



Ductile Iron Pipe  
Research Association

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APPLICATIONS

# Bridge Crossings with Ductile Iron Pipe

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The Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association (DIPRA) periodically receives requests from engineers and contractors concerning recommendations on the design and/or installation of pipelines spanning waterways, highways, and railroads. Because the variables involved in such installations present numerous alternatives and challenges for designers and contractors, DIPRA does not provide recommendations and does not assume responsibility for design or installation practices on such projects. DIPRA does, however, recognize the engineering complexities inherent to bridge crossing pipelines and offers information to assist those involved with this type of installation and to point out typical design criteria which should be considered for bridge crossings. Adaptation of the entire pipeline as a unit applied to a bridge structure involves close detail to many parameters in both structures. The following sections cover these parameters in detail.

### **General**

Ductile Iron Pipe is centrifugally cast in 18- and 20-foot nominal laying lengths. Nominal diameters range from 3 to 64 inches, with a variety of pressure and special thickness classes. Although Ductile Iron Pipe is usually furnished with a cement-mortar lining, optional internal linings also are available for a wide range of special applications. Also, Ductile Iron Pipe is normally furnished with an external shop coat for a “finished” appearance, although shop-applied primers for special painting systems also are available.

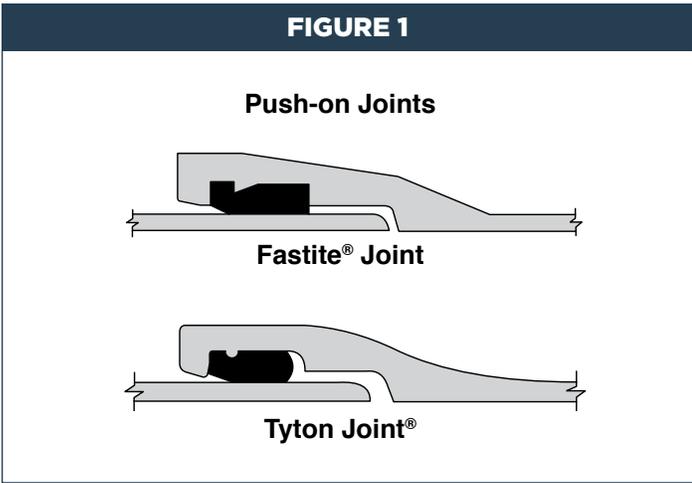
### **Joints**

Ductile Iron Pipe is furnished with several different types of joints: push-on, mechanical, restrained, ball and socket, flanged, and grooved and shouldered joints. Typically, bridge crossings involve push-on joints, restrained joints, or combinations thereof. Push-on joints (see Figure 1 on next page) are

excellent for bridges with properly designed and constructed supports. Ample deflections in these joints are possible when proper lateral and vertical supports are provided to resist the weight of the pipe and its contents, as well as thrust forces. Normally, expansion and contraction of the pipe due to temperature changes can be adequately provided for with such joints; if more adjustment is needed, expansion couplings (see section on Expansion/ Contraction Couplings) should be considered.

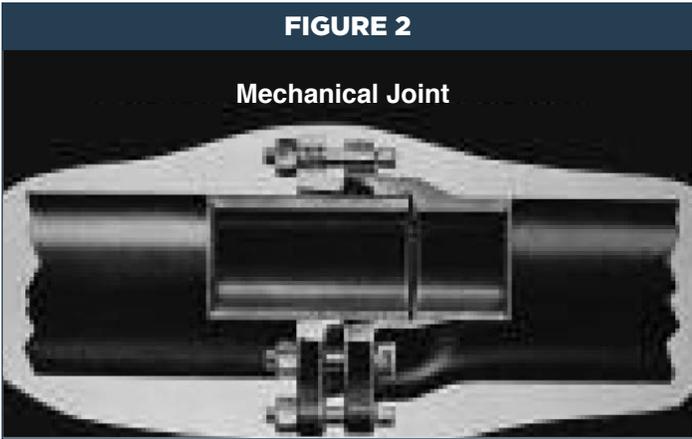
Mechanical joints (see Figure 2 on next page) are often used for fittings but are not generally used for straight runs of pipe. To accommodate possible pipe movement caused by thermal expansion and contraction, the push-on joint may be a better choice than the mechanical joint due to its deeper socket depth.

