

it to the Manager, Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office.

Note 2: Information concerning the existence of approved alternative methods of compliance with this AD, if any, may be obtained from the Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office.

(d) Special flight permits may be issued in accordance with sections 21.197 and 21.199 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.197 and 21.199) to operate the helicopter to a location where the requirements of this AD can be accomplished.

(e) This amendment becomes effective on July 29, 1999.

Issued in Fort Worth, Texas, on June 15, 1999.

Henry A. Armstrong,

Manager, Rotorcraft Directorate, Aircraft Certification Service.

[FR Doc. 99-15903 Filed 6-23-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910-13-P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 99-SW-23-AD; Amendment 39-11207; AD 99-13-12]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Bell Helicopter Textron Canada Model 206L, 206L-1, 206L-3, and 206L-4 Helicopters

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Final rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This amendment supersedes an existing priority letter airworthiness directive (AD), applicable to Bell Helicopter Textron Canada (BHTC) Model 206L, 206L-1, 206L-3, and 206L-4 helicopters, that currently requires visual inspections and visual checks at specified time intervals, and a fluorescent-penetrant inspection (FPI) for any cracks in the tailboom skins around the horizontal stabilizer openings. Inserting a copy of the priority letter AD into the Rotorcraft Flight Manual (RFM) is also required. This amendment revises the inspection procedures and specified time intervals mandated by the priority letter AD. This amendment is prompted by crack growth analysis that indicates the need to detect cracks before they propagate from underneath the horizontal stabilizer supports. The actions specified by this AD are intended to detect a crack in the tailboom skin that could result in separation of the tailboom from the helicopter and

subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.

DATES: Effective July 9, 1999.

Comments for inclusion in the Rules Docket must be received on or before August 23, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Office of the Regional Counsel, Southwest Region, Attention: Rules Docket No. 99-SW-23-AD, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Room 663, Fort Worth, Texas 76137.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Michael Kohner, Aerospace Engineer, FAA, Rotorcraft Directorate, Rotorcraft Certification Office, ASW-170, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Fort Worth, Texas 76137, telephone (817) 222-5447, fax (817) 222-5783.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On January 6, 1999, the FAA issued Priority Letter AD 99-02-01, applicable to BHTC Model 206L, 206L-1, 206L-3, and 206L-4 helicopters, to require visual inspections and visual checks at specified time intervals, and a FPI for any cracks in the tailboom skins around the horizontal stabilizer openings. Inserting a copy of the priority letter AD into the RFM is also required. That action was prompted by 7 reports of fatigue cracks that propagated from the edges of the horizontal stabilizer openings in the tailboom skins. That condition, if not corrected, could result in separation of the tailboom and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.

Since the issuance of that priority letter AD, further review of crack growth rates has shown that cracks need to be detected before they propagate from underneath the horizontal stabilizer supports. Therefore, this superseding AD requires, at specified time intervals, not just visually inspecting and checking the tailboom skins in the area of the horizontal stabilizer supports, but also removing the horizontal stabilizer supports and visually inspecting the edges of the tailboom skins around the horizontal stabilizer openings for cracks. Removing the horizontal stabilizer supports will allow the detection of cracks at an earlier stage.

Transport Canada, which is the airworthiness authority for Canada, has notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on BHTC Model 206L, 206L-1, 206L-3, and 206L-4 helicopters. Transport Canada advises that cracks were found on the tailboom skins in the area of the horizontal stabilizer.

Bell Helicopter Textron has issued BHTC Alert Service Bulletin No. 206L-98-114, dated November 25, 1998,

which specifies a pilot preflight check for cracks in the horizontal stabilizer area before the first flight of each day. Transport Canada classified this service bulletin as mandatory and issued AD No. CF-98-42R1, dated February 16, 1999, which states that a review of crack growth rates indicates the need to detect cracks earlier. In addition to the preflight check for cracks introduced by the service bulletin, the Transport Canada AD requires removing the horizontal stabilizer supports and visually inspecting the tailboom skin underneath the horizontal stabilizer supports at specified time intervals.

These helicopter models are manufactured in Canada and are type certificated for operation in the United States under the provisions of section 21.29 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.29) and the applicable bilateral airworthiness agreement. Pursuant to this bilateral airworthiness agreement, Transport Canada has kept the FAA informed of the situation described above. The FAA has examined the findings of Transport Canada, reviewed all available information, and determined that AD action is necessary for products of these type designs that are certificated for operation in the United States.

