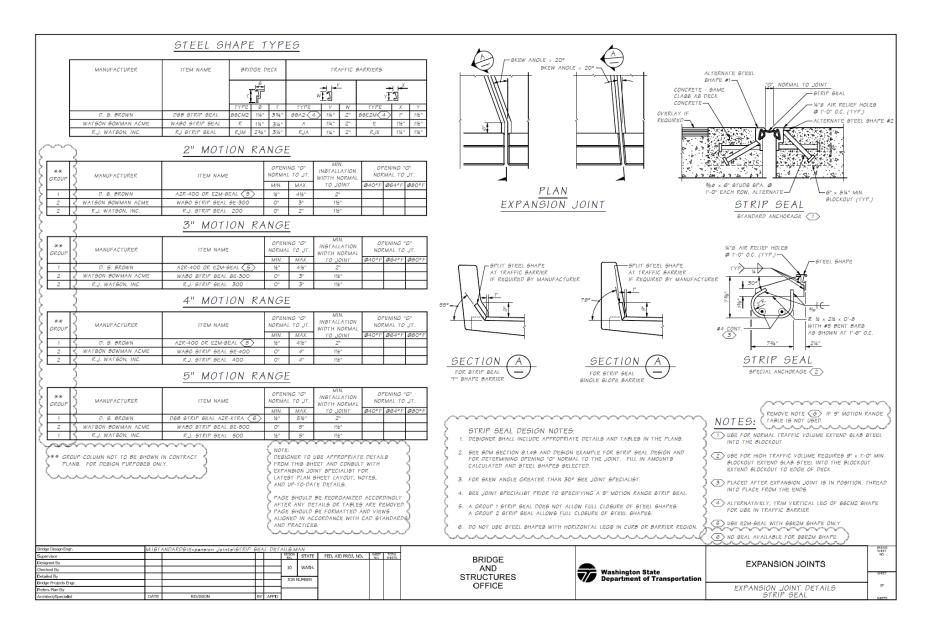
# REFERENCES

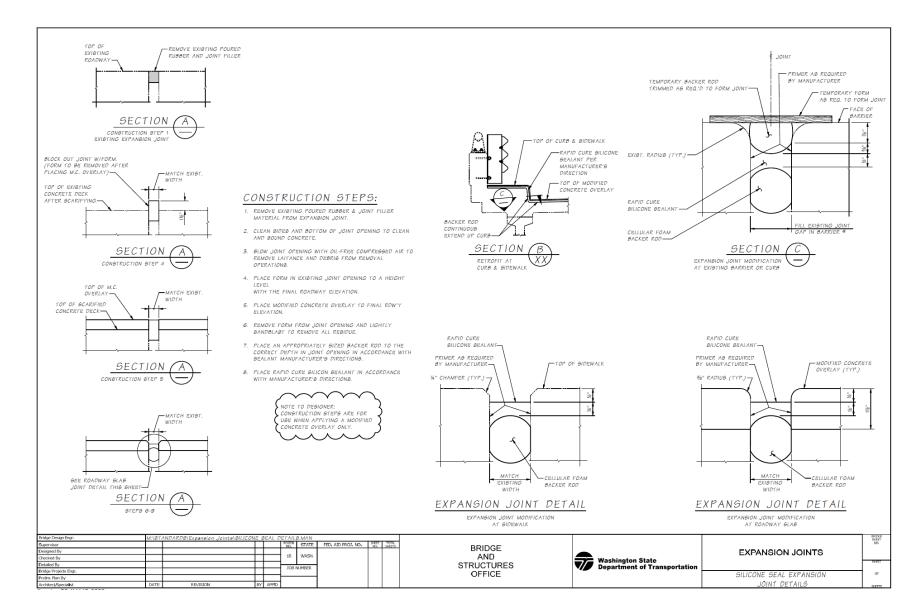
- 1. AASHTO. *Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware*, Second Edition. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, Washington, DC, 2016.
- 2. AASHTO. *Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware.* AASHTO Subcommittee on Bridges and Structures, Washington, D.C., 2009.
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- 6. S.K. Rosenbaugh, J.D. Schmidt, E.M Regier, and R.K. Faller. *Development of the Manitoba Constrained-Width, Tall Wall Barrier*. Report No. TRP-03-356-16, Midwest Roadside Safety Facility, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2016.
- 7. MatWeb. <u>https://www.matweb.com/search/DataSheet.aspx?MatGUID=cbe7a469897a47eda5</u> <u>63816c86a73520&ckck=1</u>. Accessed November 2023.

# APPENDIX A. EXAMPLES OF STATE DOT JOINT FILLER MATERIAL AND DETAILS

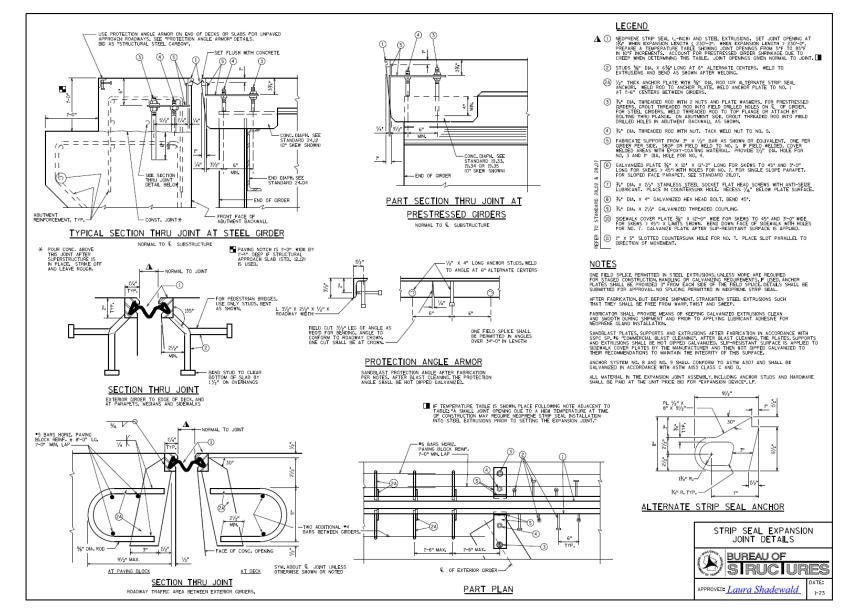
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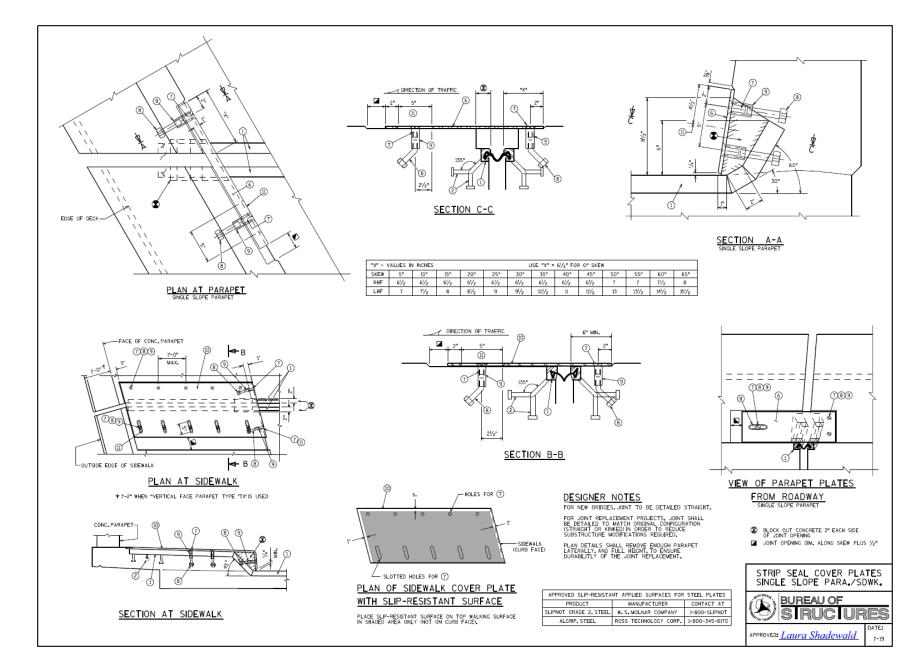


