

11CCEE Conference Report



Theme: Facing Seismic Risk

Sharlie Huffman, Chair

Don Kennedy, Technical Co-chair

General

We had an overwhelming majority of positive comments on all aspects of the conference both verbal and written. The post-conference survey had 147 returns, which were very positive as were many unsolicited comments to organizing committee members. We also received dozens of new applications to CAEE as well as reconnecting with past members. Following are some descriptions of key aspects and recognition of suggestions for improvement that were received.

Organizing Committee

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- Trevor Allen Trevor.Allen@NRCan-RNCan.gc.ca
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- Vincent Latendresse vincent.latendresse@exp.com
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- Marcus Schmierer MSchmierer@morrisonhershfield.com
- Tyler Thompson Tyler.Thompson@gov.bc.ca
- Carlos Ventura ventura@civil.ubc.ca

Technical Programs Committee

The Technical Committee who reviewed abstracts and papers, or arranged for their review by colleagues who they organized, included:

- Murat Saatcioglu, Chair murat@eng.uottawa.ca
- Don Kennedy, Co-chair kennedyd@ae.ca
- John Cassidy John.Cassidy@NRCan-RNCan.gc.ca
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Venue

The venue of Victoria was very popular. The Victoria Conference Centre was the only facility able to accommodate our numbers and while it was a pinch in few areas (exhibitor, lunch and banquet space), the staff were very helpful, flexible and accommodating. There was only one each complaint of not having a sit-down lunch, wanting more “healthy” snacks. The main downside was the restricted Wi-Fi options, in particular since a useful conference app was developed but received limited use.

Budget

Budgeting was difficult as we had little to base expectations on, with our conferences approximately 4 years apart and the previous one being a joint one with the US. We were, perhaps, over concerned about profit or loss and very conservatively estimated the number of paid delegates. We had sufficient financial backing from past conferences by CAEE to cover any reasonable loss.

Our Treasurer has reported a profit of \$90,000 from this conference. The number of registered delegates did not reach the required break-even (or better) number until very late (within approximately a week) of the conference start.

Sponsors

Despite very good efforts from our committee, we did not attract the number and level of sponsors we had anticipated or that other similar conferences have attracted. This needs to be addressed as a separate topic for discussion.

Technical Sessions

The technical tracks adopted in the call for abstracts were:

Abstracts and papers are invited on a wide range of topics related to planning, designing, defining, and response to seismic hazards, including:

1. ***Seismic hazard and seismology***
Seismic sources and ground motions
Hazard analysis
2. ***Tsunami hazards***
Tsunami risk
Performance and damage
Mitigation
3. ***Codes and standards***
Recent developments and model codes
Performance based design
Direct displacement based design
4. ***Geotechnical hazards***
Ground movements (Liquefaction and lateral spreading)
Site effects
Behaviour and performance
Design
Retrofit
5. ***Structures***
behaviour and performance
assessment
Design
Retrofit
Isolation and damping
6. ***Societal impacts and Risk Management***
Risk analyses for buildings, lifelines, urban and non-urban infrastructure systems
Public and owner expectations
Socio-economic losses
Legislation, regulation, guidelines
Risk and disaster management including preparation, financing, response and recovery
Lessons learned from past events
7. ***Monitoring***
Strong motion networks
Structural health monitoring
Earthquake early warning

316 papers were included in the program or conference proceedings. 323 abstracts were received prior to the final deadline. Approximately 15 late abstracts were received. The number of delegates/attendees was higher than expected from the number of accepted abstracts. We had 272 full conference, 19 single day, 15 plenary/committee and 9 volunteers. Given there were 316 accepted papers and approximately 340 abstracts, this appears to be a remarkably good outcome. The first indication of the number of papers and delegates expected, and

therefore the conference budget, is gleaned from the number of abstracts received which was a decent number but not high. The percentage of accepted abstracts that would ultimately submit was not known. That the final number was close to the number of submitted (on-time) abstracts was fortunate. We had 35 authors with multiple papers and 98 delegates that were non-presenting, including 18 students. Several additional abstracts were accepted following the deadline in the interest of the program.

Logistical challenges did occur, which would be balanced against the positives.