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other BHTC Model 206L, 206L-1, 206L-3, and 206L-4 helicopters of the same type designs, this AD supersedes Priority Letter AD 99-02-01 to require:

- Prior to further flight, and thereafter, at intervals not to exceed 10 hours time-in-service (TIS) until a one-time FPI is accomplished, a visual inspection for any crack in the tailboom skins around the horizontal stabilizer supports;
- At intervals not to exceed 5 hours TIS, a visual preflight pilot check for any crack in the tailboom skins around the horizontal stabilizer supports;
- Within 50 hours TIS, a one-time FPI for any crack in the edge of the tailboom skins around the left and right horizontal stabilizer openings on the tailboom; and
- After completion of the one-time FPI, at intervals not to exceed 100 hours TIS, a visual inspection of the entire edge of the horizontal stabilizer opening on both sides of the tailboom for any crack.

The visual check that is required at intervals not to exceed 5 hours TIS may be performed by an owner/operator (pilot), and must be entered into the aircraft records showing compliance with paragraph (b) of this AD in accordance with sections 43.11 and

91.417 (a)(2)(v) of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR sections 43.11 and 91.417 (a)(2)(v)). This AD allows a pilot to perform this check because it involves only a visual check for cracking in the tailboom skins, and can be performed equally well by a pilot or mechanic. These checks are additional measures to ensure that a crack that is visible without the aid of a magnifying glass has not developed during the time between maintenance inspections.

The short compliance time involved is required because the previously described critical unsafe condition can adversely affect the structural integrity of the helicopter, and this AD must be issued immediately. Therefore, a visual inspection to detect any crack using a 10-power or higher magnifying glass is required before further flight and at intervals not to exceed 10 hours TIS until accomplishing the FPI; a visual preflight pilot check for any crack is required at intervals not to exceed 5 hours TIS; a one-time FPI is required within 50 hours TIS; and after completion of the one-time FPI and at intervals not to exceed 100 hours TIS, a visual inspection for cracks around the left and right horizontal stabilizer opening on both sides of the tailboom using a 10-power or higher magnifying glass is required.

Since a situation exists that requires the immediate adoption of this regulation, it is found that notice and opportunity for prior public comment hereon are impracticable, and that good cause exists for making this amendment effective in less than 30 days.

The FAA estimates that 1,546 helicopters of U.S. registry will be affected by this AD, that it will take approximately 2 work hours per helicopter to conduct a FPI; 0.5 work hour to conduct a visual inspection; 0.5 work hour to conduct the repetitive visual check; and 20 work hours to replace the tailboom, if necessary. The average labor rate is \$60 per work hour. Required parts will cost approximately \$22,000 per tailboom. Based on these figures, the total cost impact of the AD on U.S. operators is estimated to be \$278,280 to conduct the initial fluorescent-penetrant inspections and to conduct one of the inspections and one of the visual checks for the entire fleet; \$36,145,480 if it is necessary to replace the tailboom on the entire fleet.

Comments Invited

Although this action is in the form of a final rule that involves requirements affecting flight safety and, thus, was not preceded by notice and an opportunity for public comment, comments are invited on this rule. Interested persons

are invited to comment on this rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire.

Communications should identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified under the caption **ADDRESSES**. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments will be considered, and this rule may be amended in light of the comments received. Factual information that supports the commenter's ideas and suggestions is extremely helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the AD action and determining whether additional rulemaking action would be needed.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the rule that might suggest a need to modify the rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report that summarizes each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this AD will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this rule must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: "Comments to Docket No. 99-SW-23-AD." The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

The regulations adopted herein will not have substantial direct effects on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. Therefore, in accordance with Executive Order 12612, it is determined that this final rule does not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a Federalism Assessment.

The FAA has determined that this regulation is an emergency regulation that must be issued immediately to correct an unsafe condition in aircraft, and that it is not a "significant regulatory action" under Executive Order 12866. It has been determined further that this action involves an emergency regulation under DOT Regulatory Policies and Procedures (44 FR 11034, February 26, 1979). If it is determined that this emergency regulation otherwise would be significant under DOT Regulatory Policies and Procedures, a final regulatory evaluation will be prepared and placed in the Rules Docket. A copy of it, if filed, may be obtained from the

Rules Docket at the location provided under the caption **ADDRESSES**.