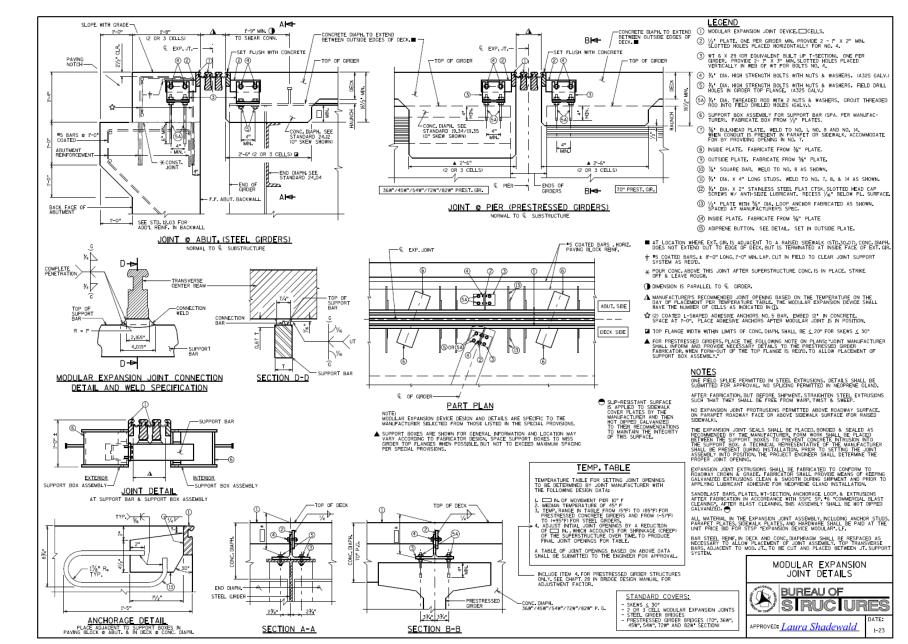




#### A.2. WISCONSIN DOT

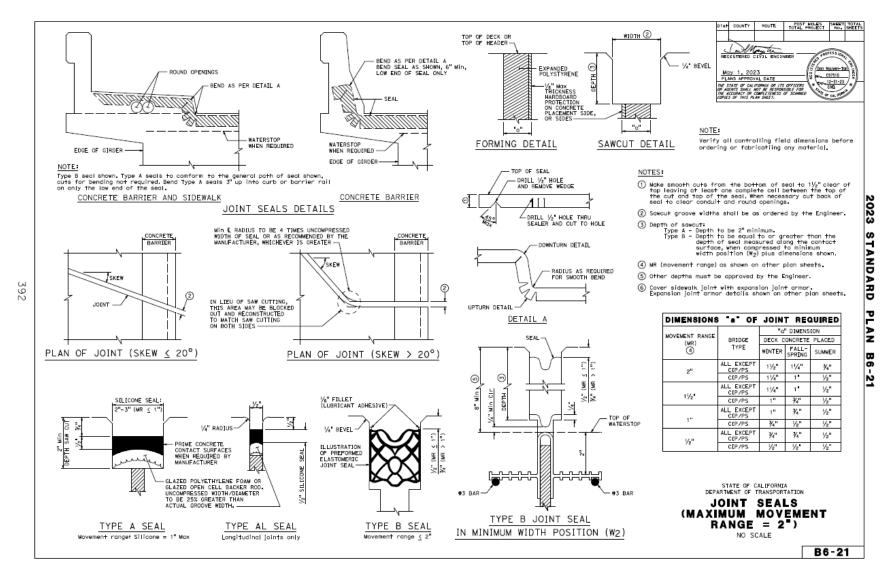


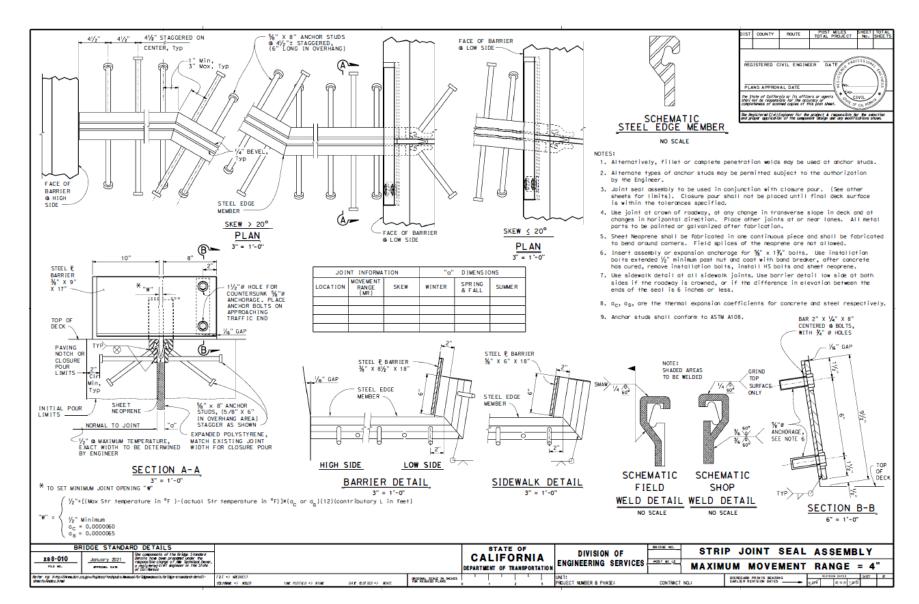




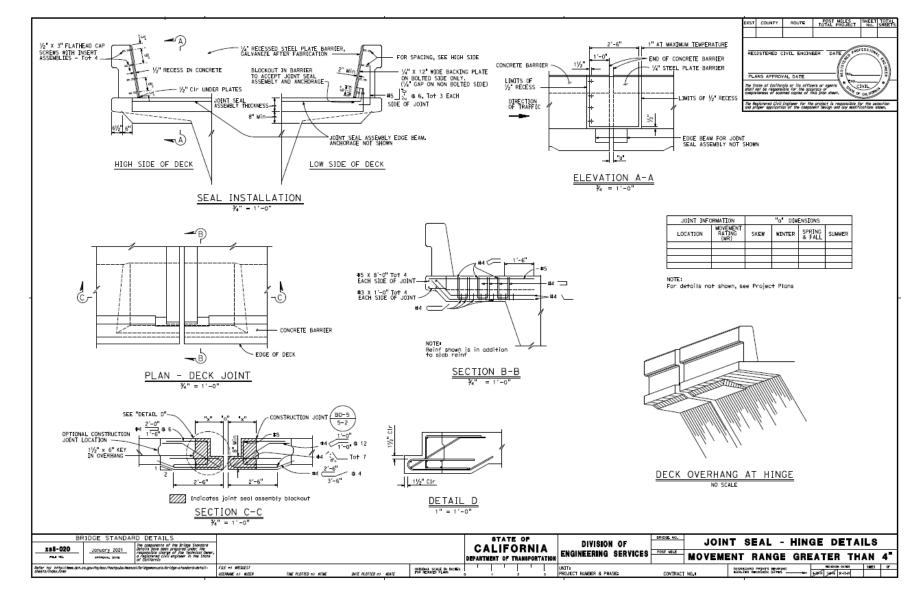