**FIGURE 1**



Since standard push-on and mechanical joints are not “restrained,” due consideration should be given to proper design and construction of supports or anchorages to resist thrust forces, dead loads, impact and shock loads, and thermal changes.

**FIGURE 2**



The restrained joint complements the push-on and mechanical types by maintaining flexibility and providing both ease of assembly and a “locking feature” to resist pull-out. Numerous types are available employing modifications of the push-on and mechanical joint designs. In a pressurized system, some flexible restrained joints are subject to significant joint extension. Therefore, when utilizing restrained joints, proper design and construction techniques normally include provisions for extending each joint so as to engage its restraints. This may be accomplished by extending the joints fully during assembly and/or by hydrostatically testing the horizontal portion of the crossing separately (using restrained closures) before making connections to offset bends or riser pipes. Cumulative joint extension due to thrust pressure over a long crossing could result in over-deflection, excessive movements, and excessive beam loadings to fitting connections at the ends of a crossing.

**Pipe Supports/Hangers**

Typical installations of Ductile Iron Pipe on bridges involve a “pipe on supports” approach, depending upon the placement of the pipe on the bridge and the details of the bridge support system. Referring to the DIPRA publication, “Design of Ductile Iron Pipe on Supports,” “the minimum pressure class in all sizes is more than adequate to support the weight of the pipe and water it contains” with one support per length of pipe (i.e., a span length of 18 or 20 feet).\*

*\*Note: Proprietary assemblies are available for long span (multiple lengths per support) applications. Contact DIPRA member companies for details*

It is recommended that the saddle angle of the support be between 90 and 120 degrees. Little or no benefit is gained by increasing the saddle angle more than 120 degrees, while stresses tend to increase rapidly with angles less than 90 degrees. It is also recommended to use one support per length of pipe positioned immediately behind the bell. With these assumptions, each span can be conservatively treated as a simply supported beam.

It is of utmost importance that sufficient vertical and lateral stability be provided at supports for both restrained and unrestrained joint pipe. When a flexibly joined Ductile Iron Pipeline is pressurized, some thrust forces develop — even at slightly deflected joints. If not adequately stabilized, these forces can cause the joints to deflect to their maximum, creating a “snaking” of the pipeline and possibly even separation of unrestrained joints.

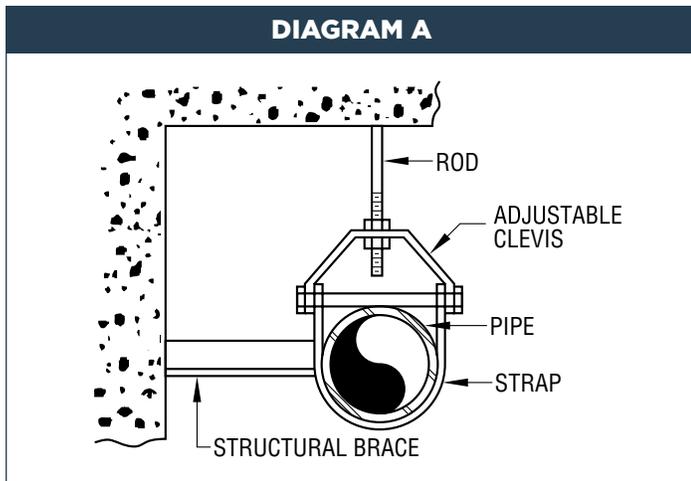
Supports must be designed to carry the weight of the pipe and its contents, and other applicable loadings and conditions, such as thrust forces, seismic loadings, traffic vibrations, and insulation in cold climates.

