Prevention and Solutions of Concrete Cracks in Cast-in-Place Box Girder

Chuan Xue
Chongqing Tongnan District Transportation Affairs Center, Chongqing, China

Abstract: Cracks in cast-in-place box girder concrete are a complex problem, with various causes and treatment methods, mainly involving multiple aspects such as materials, construction, and design. The formation of cracks can be attributed to two types of internal and external factors. Internal factors include material shrinkage deformation, temperature changes, and construction processes, while external factors include load effects, moisture infiltration, and earthquakes. In order to effectively control and deal with these cracks, comprehensive treatment from multiple perspectives is needed. This article examines ways to enhance the accuracy of predicting concrete crack formation by analyzing the influencing factors. During construction and maintenance, a series of measures are implemented to control the onset and progression of concrete cracks. Additionally, the article discusses ways to strengthen communication and collaboration in engineering practices, and to advance the application of concrete crack control technology. Finally, the article underscores the importance of strengthening quality control and supervision mechanisms to ensure the correct implementation of control measures and the validation of their effectiveness. These findings are crucial for improving the longevity and durability of bridge structures.

Keywords: Cast in Place Box Girder; Concrete Cracks; Preventive Measures; Solution Measures; Traffic Engineering

1. Introduction

Concrete is an indispensable material in the implementation of transportation engineering, and its advantages in construction include convenience, price, and overall integrity of components.[1] The most commonly used structure in transportation engineering is the cast-in-place box girder concrete structure. Due to factors such as temperature changes, concrete shrinkage, and load stress during production and construction, cracks often appear in the concrete of the box girder. These cracks not only affect the aesthetics of the box girder, but also reduce its load-bearing capacity and service life. Therefore, effective control of cracks in cast-in-place box girder concrete is crucial.

2. Prevention of Concrete Cracks in Cast-in-place Box Girder Structures

2.1 Preventive Measures

(1) Control of construction process

During the construction process of cast-in-place box girder structures, a series of measures are taken to control the occurrence of concrete cracks. Firstly, it is necessary to ensure that the concrete is mixed evenly and avoid uneven phenomena to reduce the concentration of internal stress. Secondly, during the process of pouring concrete, attention should be paid to the reasonable arrangement of vibrators and the uniform vibration of the entire structure to eliminate voids and bubbles, and prevent cracks from forming in the holes inside the concrete. In addition, the fluidity of the concrete should be controlled during pouring to avoid excessive or insufficient fluidity, in order to ensure the stability of the concrete during the pouring process.[2]

(2) Implementation of maintenance measures

Good maintenance measures are crucial for controlling the formation of concrete cracks. After pouring, timely wet curing should be carried out to maintain the moisture content of the concrete and prevent shrinkage cracks caused by premature drying. During maintenance, measures such as covering with moisturizing film and spraying water can be taken to increase the saturation of concrete and improve its crack resistance. In addition, attention should be paid to avoiding excessive temperature changes.[3] If pouring concrete in a high-temperature environment, cooling measures should be taken to prevent thermal cracks caused by rapid temperature rise.

2.2 Active Control Methods

(1) Prestress control

Prestressing is a commonly used method for controlling concrete cracks. By applying pre-set tensile or compressive forces during the construction process, compressive stress can be formed in the concrete, thereby offsetting some or all of the internal tensile stress and reducing the occurrence of cracks. Prestressing can be applied using prestressed steel bars or prestressed tendons, and the specific prestressing design needs to be reasonably selected and calculated based on the characteristics of the structure.[4]

(2) Additional steel reinforcement constraint

The external reinforcement constraint is achieved by adding additional steel bars to the concrete structure to increase its load-bearing capacity and control the propagation of cracks. These additional steel bars can be placed in the compression area or crack prone area of concrete to enhance the tensile strength of the structure and reduce the impact of concrete cracks by limiting their propagation. The design of external steel reinforcement constraints needs to consider the stress characteristics of the structure and the distribution of cracks to determine.