# APPENDIX B. EXAMPLES OF STATE DOT JOINT COVER PLATE DETAILS

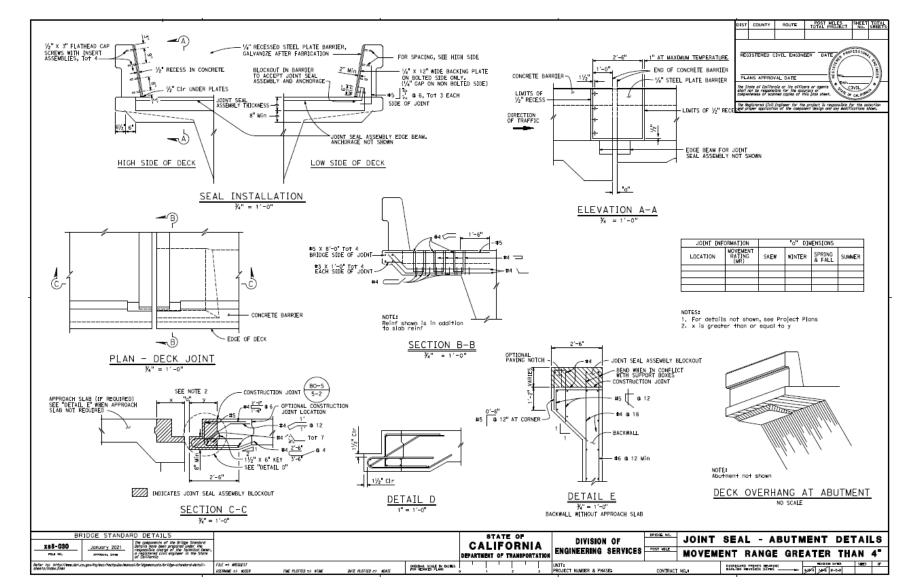
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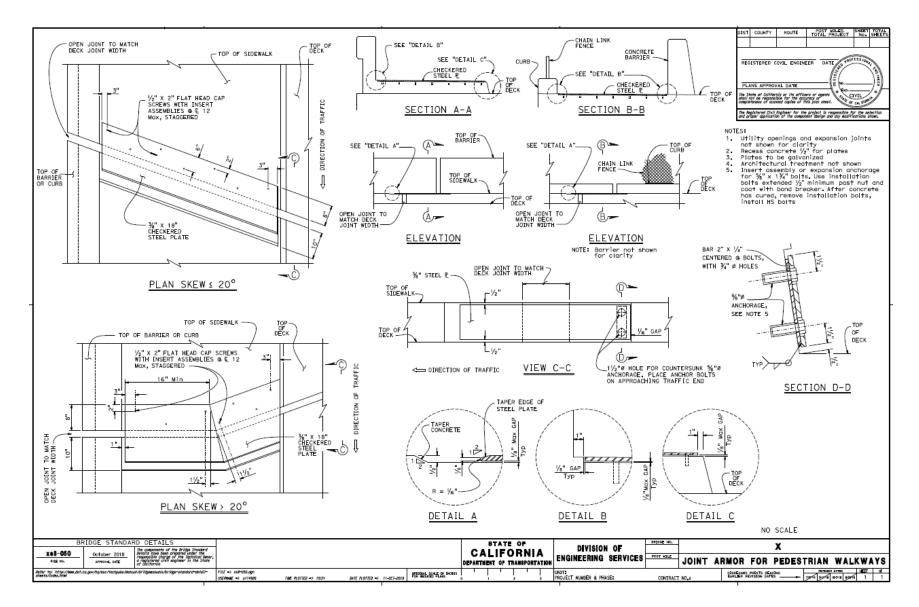