The location of the pipeline on the bridge will, in many cases, dictate the type of support to be used. Because of the many types of bridges and placements for these pipelines, specific design details for hangers and/or supports for all possibilities cannot be presented; however, three common locations for pipe placement are inside a concrete box utility corridor, underneath the deck between girders, and on the exterior side. Each location may require different types of support; here is a look at each.

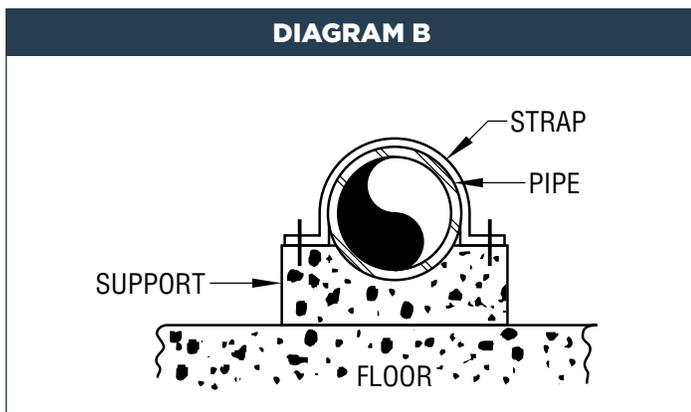
- **Inside a concrete box utility corridor**

Support of the pipeline inside a box utility corridor is normally provided by the ceiling or the floor. A universal hanging detail from the ceiling is shown in Diagram A.

Lateral movement is restricted by bracing against the side of the box corridor. Long rod lengths are not advisable due to the possibility of twisting or buckling and the lack of proper support resulting from critical movements.



Supporting the pipe from the “floor” of the box corridor may be accomplished in several ways. One way is shown in Diagram B. Straps should be used to secure the pipe to the support, with each length of pipe “strapped down” immediately behind the bell (the bell should not rest on the floor).

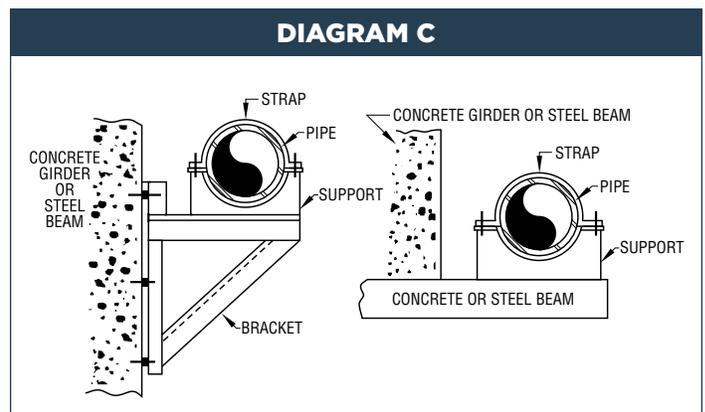


- **Underneath the deck between girders**

Because of the unlimited configurations in types of bridges and structural supports, it is impossible to address all the variations. In many cases, the pipe can be supported from the concrete deck as in Diagram A, with sufficient vertical and lateral support from the bridge understructure. Where structural steel beams are used throughout the bridge, beam clamps present an easy solution to hanging the pipe; however, the pipe will also require adequate vertical and lateral support. Many bridges have steel beams running laterally under the bridge which may serve to support hangers or cradles.

- **On the exterior side**

The structural material of the bridge exterior and its design configuration will generally dictate the arrangement for installing the Ductile Iron Pipe. Examples of bridges with concrete or steel exteriors are shown in Diagram C. For bridges with wooden exteriors (see Figure 3), drilling and tapping the supports are done easily in the field and generally, the spacing of supports will accommodate the 18- to 20- foot lengths of Ductile Iron Pipe. The specific design of the supports is unlimited and open to the discretion of the engineer.



