

Mason Hardaway Lampton

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Time to take the lead

The road and bridge construction industry is evolving. The maturity of our highway systems means that there are fewer new construction projects and more phased replacements, which bring a unique set of challenges and risks. Many of the projects occur on highly traveled roadways. As a result, departments of transportation (DOTs) want these projects finished as quickly as possible and preferably with little or no disruption to traffic.

That's good news for the precast concrete industry. Precast concrete and accelerated bridge construction (ABC) methods are the natural choices for these projects. Casting elements off-site reduces road closure times while ensuring that every element of the bridge meets quality standards. In many cases, crews can erect the entire system in a matter of weeks, often during off-hours or in segments that allow traffic flow to continue. Project owners get huge time and cost savings, and traffic jams that drive commuters insane are reduced.

In one recent example, the Georgia DOT replaced the Interstate 85 bridge over Piedmont Road in Atlanta in just 44 days using ABC methods after a massive fire destroyed the bridge, creating havoc for 240,000 daily commuters. That project came in 30 days ahead of schedule, winning it the title of Best Main Span 76–149 ft in PCI's 2018 Design Awards.

Such proven successes are giving PCI members the chance to expand the scope and control they have over these projects, but it's up to us to step up to the challenge. As the quantity of work we deliver on these projects expands, so should our role. Such a transition is not unprecedented. Precasters who build office buildings and parking structures often take leadership roles in these projects, and they can offer bridge designers a road map for transformation. It requires selling themselves as project leaders to the owners and proving that they have the resources and expertise to manage project delivery from end to end.

This evolution also opens more opportunities for PCI-certified erectors to demonstrate the added value they bring to these projects. This objective third-party certification provides owners with a benchmark to determine which erectors bring the greatest accountability, reliability, and proven safety performance to these high-risk projects, but it only works if owners understand this value proposition. It's important, as an industry and an association, for all of us to educate DOTs, bridge designers, and other project stakeholders about the benefits that certified erectors bring to the table.

The construction industry is evolving, and we have to evolve with it. The precast concrete community has always been great at generating technical innovations, but we also need to be good at business innovation. We have a chance to expand our role in planning and delivering complete solutions for these bridge replacement projects, but to do that we have to promote our total-solution designs as well as our ability to lead projects. These owners want to save time and money on these projects, and we can help them do that. We just have to show them how.

I look forward to talking more about this topic at the next National Bridge Conference in fall 2019. We specifically separated this event from PCI Committee Days to ensure that it gets the full attention and attendance it deserves. In the meantime, if anyone wants to discuss the evolution of bridge replacement projects—or any other topic—feel free to reach out to me directly. ■



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