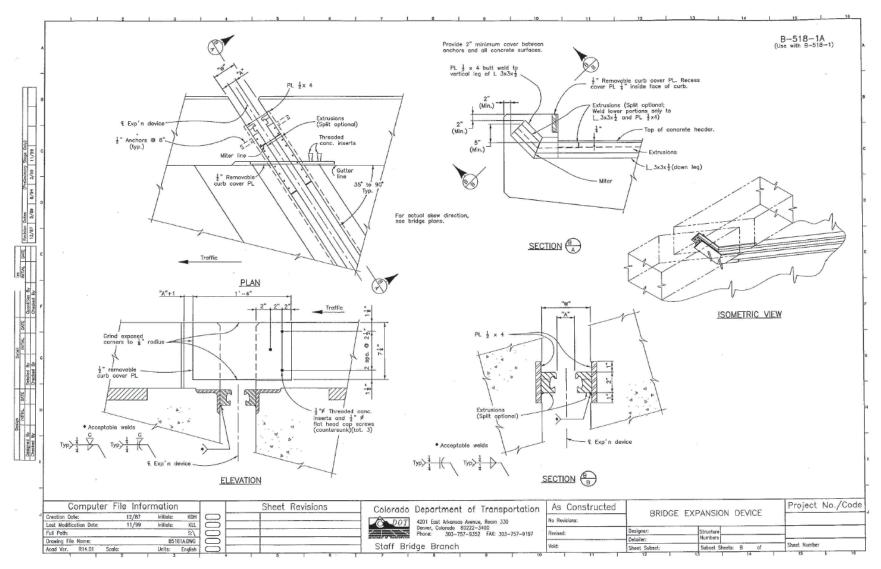
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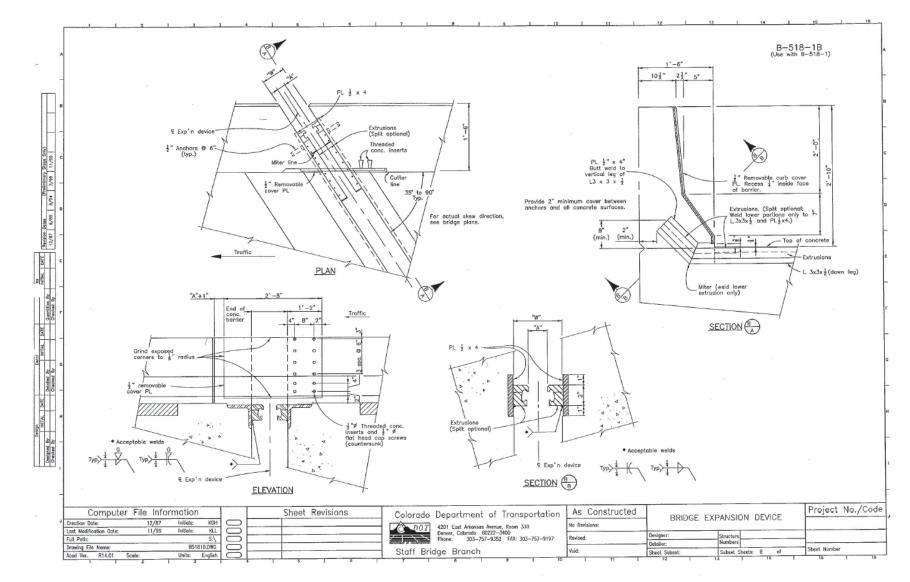




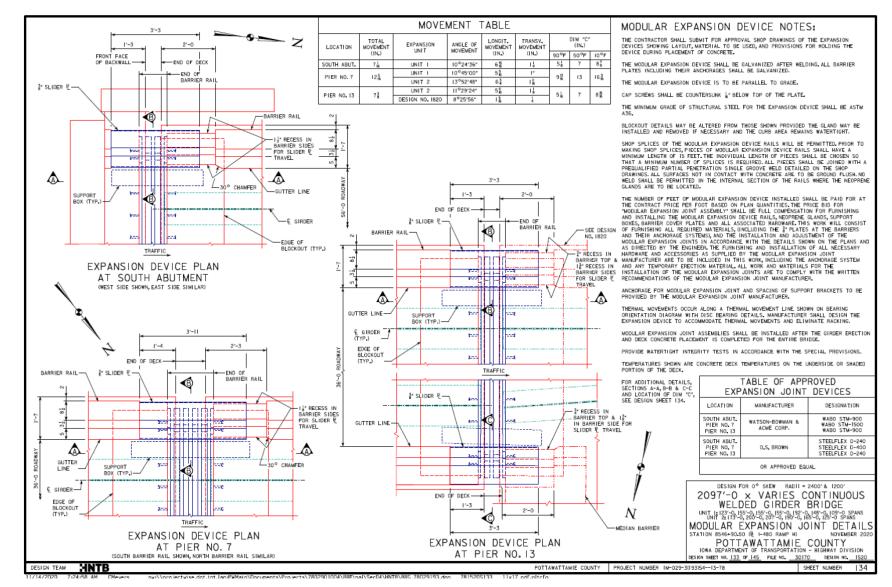


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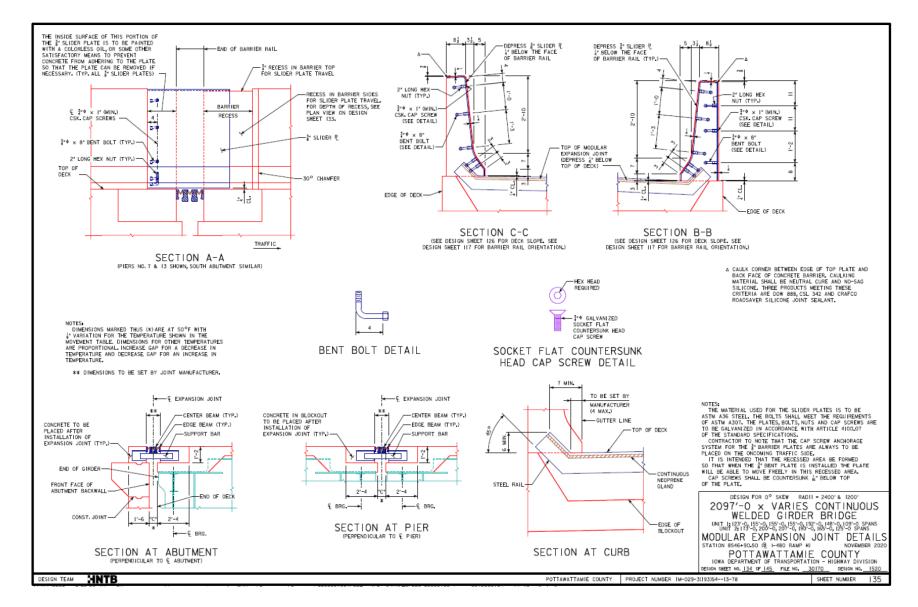