Issues with the acquisition and submission of abstracts were:

- Late receipt of abstracts compared to the due dates. This is such a universal problem with engineering conferences that all authors believe there will be extensions. Given that we must receive sufficient abstracts by the cut-off date to have a chance at a viable conference, it is difficult to imagine a conference not having to deal with this issue.
- Late distribution of final abstracts for review. The abstract cut-off was immediately prior to Christmas, and the sorting and distribution process extended beyond the Christmas break. Some time was lost that compressed the review period and the paper composition period. Ultimately the time was recovered and we had accepted papers with a comfortable margin to have proceedings assembled, organized and burned onto USB drives so that proceedings were distributed at the time of registration at the conference itself.
- A minority of abstracts were self-promotional, which was not a major issue. Clear and strong guidance was sent in some cases and papers that followed were accepted.
- With a 'non-technical' track on societal impacts, this opened up the abstracts to unusual or provocative topics from both non-technical participants and from engineers. The reviewers, with encouragement from Technical Committee members, did a good job of recognizing and embracing the opportunities. Some excellent sessions and discussions at the conference attest to this, and we regard it as part of the success of the conference.
- Some technical reviewers had very high expectations as to original engineering content or contributions. These reviewers were excellent, valuable and critical to conference success. The Technical Chairs recognized that "project" papers make up a significant number of the presentations at many engineering conferences and that these may not advance the profession substantially in some cases, so a number of papers thought 'marginal' were accepted. Delegates appeared very satisfied with the technical content, suggesting a reasonable balance was struck. The Conference organizer, DM, indicated

that our level of technical review was higher, i.e. more rigorous, than other similar conferences. We doubt that is so as we found the reviews to be appropriate.

- A significant number of reviews were not completed in time for paper acceptance or feedback. Technical Chairs reviewed a number of these, likely less rigorously than others. A small number of papers were accepted with no reviews at all.

Papers –. Issues that occurred with the paper submissions included:

- See discussion on Abstracts elsewhere.
- The web site payment of submission fees was to be linked to the submission of papers. This linkage did not materialize; papers could be uploaded without prior payment of fees. Whether this was a logistical challenge or a real issue at the end (fees paid?) is not certain. Likely the vast majority of fees were paid.
- For authors who had to cancel later, a refund policy was put in place. This is believed important, as the absence of this policy may reduce the number of papers received.
- The web-page resource as a paper review environment was ‘rudimentary’ and not user friendly. It was not used for abstracts as the learning curve was unexpectedly high. It was regarded as a source of frustration by technical reviewers. This feature of a conference web site is regarded as critical to the myriad of volunteers who contribute time to conference success.

Pre-conference courses

While the attendance was low, the courses did not lose money and were well received. We did have a glitch with getting course hand-out material to everyone. Courses held, with numbers of registrants, were:

- New and Updated Seismic Provisions of the 2015 National Building Code (NBC) of Canada (John Sherstobitoff, John Adams, Ron DeVall, Andy Metten, Adria Whightman) – 27 registrants
- Seismic isolation and damping (Alan Klembczyk, Taylor Devices. Tung Ng, DSI, John Sherstobitoff, Ausenco) – 14 registrants.
- Performance-based Bridge Design to the new S6-14 Canadian Highway Bridge Design Code (Denis Mitchell, Don Kennedy, Upul Atukorala, Saqib Khan, Robert Tremblay). 14 registrants; more than 14 attended the session.
- Instrumentation, monitoring and analysis of recorded motions from structures using OMA (full day course): Carlos Ventura, UBC. Rune Brincker, Aarhus University (Denmark) – 8 registrants.

Technical tours

One technical tour was arranged to the Johnson St Bridge which was under construction. PCL Constructors and the City of Victoria were enthusiastic and gave strong support. The tour was not advertised on the web page in advance out of concern for tour capacity. Both the site and PCL work windows had limited capacity, and one relatively large tour, complete with briefing and safety briefing, was held. It was well received, well presented by PCL's site project manager, Mark Donahue.