The design choices for any placement location are many; however, these specific points need to be observed:

- At least one support per length of pipe is required (unless “long span” pipe is utilized).
- The minimum pressure class of Ductile Iron Pipe is sufficient in all sizes to support the weight of the pipe and its contents.
- Proper lateral and vertical support is needed to prevent “snaking.”

### Expansion/Contraction Couplings

Conditions of fluid flow inside a Ductile Iron Pipeline — as well as ambient temperature changes throughout the year — will affect expansion and contraction of the pipeline with respect to the bridge. Attention should be drawn to the fact that bridge expansion could differ from that of the pipe because of (1) differences between bridge and pipe temperature, with pipe temperature being affected by the temperature of its contents, (2) differences in coefficients of thermal expansion,\* and (3) locations of bridge expansion joints which may concentrate movement relative to the pipe. Also, the engineer needs to consider the interaction of expansion/contraction couplings with thrust restraint systems, especially when restrained joints are used.

Expansion and contraction in conjunction with thrust movement could introduce excessive stresses in the Ductile Iron Pipe, its joints, or its structural supports.

The number and location of expansion/contraction couplings, if required, are determined by the length and design of the bridge in consideration of the maximum anticipated temperature differential. These couplings are normally utilized for longer crossings and bridges with multiple spans. Typically, expansion/contraction couplings in the pipeline will be located adjacent to bridge expansion joints. Since these devices occasionally require maintenance, they should be located in an area that is easily accessible.

\*Coefficients of expansion:  
Ductile iron 0.0000062 inch/inch F  
Structural steel 0.0000065 inch/inch F  
Reinforced concrete 0.0000070 inch/inch F

Basically, there are two types of couplings: single-end and double-end (see Figure 4). Manufacturers’ recommendations for installation and proper use should be followed. The type of joints used for the Ductile Iron Pipe will dictate the possible need for an expansion/contraction coupling.

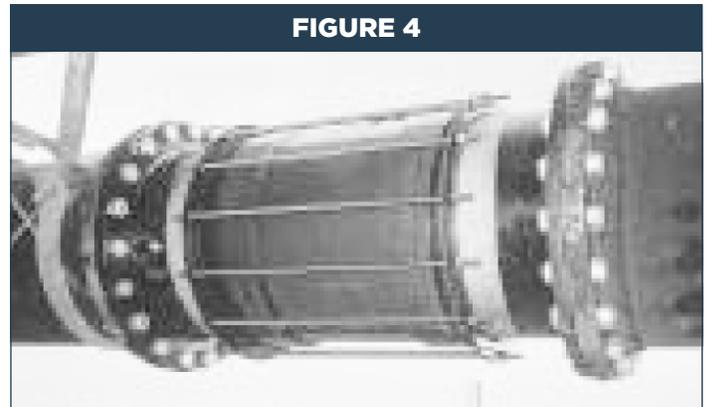


FIGURE 4

Generally speaking, push-on joints, strapped down behind the bell, are adequate for most short crossings without special expansion/contraction devices, assuming care is exercised in the installation procedure of these joints. Specifically, push-on joints should not be assembled completely “home” if installed in the winter, due to the expansion caused as the weather becomes warmer. This temperature change could cause a reaction to occur at each joint, “kicking” it out of alignment, creating a “snaking” action.

### Abutments

Installation of a pipeline on a bridge is complicated by the transition from underground to the bridge itself. This critical point in design and operation of the pipeline is dependent upon the type of joints, the amount of vertical and horizontal displacement, and the physical structure of the abutment. If a change in direction exists at this transition, it is good design practice to restrict the fittings to as small an angle change as possible.

