SECTION II
Pavement Background

This section is intended to introduce important pavement design definitions and calculations as a background for understanding the pavement evaluation assumptions.

PAVEMENT DESIGN BASICS

Pavements are a structural support system generally considered to act like a beam. But unlike beams in buildings, which generally have static loads, the pavement structure is flexed many times from traffic loading. Cars and light trucks have little impact on the pavement structure. Larger/Heavier trucks have very significant impacts on the pavement due to the high axle weights. The impact of trucks is measured in equivalent single 18,000-pound axle loads (EALs). The total EALs are converted into a design Traffic Index (TI). As an example, a design TI of 5.0 is equal to 7,160 EALs. A Design TI of 8.0 is equal to 372,000 EALs. Therefore, the design TI is the total number of EALs that the pavement will support before it begins to fail, regardless of the passage of time. Normally for a new pavement, the EALs over a 20-year period are used. For rehabilitation procedures such as overlays, 10 years is generally used.

The other element of pavement design is the support of the beam. The support is provided by the sub-grade soils. The support value is designated by the R-value test.

Using the design TI and R-value, the pavement designer chooses various materials to construct the structural section. The most common pavement section is a thin layer of asphalt concrete over aggregate base(s). Many options are available, depending on specific project requirements and conditions.

The design methods used in California are based on a 50 percent reliability. This means that the average pavement life of all pavements constructed using the design procedure will last the design life. It also means that about half will not last that long and the other half will last longer. To express this concept, a design life is often expressed in a span of years, such as 17 to 23 years for 20-year design life.

PAVEMENT DETERIORATION

Pavement deteriorates from two processes; **fatigue** and **aging.** The processes occur simultaneously. In a well-designed and constructed pavement, the two processes result in the need to rehabilitate the pavement at approximately the same time. This is called the design life. The design life for most new pavements is 20 years. Each aging process has its own set of pavement defects, which are related to the process.

Fatigue

The first deterioration process is fatigue from heavy axle loads. As the pavement structure flexes or bends from heavy wheel loads, the asphalt concrete layer's ability to flex is consumed. With sufficient bending, the asphalt concrete layer begins to break at the bottom. This cracking progresses upward until it reaches the surface and appears as alligator cracking. These areas are repaired by removal and replacement of the asphalt concrete in the affected areas. These repairs are commonly called digouts.

As the pavement structure, its supporting soils, and the precise loading from wheel loads varies, so does the time it takes for alligator cracking to appear. As alligator cracking appears, the pavement is repaired with digouts. Generally, when total cumulative quantity of digouts reaches approximately 10 percent of the total area, the pavement is considered to have reached its design life and requires major rehabilitation.

Aging

The major element of the pavement structure that ages is the asphalt concrete layer. To a minor extent, aggregate bases can age if contaminated by fine soil particles, which are transported from the subsoil into the aggregate base.

Asphalt concrete is composed of aggregates and asphalt cement. The aggregates used are generally of fair quality and do experience some breakdown over time. Aggregate aging problems need to be addressed in maintenance procedures. The asphalt concrete binder ages as well. As the asphalt binder ages, it loses volume through loss of volatile components in the asphalt. As the volume decreases, the pavement will progressively crack from the resulting tensile strain in the layer. Normally, these cracks first show up as transverse cracks. They also show up as weak areas such as paving joints. These cracks widen and increase over time until the pavement has a checkerboard appearance.

The aging process also causes the pavement to become more brittle. The increased stiffness results in additional cracking from loaded vehicles. This load induced cracking from the brittleness of the asphalt concrete is very similar to fatigue cracking in appearance.

The major agent for deterioration of the asphalt concrete binder is oxygen. The carrier of the oxygen is water. Water enters the pavement either from the surface or as water vapor from underneath.

TYPICAL PAVEMENT DEFECTS

Defects are common to virtually the entire pavement as aging progresses.