Plenaries – There were 6 Plenary speakers

1. John Adams, Canada's 5th Generation Seismic Hazard Model for the 2015 National Building Code of Canada
2. Robert Tremblay, Seismic Response of Steel Buildings: Design Provisions and Remaining Challenges
3. Ian Buckle, Towards the Earthquake-Proof Bridge
4. Upul Atukorala – Seismic Response as Affected by Site Soil Conditions
5. Ioan Nistor, Engineering Significance and Lessons of the March 11, 2011 Tohoku Tsunami - Tsunami Impacts on Structures
6. Modeling Societal Impacts of Earthquakes: Progress and Challenges for Canada, Stephanie Chang.

All very well received but we did not have digital or other copies of the presentations from all and there was a strong desire for those.

Schedule

We had the usual difficulty in matching rooms with expected participants several weeks in advance of the conference when schedule being produced. The participants interested in the topics on the final day generally wished them to have been earlier. The final day had presentations through to mid-afternoon. While attendance on the last day was a lighter, it was only the final coffee break (to be followed only by the closing ceremony) that had many goodies left over. Very few, however, stayed for a closing ceremony. This should be an agenda item for the next conference.

In-conference changes to schedule.

As many participants came for specific days or sessions, it was important to keep the main topics together. This was done and largely successful. Plenary speaker themes were matched

with the track topics as best as possible. The most uncertain at the time of publishing was the “Wood” track which as a consequence was toward the end of the conference. Several attendees felt more comingling of topics would be better, though there were also a couple who wished greater purity of topic. We took a slightly broad approach to topics in order to accommodate the large variety of topic approaches and mixed topic papers.

Registration

We had over 300 registrants from 26 countries with Canada, as expected, providing the majority. Our ratio of registrants to abstracts was 90%, which may be a record for our conferences.

Interesting notes are that about half the attendees were under 40 and 16% were women.

Exhibitors

The exhibition space, being relatively small and spread out, posed a challenge and we ended up with Exhibitor tables in the main foyer between the entrance and the registration desk. This appears to have worked well with much traffic continually passing the exhibits and happy exhibitors. Exhibitors were very good, co-operative, and contributed to the conference financially and technically. Exhibitors for base isolation and added damping products were also technical speakers at the Isolation and Damping pre-conference course.

Banquet

We had some difficulty in finding an appropriate sized space for the banquet due to our uncertainty in expected numbers. We struggled between options that were either too large (and expensive) or potentially too small. We had to make a last minute shift to the ballroom which did work well.

We had 235 attendees in the Crystal Ballroom at Fairmont Empress which was very close to capacity with the diners and performers. The performers were dancers from the local First Nation whose traditional territory the conference centre is on. They were very good, very well received overall – sufficient to cause the conference centre to take their particulars to recommend to others.

The food was traditional wild sockeye salmon (delicious) but we did not supply the usual 2 bottles of wine for the tables. This solicited a few negative comments; we recommend not repeating that mistake in future conferences. Delegates expect a certain level of benefit for their registration fees, which are often paid by their organizations. Add-on costs such as drinks or wine with dinner are probably difficult to 'expense' and hence this omission was noticed.

Social Program

It is becoming increasingly difficult to provide a social program to run concurrent to the conference. Most attendees do not bring a spouse and those that attend have greater variety in their tastes/habits than in the past. We decided to not put on a special program but to provide attendees with brochures and web links to a variety of activities. We received no comments on this so it would appear such a program was not missed.

Associated Meetings

Only two associated meetings were held, the CAEE AGM and the Directors' meeting. The AGM was well attended (compared to our usual turn-out) and we were able to make the quorum required by the new NP Society rules. Strong solicitation for new members resulted in dozens of new applications and helped increase the AGM attendance.

Post Conference survey

60% of respondents heard about the conference from colleagues with only 12 % by email which is interesting considering the extensive email processes we used.

2/3 of attendees were first-timers. We have to give some consideration to getting more repeats.

The fees charged seemed reasonable as there were 40% who agreed with them, 40% neutral and only 20% who disagreed with the fees charged.

The top 3 highlights of the conference were:

1. Victoria as a venue – 100% of respondents
2. Earthquake information – 80%
3. Tsunami sessions – 60%

Overall conference rating (Excellent, VG, G) = 90%

- Everyone liked the Plenaries
- 3 didn't like the regular sessions
- 2 didn't like the exhibit

Anecdotally, Committee members and delegates remarked on the value added to the conference through the inclusion of non-traditional tracks and keynote speakers.. These included:

- Tsunami hazards.
- Societal impacts of earthquakes.
- Insurance, preparation and recovery.

