

**Senate Committee Hearing
November 28, 2012
Peer Review Process – SFOBB East Span Project**

Chair DeSaulnier and Members, I'm Bimla Rhinehart, Vice Chair of the Toll Bridge Program Oversight Committee and the Executive Director for the California Transportation Commission.

I was asked to share some of the lessons learned by the TBPOC when it utilized the Seismic Peer Review Panel.

The Toll Bridge Program Oversight Committee called upon the services of the Seismic Peer Review Panel on two separate occasions to provide independent advice and counsel on technical engineering matters.

1. The first time was related to welding irregularities associated with the fabrication of the Orthotropic Box Girder (OBG) deck sections for the Self-Anchored Suspension (SAS). American Bridge/Fluor (ABF) the prime contractor, Caltrans the owner/operator and the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) the financier, each hired their own welding experts to investigate and recommend corrective action to address the irregularities.

2. The TBPOC asked the Peer Review Panel to review the work product of the welding experts and provide an overall assessment of recommended actions. The involvement by the Peer Review Committee promoted the development of a consensual solution that not only prevented further fabrication delays, but also resulted in process efficiencies that were incorporated into the contractor's welding process.

In my opinion, this was a very successful deployment of expertise that was immediately available to the TBPOC. Primarily due to the fact that the Seismic Peer Review Panel was already in place and familiar with the SFOBB East Span Project and had the professional stature to bring

about consensus among world experts in a very narrow field of engineering.

3. The second time the TBPOC called upon the services of the Peer Review Panel was when some of the SAS Bridge foundation test procedures were questioned by the Sacramento Bee.

Based on the quick response the TBPOC received from the Peer Review Panel on the OBG welding issue, the TBPOC again, decided to call upon the Seismic Peer Review Panel to investigate and answer specific questions about the safety of the SAS Bridge's foundations.

Because the Peer Review Panel was already in place and familiar with the SFOBB East Span Project and possessed professional knowledge in the subject matter at hand, again they were able to respond in a fairly short amount of time.

Mr. Chair, at least in my opinion, an established Peer Review Panel that consists of highly regarded technical professionals that have intimate familiarity with the details of a mega project, like the SFOBB East Span, is very beneficial to a Program Oversight Committee.

As I mentioned before, the individuals on this Peer Review are the premier experts in their specialty. Their expertise and specialized knowledge is sought after from all over the world.

Caltrans uses the Seismic Peer Review Panel quite often and as a result, it has saved the State and the taxpayers Millions of dollars.

I personally have not seen any evidence of conflicts of interests or any cozy situations.

To remedy this situation, Caltrans formalized the Form 700 process and this was a step in the right direction. Full disclosure is a good thing.

Mr. Chair, matter fact, Caltrans should be commended for using the Peer Review Panel. No one likes to be second guessed on their work product or decisions. On occasion the Peer Review Panel has been very blunt with Caltrans and did not worry about letting Caltrans know when they had a difference of opinion with them.