

State senators see broad management problems in Caltrans

By Charles Piller, Sacramento Bee

In a sometimes contentious legislative hearing Tuesday, state senators told California Department of Transportation officials that their management of data falsification by a technician in one of the agency's testing units suggests pervasive management problems.

"I'm a little bit troubled about what seems to be a systemic problem in the agency," said Sen. Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar. "I'm concerned that it took a whistle-blower and the press to bring this to light

"I can only imagine if you were a private entity caught in falsifying data, what the consequences would be."

The Senate transportation committee's hearing was called to address the findings of a recent Bee investigation concerning fabricated data, improper test methods and apparent misuse of state property in the Foundation Testing Branch, which examines the integrity of underground supports for bridges and other freeway structures. The Bee found that Duane Wiles, a technician who fabricated data on three structures, also examined the foundations for portions of the new Bay Bridge eastern span, slated for completion in 2013.

Huff suggested that the state might consider moving some Caltrans responsibilities to county agencies as part of a realignment of budget priorities.

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