We did not require the presenters or keynote speakers in the social / societal tracks to submit papers or plenary presentation materials. The committee worked hard for the year leading up to the conference to retain these tracks. The number of speakers was limited, but provided sufficient papers to hold tracks on all of these topics. Presentations tended to be less formal than in engineering presentations, which allowed for very good audience participation during and following these tracks. This aspect was a novel and successful component of the conference. We recommend similar future conferences take a similar approach, and perhaps work towards soliciting more non-engineering tracks if space and time allow. Feedback from those attending these presentations and discussions was exceptionally good.

Organization

The survey asked their opinion of organizers (which DM took to mean themselves, but which many of submitters took to mean overall organization from CAEE).

Proceedings – Due to our under-estimations, we ran out of proceedings, with unfortunately no documentation of which bag had them and which not or any advance notice of the deficiency. The committee reproduced an additional 30 USB drives with proceedings and mailed them out to those delegates believed to have not received them.

Suggestions for next conference

Numbers

It is always an issue to guess numbers for accommodation booking, presentation rooms, exhibitor spaces and banquet/entertainment space. As we go forward, these are some statistics we should be keeping City, venue, abstracts, papers, break numbers, banquet numbers. As noted previously, despite the typical situation where numbers are not known, with CAEE having funds to financially 'seed' these conferences, some additional risk on numbers and hence on amenities or services could be taken.

Venue

I don't think a more positive response has been received as Victoria got so it should certainly be on the list for a return visit. The challenge is being able to handle the numbers, which we wish to increase, and having only one conference centre option. A return visit should consider renting the entire both floors which would not be a significant financial burden.

There was initial concern within the Committee on the additional 'leg' of travel that would be required for delegates to get from Vancouver to Victoria. Victoria during the summer is a strong tourist draw on its own, and this contributed to the successful number of delegates despite the additional travel.

Schedule:

Some commented that mixed sessions amongst topics – e.g. building, geotechnical, bridges/other, seismology occur sometime during each day within streams. Owing to the limited number of paper on some topics (including geotechnical aspects), we opted to stream papers together, which we believe most delegates expect.

Track chairs were strongly encouraged to hold to the scheduled time slots when presenters did not show up. This allows delegates to plan their attendance at specific papers of interest. No strong comments were received either way on this aspect, suggesting the presentation schedules 'met expectations' of many delegates.

Banquet:

- Supply white/red wine from local winery with a note on table regarding source, awards won etc.
- Provide local, representative entertainment – provide background on entertainment – also on the table note

Organizing

- Start much earlier than we did this time – at least 2 years in advance with scheduled milestones. Provide a schedule that makes a final close-off at least 2 weeks prior to conference so all material can be gathered and bagged.

- Develop an advertising process that will ensure Canada-wide and broader international coverage for the event well in advance. Use both social and traditional media.
- Technical Reviewers:
 - The technical leads and the technical reviewers they and organizing committee members organized were remarkably organized, generous with their time and performed admirably in their technical reviews. The success of the conference depends on technical quality and this contributed to the high quality.
 - The Technical Chairs provided guidelines for the reviewers with the intent on having a level of consistency in the rigour of the technical reviews. The level of technical review does not need to match that of a refereed engineering journal, and in general the reviews provided were appropriate. Some reviewers expected a level of original contribution that is not strictly consistent with this level of conference. The Technical Chairs mediated or made final decisions in these cases.
 - The majority of abstracts received were accepted, with technical or general editorial comments provided to guide the final papers. The vast majority of papers were accepted. Some contributors, whether for grammar or commercial content, were guided very consciously towards acceptable papers. Guidance was appreciated and contributed to acceptance and to some international delegates being able to attend and present.

Other

- Identify other meetings (such as CAEE AGM or directors' meeting; technical committees).
- Identify keynote speakers well enough in advance to obtain copies of presentations for proceedings or get permission to tape them. Actually that would be better and we could put the tape on the web site.