(3) Construction with preloading groove

The construction with preloading grooves is a commonly used method for controlling concrete cracks. By installing pre designed compressive stress fixings in concrete structures, a prestressed state can be formed to counteract some or all of the internal tensile stress. Pre stressing grooves are usually located on the surface of concrete or near the compressed area, which limit the cracking of concrete and improve the crack resistance of the structure by applying pressure. The design of the preloading groove needs to be reasonably selected and calculated according to specific structural requirements.[5]

2.3 Responsiveness Control Methods

The responsive control method refers to the control of concrete cracks in cast-in-place box girder structures through intelligent sensing technology and real-time monitoring and control processes. This method can monitor the deformation, temperature, humidity and other parameters of the structure in real time, as well as the stress distribution inside the concrete, so as to make timely adjustments based on the monitoring results and control the formation of concrete cracks.[6]

(1) Application cases of intelligent sensing technology

The application of intelligent sensing technology can effectively achieve responsive control of concrete cracks. By installing various sensors in the structure, such as strain sensors, temperature sensors, humidity sensors, etc., important parameters such as deformation, temperature, and humidity of the structure can be monitored in real time. Monitoring data can be transmitted to the monitoring system through wireless communication or wired connection, and then analyzed and processed. According to the changes in monitoring data, corresponding control measures can be taken, such as adjusting maintenance conditions, changing the application force of prestress, etc.

(2) Real time monitoring and regulation process

In cast-in-place box girder structures, various sensors can be installed to monitor parameters such as deformation, temperature, and humidity of the structure. These sensors include strain sensors, temperature sensors, and humidity sensors. The data collected by sensors can be transmitted wirelessly or wired to the monitoring system for real-time monitoring, in order to obtain the status information of the structure in a timely manner. The monitoring system will analyze and process the transmitted data, including interpreting the data, extracting structural features, and identifying abnormal situations. Based on the results of data analysis, corresponding regulatory measures can be formulated to address the problem. For example, maintenance conditions can be adjusted, the application force of prestressing can be changed, or external steel reinforcement constraints can be increased. The formulated regulatory measures will be implemented and the effectiveness of the regulation will be monitored. If further adjustments are needed, feedback information can be transmitted back to the monitoring system for correction.

3. Solution Measures for Cracks in Cast-in-place Box Girder Concrete

3.1 Prevention and Control Measures for Cracks Caused by Design Issues

In the design phase of transportation engineering, a reinforcement scheme was proposed to ensure the coordination between structure and appearance. The so-called compensating shrinkage concrete technology refers to the optimization of the shrinkage characteristics of concrete by adding expansion agents to the concrete during the design process of building construction. In practical applications, in order to improve the application effect of compensating shrinkage concrete, it is necessary to focus on the configuration of structural steel bars. Especially for thin-walled components, the radius and quantity of steel bars used in their construction need to be reasonably determined.

3.2 Preventive Measures for Cracks in Concrete Mix Proportions

Concrete is an essential raw material in construction engineering. When designing the mix proportion, construction conditions and climate environment should be considered to improve the accuracy of mix proportion design and the construction performance of concrete. Before construction, a simulation test of the mix proportion should be conducted to meet the construction requirements. When designing the mix proportion, standards and specifications should be taken as the premise, and the concrete slump and aggregate particle size should meet the requirements of component size and steel bar spacing. When the concrete meets the workability standards, try to choose a lower sand ratio and smaller slump.[7]

3.3 Prevention and Control Measures for Cracks Caused by Construction and On-site Maintenance

During the transportation of concrete, it is necessary to ensure that the concrete mixture is evenly mixed to prevent layering and segregation. After pouring concrete, insulation and moisture retention measures should be taken immediately to ensure that the water loss rate inside and on the surface of the concrete is basically the same, avoiding surface plastic shrinkage cracks and stress cracks caused by inconsistent shrinkage. When the contact area between the concrete surface and the outside world is large and the hydration temperature gradually increases, the insulation measures should be adjusted accordingly, especially for high-grade concrete. Due to the large amount of cement and low water cement ratio, the hydration heat release is relatively large. During the entire curing period, the curing time should not be less than 7 days. For impermeable concrete and large volume concrete, the curing time should not be less than 14 days.[8]

If the temperature is relatively low during construction, it should be noted that the temperature of the concrete entering the mold should exceed 5 °C. After the completion of concrete pouring construction, the staff should immediately cover all pouring surfaces with insulation and moisture retaining materials. When removing the concrete formwork, the strength of the concrete should reach the standard value.

The pouring and curing of concrete are key steps in ensuring the quality of structural concrete and reducing cracks. Therefore, choosing the appropriate construction method is crucial as it is a major measure to prevent concrete cracks. For example, in construction, the segmented and block pouring method is particularly adopted for large volume concrete, which can control the internal hydration heat within a reasonable range. Pre embedded pipes can also be used to reduce the hydration temperature of concrete, and external storage and internal dispersion curing can be used to increase the surface temperature of concrete and reduce the internal hydration heat, thereby controlling the internal heat within a reasonable range and reducing temperature differences. Finally, in the concrete curing process, if the next step is required, concrete strength testing must be carried out to ensure that the process operation will not affect the surface of the concrete. After the work is completed, immediately take covering and watering maintenance measures to increase the surface humidity.[9]

4. Research Progress and Challenges

4.1 Current Research Progress

In research into controlling concrete cracks in cast-in-place box girder structures, notable advancements have been achieved in the application of new materials and technologies. For instance, employing advanced concrete types like high-performance concrete (HPC) and self-compacting concrete (SCC) can effectively enhance the structures' resistance to cracking. These new materials possess superior fluidity and self-compacting properties, enabling them to fill minute gaps and reduce the concentration of internal stress, thus minimizing the formation of concrete cracks. Moreover, incorporating nanomaterials, using reinforcing agents, and conducting microstructure analysis offer additional possibilities for research into concrete crack control.