Thrust restraint is of primary importance at this transition section if there is a change in direction (see Figure 5 on next page). Thrust restraint also has to be considered for all possible changes in direction or other points of thrust in the pipeline. If restrained joints are utilized on the bridge structure, the thrust can be carried through this transition section back to the underground piping on each side of the bridge. The equations for calculating

**FIGURE 5**



the thrust forces are covered in the DIPRA manual “Thrust Restraint Design for Ductile Iron Pipe.” If desired, a concrete block can be poured to anchor the elbow or bend at the end of the bridge. Sometimes the abutment of the bridge or separate piles can safely be used to “tie-down” the pipeline and/or bends and restrain the thrust forces.

Where a Ductile Iron Pipeline is to be installed on a new bridge, coordination with the contractor can facilitate this transition section by leaving an opening in the abutment wall for the pipeline.

### **Air Release**

Ductile Iron Pipe installed on a bridge may need an air release valve assembly to purge the pipeline of any accumulated air (see Figure 6). The size of the valve and assembly is governed by the pipe size and expected accumulations of air. Some restrictions may apply from the governing authority, such as the State Highway Department. However, an air release valve assembly generally is required at a high point in the pipeline, such as could occur on a bridge due to the change in elevation from the underground piping up to the supports on the bridge, or on a long vertically arched bridge.

### **Seismic Conditions**

Special design considerations are warranted when seismic conditions might be encountered. The approach piping to the bridge (specialty joints) and the pipe construction (bracing) on the bridge need to meet particular design criteria. The approach piping is subject to great joint deflections during earthquakes as well as elongation and contraction as the earth moves. Likewise, the piping on the bridge needs adequate supports to maintain integrity during shaking.

### **External Protection**

It has been found that standard Ductile Iron Pipe exposed to the atmosphere does not require special corrosion protection measures in most cases. In areas subject to corrosive atmospheric conditions, appropriate protection should be provided for the pipe as well as the steel hangers, clevises, threaded rods, etc.

In underground installations where Ductile Iron Pipe is subjected to corrosive soil conditions, polyethylene encasement is generally recommended in accordance with ANSI/AWWA C105/A21.5 Standard. For these installations at bridge crossings, the polyethylene sleeve should extend a minimum of 12 inches beyond the soil at the soil/atmosphere transition and be taped in place to the pipe.

### **Freezing Conditions**

In the northern parts of the country as well as mountainous areas, freezing of a Ductile Iron Pipeline on a bridge is a possibility. This is more likely to occur for small-diameter pipe with low

**FIGURE 6**



flow velocities. Where freezing conditions are anticipated, consideration should be given to insulating the pipeline.

The amount, type, and application of insulation depends upon the conditions. Other measures used to retard freezing include the use of a heat tape wrapped around the pipe underneath the insulation. This, of course, requires a source of electricity. During periods of inactivity, system drains or blow-offs on a raised bridge pipeline may be employed to empty the pipeline.

### Basic Design Approaches

From a basic design standpoint, there are some generally accepted principles for the overall design of a Ductile Iron Pipe installation on a bridge. Generally, they are dependent on the bridge structure, the type of thrust restraint to be used, and on the method of pipe support.

The use of restrained joints and fittings allows the following:

- Axial thrust forces can be resisted.
- Movement of the pipe due to thermal expansion/contraction may be transmitted to expansion/contraction couplings without joint separation.
- Thermal expansion/contraction may be accommodated without joint separation and without pipe expansion/contraction couplings.
- Extra security is provided in the event of failure or damage of a support.
- The pipeline is effectively “separated” from the bridge structure (in conjunction with rollers or other pipe supports).
- An easy means is provided for testing the bridge pipeline separate from the main pipeline without external thrust restraint (using restrained joint test closures).

When using unrestrained push-on or mechanical joint pipe and fittings, some general guidelines are appropriate:

- Unrestrained pressure pipelines should not be installed on hangers with little or no lateral support. This also applies to flexible restrained joints.
- Unrestrained Ductile Iron Pipe should be clamped securely to the supports or structure with at least one support per length of pipe.
- Fittings must be externally thrust anchored and/or blocked.
- If crossings are to be tested independently of and without attaching to the main pipeline, test closure pieces must be externally restrained and/or anchored.