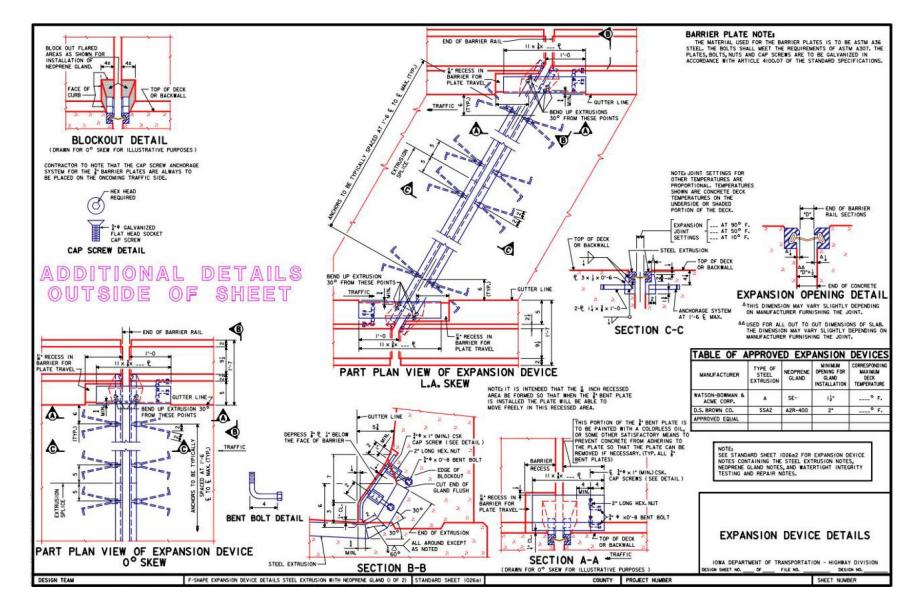


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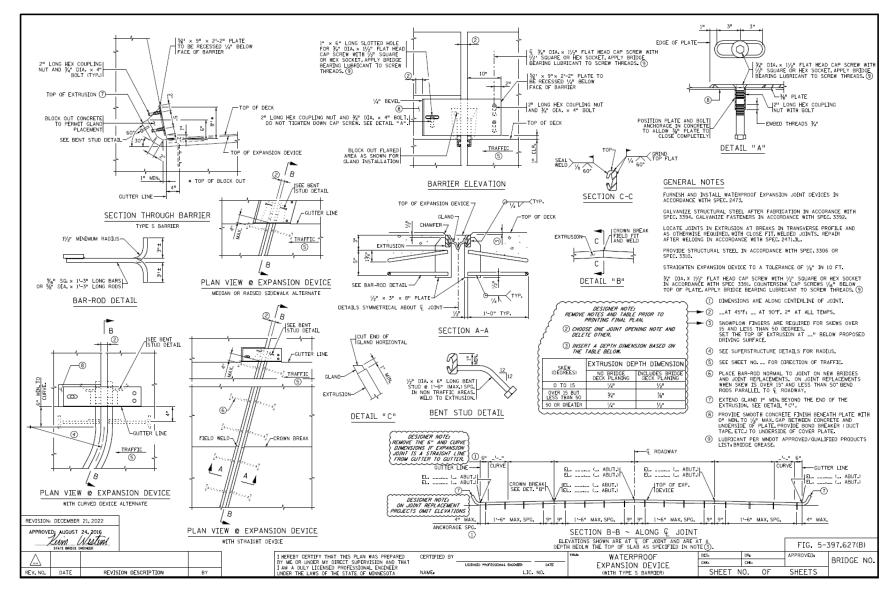


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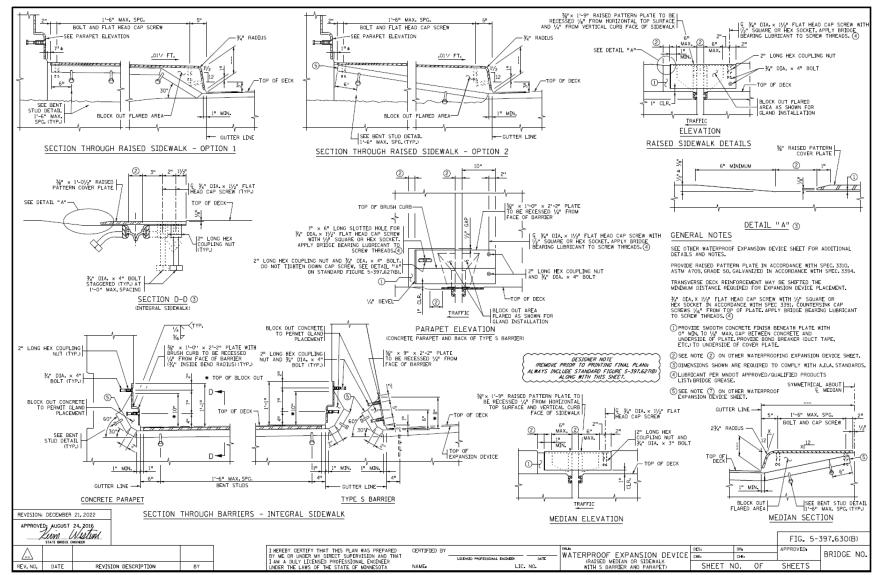
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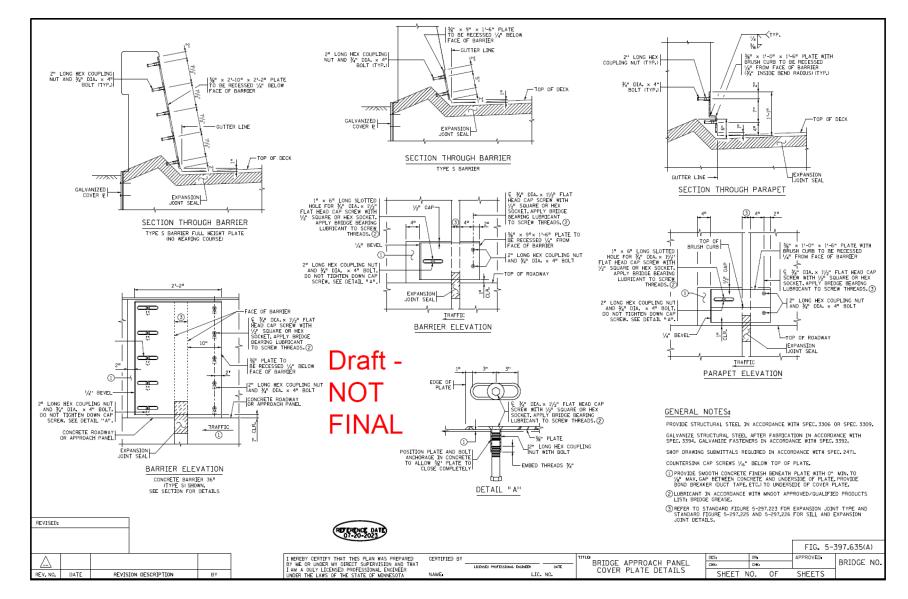