Age cracking begins with longitudinal and transverse cracking and progresses to block shrinkage cracking.

For purposes of understanding the levels of these distresses, the condition level descriptions from the rating manual are included herein:

Alligator Cracking (Fatigue)

Description:

Alligator or fatigue cracking is a series of interconnecting cracks caused by fatigue failure of the asphalt concrete surface under repeated traffic loading. Cracking begins at the bottom of the asphalt surface (or stabilized base) where tensile stress and strain are highest under wheel load. The cracks propagate to the surface initially as a series of parallel longitudinal cracks. After repeated traffic loading, the cracks connect, forming many sided, sharp-angled pieces that develop a pattern resembling chicken wire or the skin of an alligator. The pieces are generally less than 2 ft on the longest side. Alligator cracking occurs only in areas subjected to repeated traffic loading, such as wheel paths. Therefore, it would not occur over an entire area unless the entire area were subject to traffic loading (pattern-type cracking that occurs over an entire area not subjected to loading is called "block cracking," which is not a load-associated distress).

Block Cracking

Description:

Block cracks are interconnected cracks that divide the pavement into approximately rectangular pieces. The blocks may range in size from approximately 1 by 1 ft to 10 by 10 ft. Block cracking is caused mainly by shrinkage of the asphalt concrete and daily temperature cycling (which results in daily stress/strain cycling). It is not load-associated. Block cracking usually indicates that the asphalt has hardened significantly. Block cracking normally occurs over a large portion of the pavement area, but sometimes will occur only in non-traffic areas. This type of distress differs from alligator cracking in that alligator cracks form smaller, many-sided pieces with sharp angles. Also, unlike block cracks, alligator cracks are caused by repeated traffic loadings and therefore found only in traffic areas (i.e., wheel paths).

Distortions

Description:

Distortions are usually caused by corrugations, bumps, sags and shoving. They are localized abrupt upward or downward displacements in the pavement surface, a series of closely spaced ridges and valleys or localized longitudinal displacements of the pavement surface. Distortions affect ride quality.

Longitudinal and Transverse Cracking

Description:

Longitudinal cracks are parallel to the pavement's centerline or laydown direction. They may be caused by:

1. A poorly constructed paving lane joint.
2. Shrinkage of the AC surface due to low temperature or hardening of the asphalt and/or daily temperature cycling.
3. A reflective crack caused by cracking beneath the surface course, including crack in PCC slabs.
4. Decreased support or thickness near the edge of the pavement.

Transverse cracks extend across the pavement at approximately right angles to the pavement centerline or direction of laydown. These may be caused by conditions (2) and (3) above. These types of cracks are not usually load-associated.

Patching and Utility Cut Patching

Description:

A patch is an area of pavement that has been replaced with new material to repair the existing pavement. A patch is considered a defect no matter how well it is performed (a patched area or adjacent area usually does not perform as well as an original pavement section). Generally, some roughness is associated with this distress.

Rutting and Depressions

Description:

A rut is a surface depression in the wheel paths. Pavement uplift may occur along the sides of the rut, but in many instances, ruts are noticeable only after a rainfall, when the paths are filled with water. Rutting stems from a permanent deformation in any of the pavement layers or sub-grades, usually caused by consolidated or lateral movement of the materials due to traffic load. Significant rutting can lead to major structural failure of the pavement.

Depressions are localized areas where the pavement structure is lower than the surrounding area, but the transition is not abrupt enough to be considered a distortion. They are often referred to as "bird baths".

Weathering and Raveling

Description:

Weathering and raveling are the wearing away of the pavement surface due to a loss of asphalt binder and dislodged aggregate particles. These distresses indicate that either the asphalt binder has hardened appreciably or that a poor-quality mixture is present. In addition, weathering and raveling may be caused by certain types of traffic, e.g., tracked vehicles. Softening of the surface and dislodging of the aggregates due to oil spillage areas are also included under these distresses.