List of Subjects in 14 CFR Part 39

Air transportation, Aircraft, Aviation safety, Safety.

Adoption of the Amendment

Accordingly, pursuant to the authority delegated to me by the Administrator, the Federal Aviation Administration amends part 39 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR part 39) as follows:

PART 39—AIRWORTHINESS DIRECTIVES

1. The authority citation for part 39 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 106(g), 40113, 44701.

§ 39.13 [Amended]

2. Section 39.13 is amended by adding a new airworthiness directive (AD), Amendment 39-11207, to read as follows:

AD 99-13-12 Bell Helicopter Textron

Canada: Amendment 39-11207. Docket No. 99-SW-23-AD. Supersedes Priority Letter AD 99-02-01, Docket No. 98-SW-83-AD.

Applicability:

- Model 206L helicopters, serial numbers (S/N) 45004 through 45153, and 46601 through 46617;
 - Model 206L-1 helicopters, S/N 45154 through 45790;
 - Model 206L-3 helicopters, S/N 51001 through 51613; and
 - Model 206L-4 helicopters, S/N 52001 and higher,
- with tailboom, part number (P/N) 206-033-004-all dash numbers, installed, certificated in any category.

Note 1: This AD applies to each helicopter identified in the preceding applicability provision, regardless of whether it has been otherwise modified, altered, or repaired in the area subject to the requirements of this AD. For helicopters that have been modified, altered, or repaired so that the performance of the requirements of this AD is affected, the owner/operator must request approval for an alternative method of compliance in accordance with paragraph (f) of this AD. The request should include an assessment of the effect of the modification, alteration, or repair on the unsafe condition addressed by this AD; and, if the unsafe condition has not been eliminated, the request should include specific proposed actions to address it.

Compliance: Required as indicated, unless accomplished previously.

To detect a crack in the tailboom skin and to prevent separation of the tailboom from the helicopter and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter, accomplish the following:

- (a) Before further flight, and thereafter, at intervals not to exceed 10 hours time-in-service (TIS) until accomplishing the one-time fluorescent-penetrant inspection (FPI) required by paragraph (c)(2) of this AD,

visually inspect for any crack in the shaded areas shown in Figure 1. Use a 10-power or higher magnifying glass. If any crack is found, replace the tailboom with an airworthy tailboom.

(b) At intervals not to exceed 5 hours TIS, visually conduct a preflight check of the shaded areas shown in Figure 1 for any crack. If any crack is found, replace the tailboom with an airworthy tailboom. The visual check may be performed by an owner/operator (pilot) holding at least a private pilot

certificate, and must be entered into the aircraft records showing compliance with paragraph (b) of this AD in accordance with sections 43.11 and 91.417 (a)(2)(v) of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR sections 43.11 and 91.417 (a)(2)(v)).