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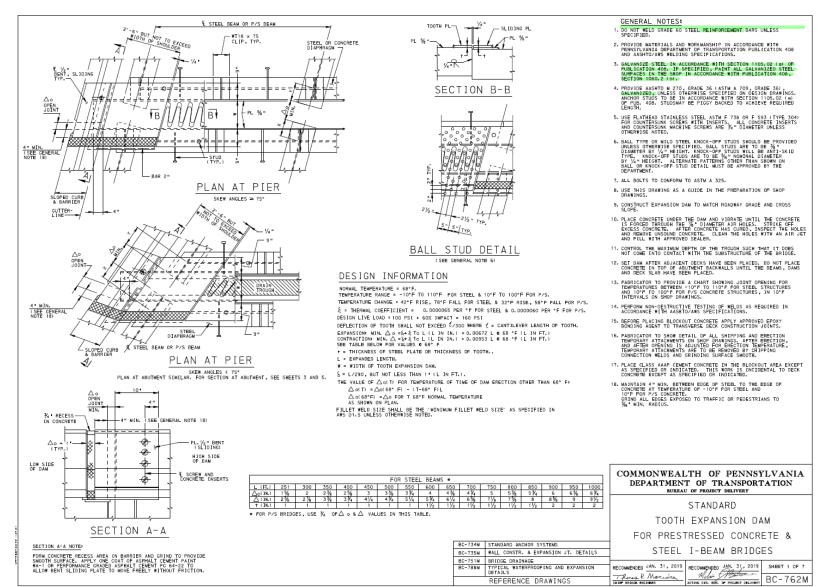
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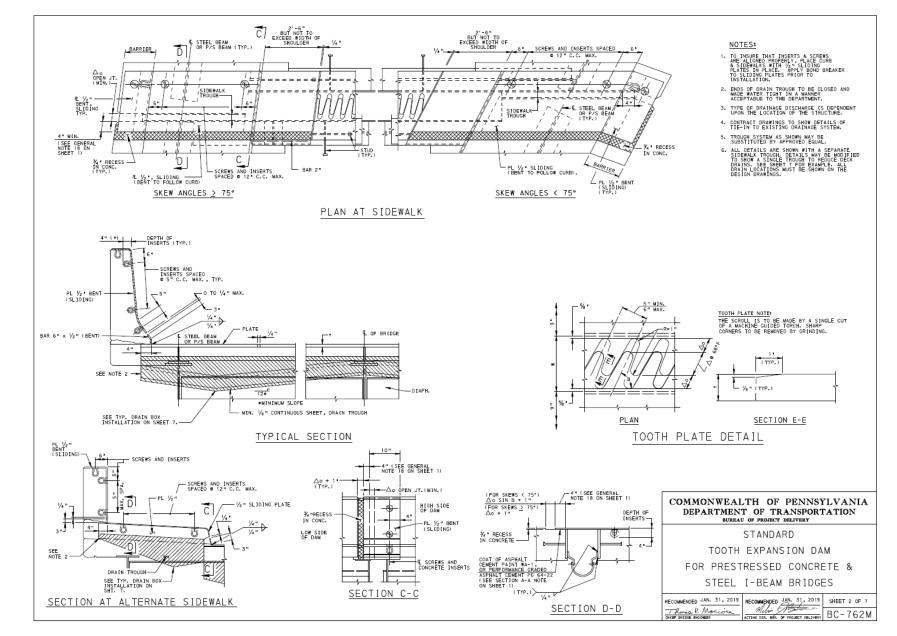


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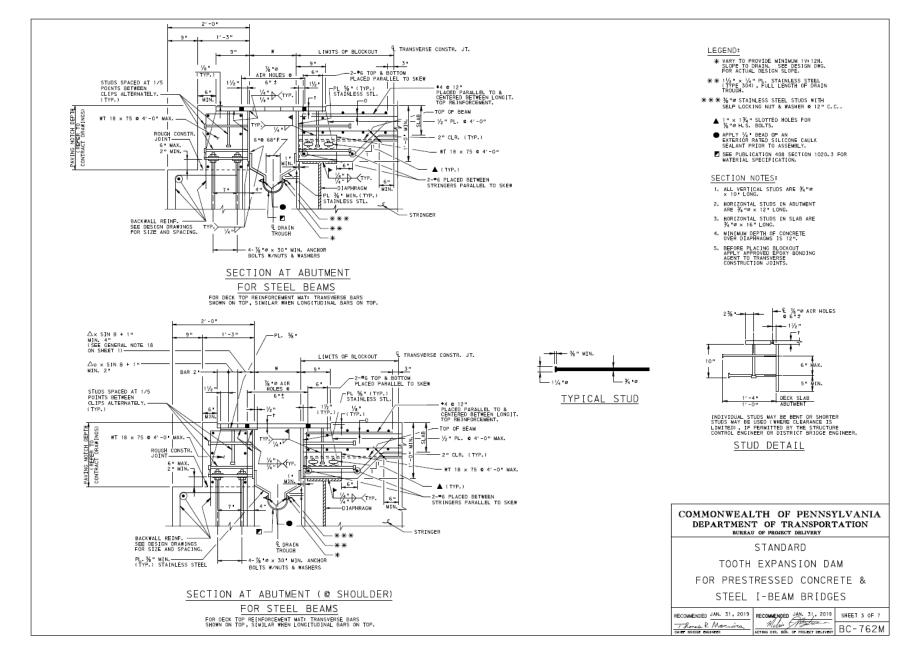