Each individual unrestrained joint should be brought fully home and then, dependent on the ambient temperature conditions at the time of installation, backed out slightly to provide for anticipated or possible thermal expansion of the pipe lengths. If counted on for thrust restraint, restrained joints normally should be fully extended to remove slack, engage the restraint, and minimize movements under pressure.

If the pipeline is attached to the structure, particularly on long crossings, pipe expansion/contraction couplings may be required at the bridge expansion joint locations. If such couplings are required, the adjacent pipe generally must be firmly attached to or anchored to the bridge to prevent joint separations as the bridge and pipeline expansion mechanisms do their jobs.

Governmental regulations and/or construction codes may affect the pipeline bridge crossing design/construction and should be adhered to where applicable.

### Construction

This article is not intended to give step-by-step, detailed instructions for the design or installation of any particular Ductile Iron Pipeline on a bridge; however, there are certain principles and application techniques of which the installer and the designer/engineer need to be aware:

1. The design location for placement of the pipeline on the bridge will dictate, in many cases, the choices available for handling and installing the pipe. For example, if the pipe is to be installed in a box utility corridor, the option of installing the pipe from below the bridge is eliminated.
2. From a performance standpoint, one support per length of pipe is sufficient. However, two supports per length may facilitate the actual construction of the pipeline.
3. To eliminate over-deflected joints and misalignment, vertical as well as horizontal bracing must be properly designed and installed.
4. For any joint that needs to function as an expansion joint, a suitable water-insoluble pipe lubricant (such as an underwater lubricant or the like) may be preferable over regular water soluble joint lubricant or soap for exposed pipe on the bridge.

5. The designer/engineer should consider the ambient temperature conditions with regard to assembly and service of the joints and expansion/contraction devices.
6. Where necessary, appurtenant items such as air-release valves, drain blow-offs, insulation, etc., should be designed and constructed to facilitate any future maintenance.
7. Support and hanger installations are critical to the integrity of the pipeline and as such should be properly designed, installed and maintained.
8. In the design of a new bridge, consideration should be given to provision of support locations and insertions of anchors, openings in the abutment and/or beams, etc., to facilitate pipeline installation.
9. Thrust restraint for a pipeline on a bridge is critical and needs to be properly considered. All thrust restraint mechanisms designed for the pipeline on the bridge should be installed with proper care and attention to detail. The use of restrained joints should be coordinated with the manufacturer to ensure proper assembly and installation practices.

### **Summary**

The design and construction of a Ductile Iron Pipeline on a bridge structure is unique from the standpoint of its placement outside the confines of a typical underground installation, its transition from underground to the bridge structure, and its susceptibility to the various prevalent loadings and conditions. Even so, with proper design approaches and construction techniques, bridge crossing installations can be easily accomplished. Further design and installation information is available through DIPRA and/or its member companies.

### **References**

Bonds, Richard W., P.E., Design of Ductile Iron Pipe on Supports. Birmingham, Alabama: DIPRA, 2015.

Thrust Restraint Design for Ductile Iron Pipe, Fourth Edition. Birmingham, Alabama: DIPRA, 2015.

For more information contact DIPRA or any of its member companies.

### Ductile Iron Pipe Research Association

An association of quality producers dedicated to the highest pipe standards through a program of continuing research and service to water and wastewater professionals.

P.O. Box 190306  
Birmingham, AL 35219  
205.402.8700 Tel  
[www.dipra.org](http://www.dipra.org)

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### Member Companies

AMERICAN Ductile Iron Pipe  
P.O. Box 2727  
Birmingham, Alabama 35202-2727

Canada Pipe Company, Ltd.  
1757 Burlington Street East  
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3R5 Canada

McWane Ductile  
P.O. Box 6001  
Coshocton, Ohio 43812-6001

United States Pipe and Foundry Company  
Two Chase Corporate Drive  
Suite 200  
Birmingham, Alabama 35244

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