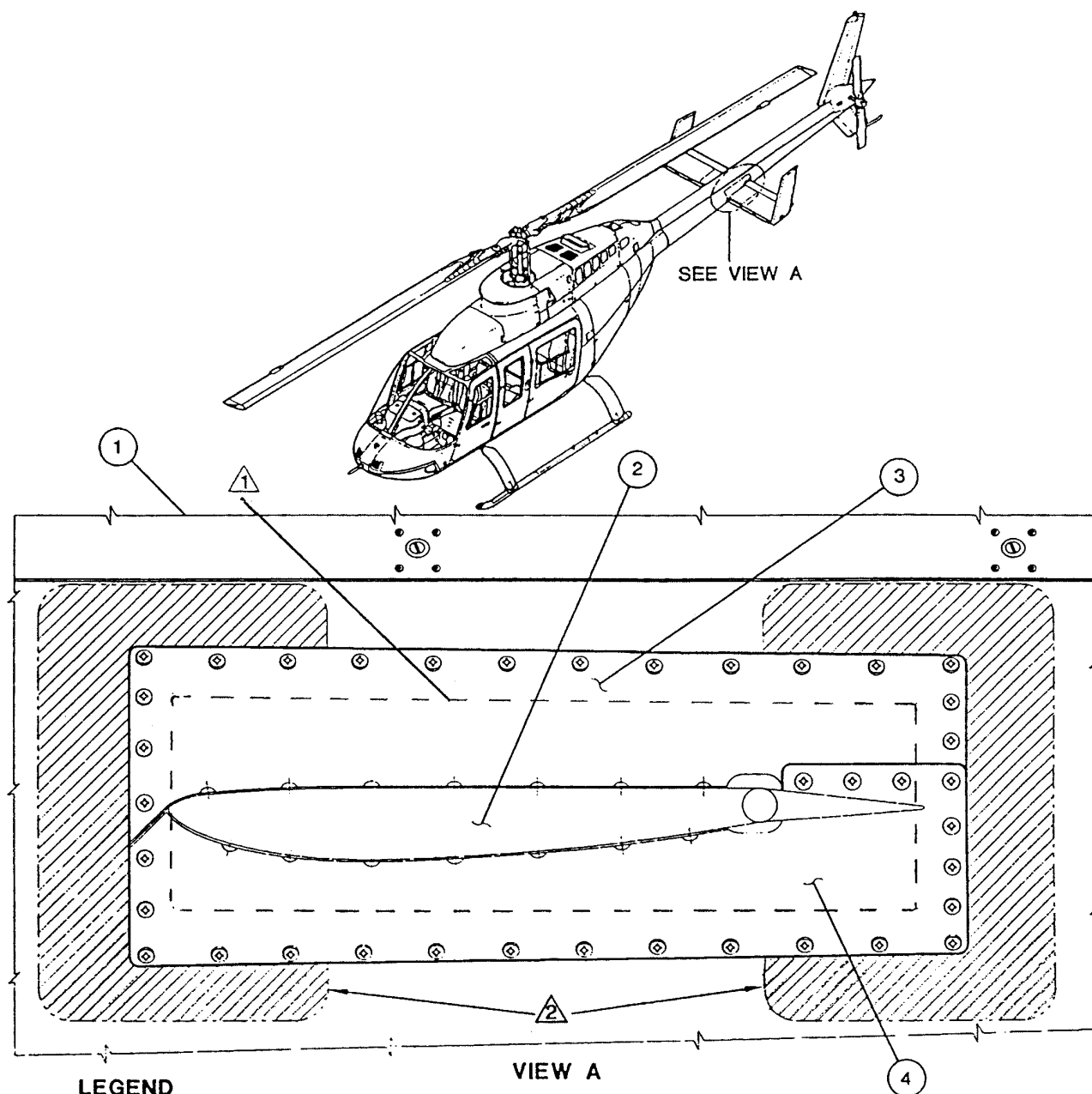
(c) Within 50 hours TIS:

(1) Remove all 4 horizontal stabilizer supports, P/N 206-023-100-all dash numbers, from the tailboom and the horizontal stabilizer.

(2) Perform a one-time FPI of the edges of the tailboom skins for any crack around the left and right horizontal stabilizer openings (Figure 1). Remove paint and primer to inspect the edges and exterior skin surface in the skin area at least $\frac{3}{4}$ inch around the edges of the horizontal stabilizer openings.

(3) If a crack is found, replace the tailboom with an airworthy tailboom.

BILLING CODE 4910-13-P

**LEGEND**

- 1. Tailboom assembly
- 2. Horizontal stabilizer
- 3. Upper support
- 4. Lower support

NOTES

- △2 Inspect for a crack in these two areas on both sides of the tailboom.
- △1 Inspect entire edge of stabilizer opening on both sides of the tailboom.

Figure 1

(d) At intervals not to exceed 100 hours TIS after completion of the FPI, accomplish the following:

(1) Remove all 4 horizontal stabilizer supports, P/N 206-023-100-all dash numbers, from the tailboom and the horizontal stabilizer.

(2) Visually inspect the entire edge of the horizontal stabilizer opening on both sides of the tailboom for any crack using a 10-power or higher magnifying glass.

(3) If any crack is found, replace the tailboom with an airworthy tailboom.

(e) Insert a copy of this AD into the Rotorcraft Flight Manual.

(f) An alternative method of compliance or adjustment of the compliance time that provides an acceptable level of safety may be used if approved by the Manager, Rotorcraft Certification Office, FAA, Rotorcraft Directorate. Operators shall submit their requests through an FAA Principal Maintenance Inspector, who may concur or comment and then send it to the Manager, Rotorcraft Certification Office.

Note 2: Information concerning the existence of approved alternative methods of compliance with this AD, if any, may be obtained from the Rotorcraft Certification Office.