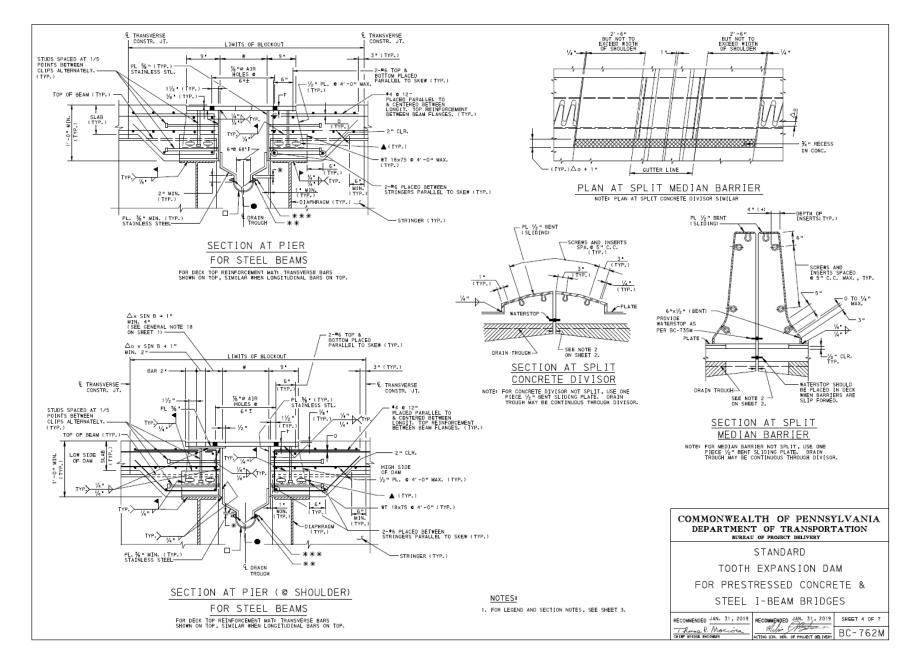
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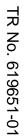


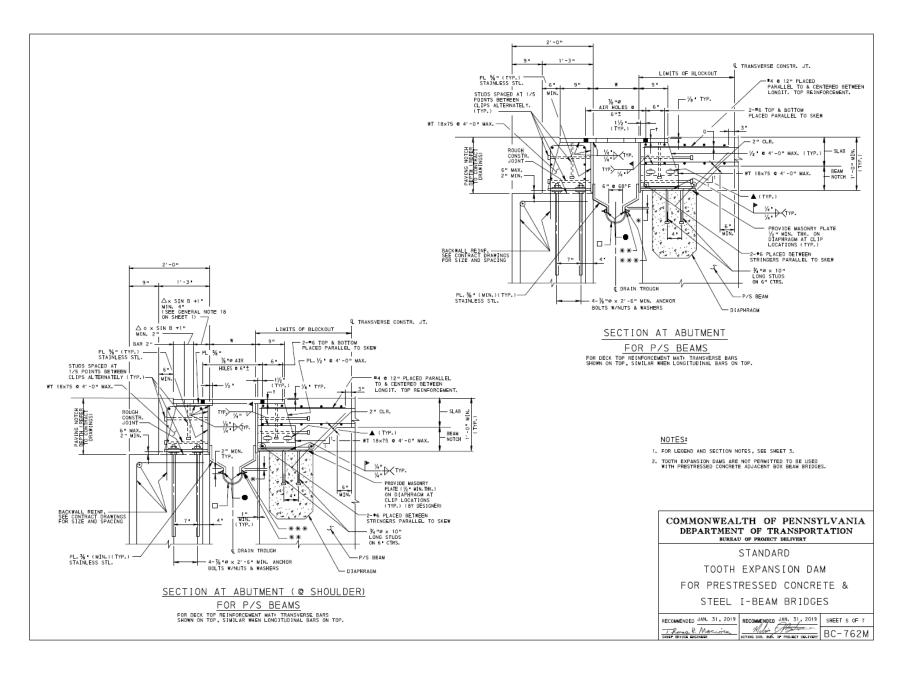
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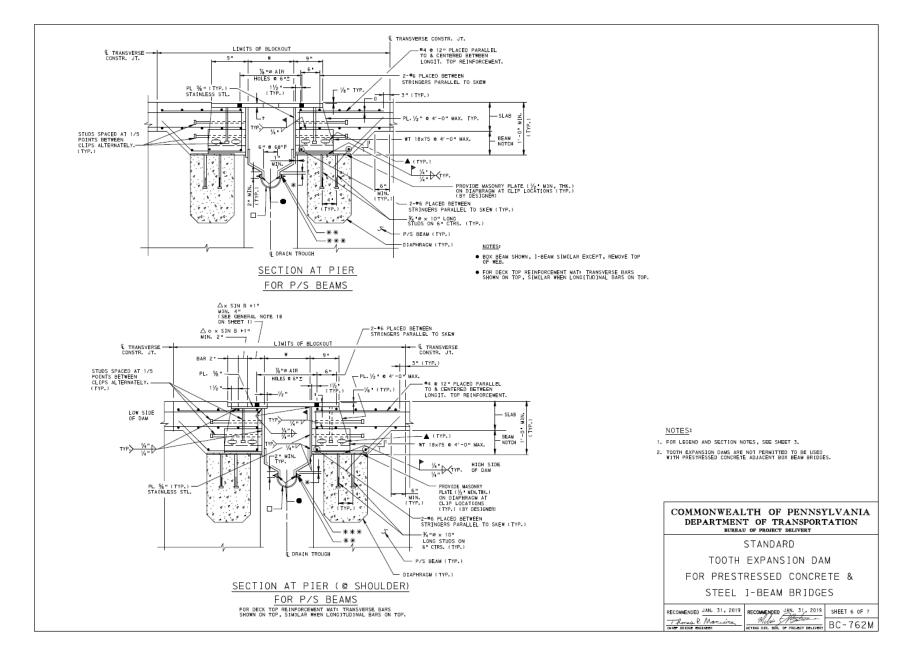