Through experiments and numerical simulations, significant achievements have been made in controlling concrete cracks in cast-in-place box girder structures. By simulating the stress distribution and deformation of concrete during loading, the location and propagation trend of concrete cracks can be predicted. Meanwhile, experimental research can verify the results of numerical simulations and explore effective methods for controlling concrete cracks through loading experiments and observing crack morphology. These experimental and numerical simulation research results provide theoretical basis and technical support for concrete crack control.

4.2 Challenges and Issues Faced

The concrete crack control technology faces some challenges and problems in practical applications, including the trade-off between technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness, as well as practical application difficulties in engineering practice.

In the research and application of concrete crack control technology, it is necessary to balance technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness. On the one hand, the introduction of new materials and technologies can improve the crack resistance of concrete structures, but at the same time, it will also increase construction and maintenance costs. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehensively consider the feasibility and economy of the technology, and minimize costs as much as possible while ensuring structural safety.

In engineering practice, concrete crack control technology faces some practical application difficulties. For example, existing engineering projects often have complex construction environments and constraints, such as time and space limitations, which pose challenges to the practical application of concrete crack control. In addition, the lack of relevant standards and specifications also brings uncertainty to engineering practice, making the selection and application of control measures difficult.

4.3 Solutions

In order to ensure the economic effectiveness of concrete crack control technology, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research and develop new technologies. These technologies should strike a balance between technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness. By researching new materials, technologies, and methods, the crack resistance of concrete can be improved, and construction and maintenance costs can be reduced. At the same time, it is also necessary to strengthen the formulation and improvement of standards and specifications to guide and support the application of concrete crack control technology. Developing unified testing methods, evaluation criteria, and design specifications can improve the reliability and consistency of technical applications. In addition, strengthening communication and cooperation in engineering practice can help promote the application of concrete crack control technology. By sharing successful cases and exchanging experiences, engineers and construction personnel can enhance their understanding and comprehension of control technology. At the same time, establish a sound quality control and supervision mechanism, and strengthen the supervision and testing of concrete crack control projects. Through strict quality control and supervision, the correct implementation of control measures can be ensured and their effectiveness can be verified.[10]

5. Conclusion

Cracks are a common phenomenon in concrete structures, which not only weaken the anti-seepage ability of buildings and affect their quality, but also cause steel bars to rust, concrete to carbonize, shorten the service life of materials, and reduce their bearing capacity.

In the construction process, if cracks occur, a comprehensive analysis of the types of cracks should be conducted, effective measures should be taken, and targeted prevention and control plans should be formulated from each stage to solve the problem of concrete cracks and ensure the safety, reliability, and stability of buildings.

Concrete crack control is an important issue in the design and construction of cast-in-place box girder structures, which is of great significance for ensuring the stability and durability of the structure. In terms of research progress, the application of new materials and technologies, as well as experimental and numerical simulation research results, provide theoretical basis and technical support for concrete crack control. However, concrete crack control still faces some challenges and issues. This includes balancing technical feasibility and cost-effectiveness, as well as practical application difficulties in engineering practice. To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to continue in-depth research and development of economically effective concrete crack control technologies, and strengthen the formulation and improvement of standards and specifications. In addition, establishing a sound quality control and supervision mechanism, promoting communication and cooperation in engineering practice, is also an important way to solve problems. Looking ahead to the future, there is still much room for development in concrete crack control technology. With the continuous progress and innovation of science and technology, new materials, new technologies, and new methods will continue to emerge. For example, the application of nanomaterials and the development of intelligent sensing technology are expected to bring new breakthroughs to concrete crack control. In addition, strengthening cross cooperation with other fields, such as structural optimization design, construction process improvement, etc., can also provide a more comprehensive solution for concrete crack control pan.

In summary, concrete crack control is a continuously researched and improved field that requires a balance between theory and practice. Through continuous efforts and innovation, we believe that concrete crack control technology will continue to improve, safeguarding the stability and durability of cast-in-place box girder structures.

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