(g) Special flight permits may be issued for a one-time flight, not to exceed 5 hours TIS and a maximum of one landing, in accordance with sections 21.197 and 21.199 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.197 and 21.199) to operate the helicopter to a location where the requirements of this AD can be accomplished. The visual preflight check required by paragraph (b) must be accomplished prior to making a one-time flight.

(h) This amendment becomes effective on July 9, 1999.

Note 3: The subject of this AD is addressed in Transport Canada (Canada) AD No. CF-98-42R1, dated February 16, 1999.

Issued in Fort Worth, Texas, on June 16, 1999.

Henry A. Armstrong,

Manager, Rotorcraft Directorate, Aircraft Certification Service.

[FR Doc. 99-15925 Filed 6-23-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910-13-P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

23 CFR Part 655

[FHWA Docket No. FHWA-97-2353; 96-20]

RIN 2125-AD63

National Standards for Traffic Control Devices; Metric Conversion

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This rule adopts as final, with changes, the interim rule concerning

national standards for traffic control devices, metric conversion, published on Tuesday, June 11, 1996. This document makes minor changes to certain regulatory citations and corrects the titles of certain publications incorporated by reference.

DATES: This final rule is effective June 24, 1999. The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the regulations was reapproved by the Director of the Federal Register as of June 24, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Ernest Huckaby, Office of Transportation Operations (HOTO), (202) 366-9064, or Mr. Raymond Cuprill, Office of the Chief Counsel (202) 366-1377, Federal Highway Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20590. Office hours are from 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

Internet users can access all comments received by the U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, by using the universal resource locator (URL): <http://dms.dot.gov>. It is available 24 hours each day, 365 days each year. Please follow the instructions online for more information and help.

You may download an electronic copy of this document by using a modem and suitable communications software from the Government Printing Office's Electronic Bulletin Board Service at (202) 512-1661. Internet users may reach the Federal Register's home page at: <http://www.nara.gov/fedreg> and the Government Printing Office's database at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara>.

The text for Part 1 of the MUTCD is available from the FHWA Office of Transportation Operations (HOTO) or from the FHWA Home Page at the URL: <http://www.ohs.fhwa.dot.gov/devices/mutcd.html>.

Background

Section 1211(d) of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) (Pub. L. 105-178, 112 Stat. 107) removed the target date for metric conversion, thereby allowing the State departments of transportation (DOTs) the option of converting to the International System of Measurements (SI). Section 205(c)(2) of the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-59, 109 Stat. 568) was amended by striking the language "before September 30, 2000," which removes the mandate that States convert

to SI. Most of the State DOTs have substantially converted their project development and construction processes to SI. Full conversion by all the State DOTs remains an FHWA goal since it will improve efficiency within the highway construction industry by reducing translation errors and enabling the contractors, consultants, fabricators and materials suppliers to utilize a single system of units. The FHWA believes that it is in the best interest of the highway community to expedite the metrication process and ensure compatibility within the highway industry and with other industries. Reversion to inch-pound units by some States will perpetuate a confusing mix of measurement systems.

The FHWA is adopting, as its policy for the design of traffic control devices for use on all roads open to public travel, two American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) publications: "Guide to Metric Conversion, AASHTO, 1993," and "Traffic Engineering Metric Conversion Factors, 1993—Addendum to the Guide to Metric Conversion, AASHTO, October 1993."

The FHWA's Metric Conversion Policy, published at 57 FR 24843 on June 11, 1992, requires that newly authorized Federal-aid construction contracts be in metric units only by September 30, 1996. The National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 postponed this requirement until September 30, 2000. Many States have progressed in their conversion activities to a point that it is impractical not to continue the transition into full metric use. Because of the long lead times required for highway construction projects, planning for projects is already underway and, in fact, the majority of the Federal-aid highway construction program nationwide is currently being constructed in metric units. It is the intent of this rulemaking to assure the States and other FHWA partners that the metric conversions used to formulate their plans are consistent nationwide.

The traffic control device design and applications standards have been adopted by the FHWA for use on all streets and highways open to public travel and are incorporated by reference in 23 CFR Part 655, subpart F. The current design standards are on file at the Office of the Federal Register in Washington, D.C. and are available for inspection from the FHWA Washington Headquarters and all FHWA Division and Resource Centers as prescribed in 49 CFR Part 7. Copies of the current AASHTO publications are also available for purchase from the American Association of State Highway and