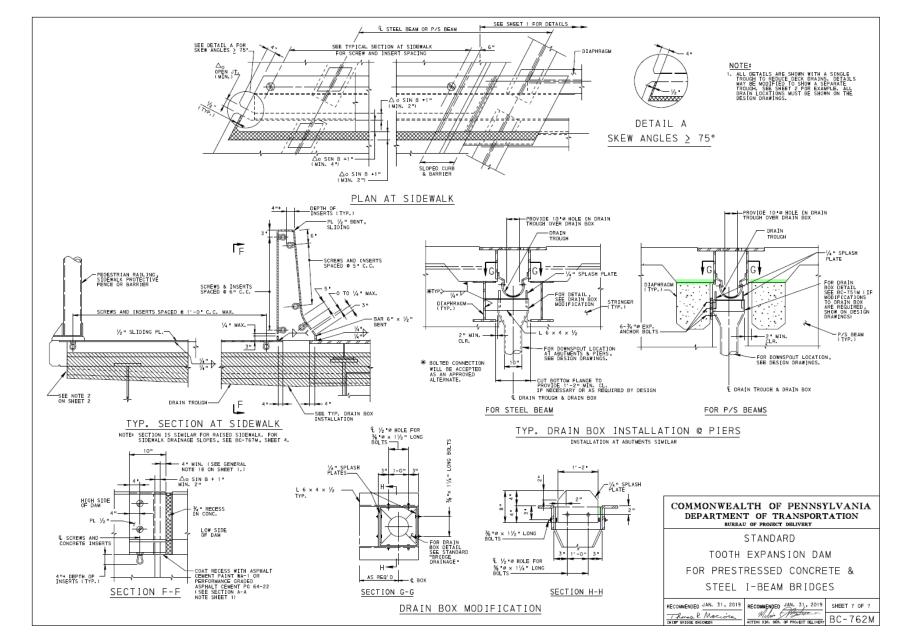
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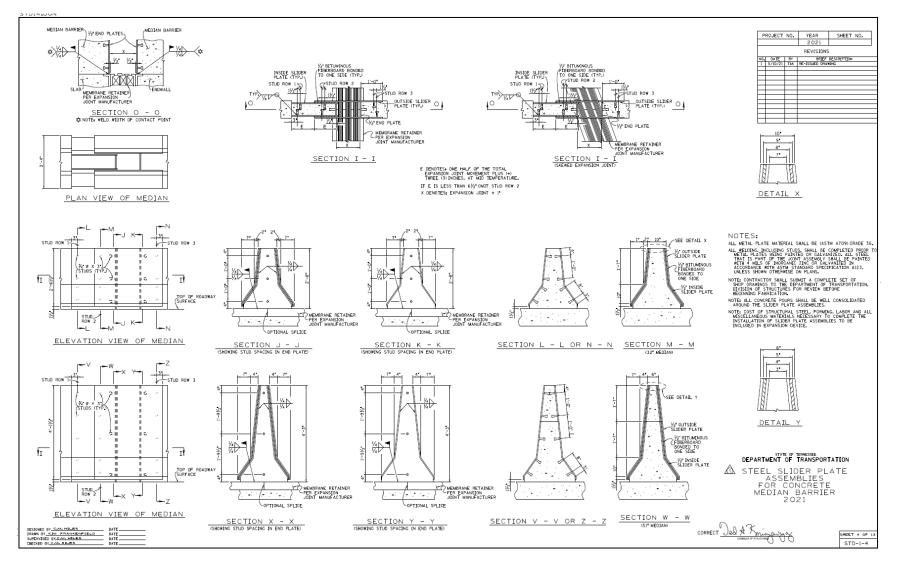


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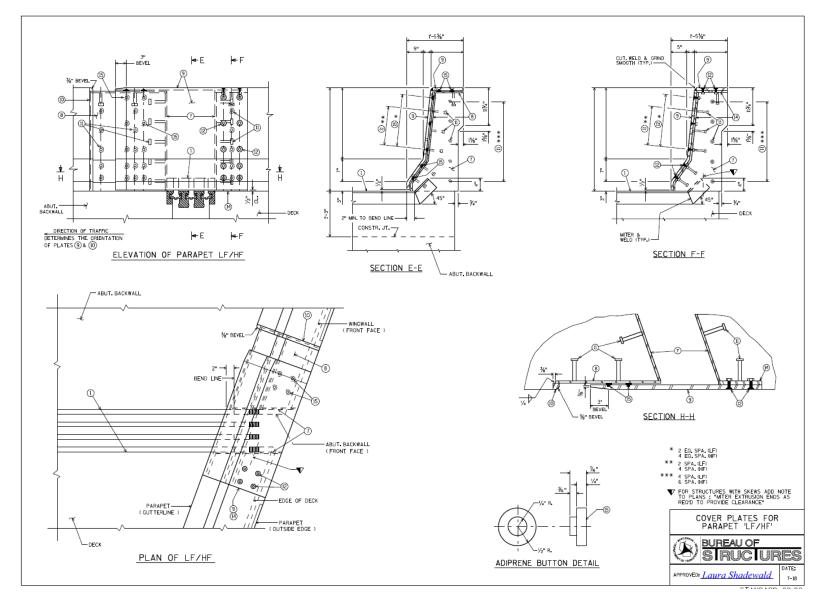


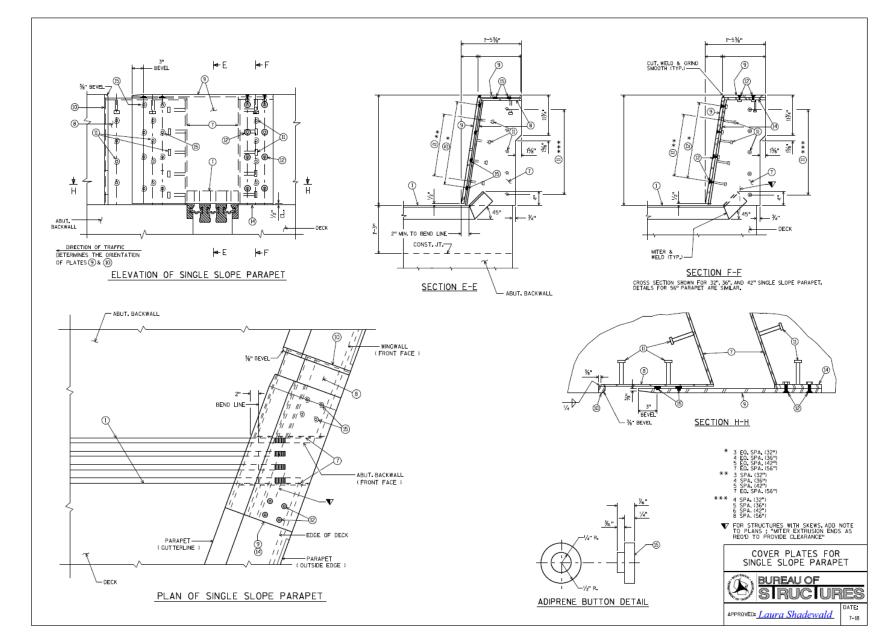


#### B.6. TENNESSEE DOT



### B.7. WISCONSIN DOT





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