
GradeDec.Net

User's Manual



Federal Railroad Administration

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Introduction

Introduction to *GradeDec.Net*

GradeDec.Net is a web-based decision support tool that assists federal, state and local authority decision makers in evaluating the benefits and costs of highway-rail grade crossing upgrades, separations and closures. *GradeDec.Net* employs benefit-cost methodologies that are used to evaluate highway-rail grade crossing investment alternatives at the corridor level or in a region. The modeling frameworks in *GradeDec.Net* were developed by the Federal Railroad Administration and include research findings of the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program. *GradeDec.Net* analyses effectively support the planning and investment decision processes.

GradeDec.Net forecasts the transportation and non-transportation effects of highway-rail grade crossing investments and estimates the economic value of these effects over the useful life of the project in dollar terms. The benefit-cost of an investment is calculated by comparing the time-stream of expected economic benefits with the time-stream of investment-related and other costs, after adjusting for the opportunity costs of capital. Known as “discounting”, this adjustment enables decision makers to inspect future benefits and costs in terms of their *present-day* value. This is a standard way of giving due weight to nearer-term versus distant (thus less valued) outcomes.

GradeDec.Net's underlying methodology is consistent with the current benefit-cost methodologies employed by the United States Department of Transportation Agencies (Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, and the Federal Aviation Administration) and with Executive Order 12866, which governs the principles of federal infrastructure investment. The model is transparent in all of its assumptions and the model inputs are readily accessible to users who may want to adjust model inputs to reflect local circumstances.

GradeDec.Net addresses two types of risk. First, accident risk is the probability of an accident occurring at a crossing. The principal metric of

accident risk is the number of annual predicted accidents at a crossing (or in a corridor or region) by severity category (fatal, injury or property damage only). Accident risk is measured in *GradeDec.Net* using the U.S. Department of Transportation's Accident Prediction and Severity (APS) model and a separate procedure that was developed for evaluating the accident risk associated with High Speed Rail (HSR) corridors.

GradeDec.Net has recently added a module for evaluating the effects of aggravating risk factors on predicted accidents.

GradeDec.Net also has capabilities for risk analysis, distinct from accident risk, which is concerned with quantifying uncertainty associated with forecasts. This second type of risk allows for the assigning of probability distributions to input variables of the analysis and determining the effects of uncertainty on the outcomes.

GradeDec.Net is designed to minimize the data needs and technical expertise required of the user while at the same time providing reliable benefit-cost results. With information about a series of grade crossing improvements along a particular corridor, the range of anticipated accident reductions, train crossing delay improvements, and travel demand forecasts generate preliminary benefit-cost results for a given confidence interval. Depending on the user's needs, requirements, and abilities, one can select either an extensive default database that will minimize input requirements, or the user can customize the analysis by inputting project specific localized data. In this way, *GradeDec.Net* functions as both a high-level preliminary model and a micro-level localized model.

Why *GradeDec.Net*

Growing requirements for highway-rail grade crossing investments and dwindling fiscal resources point to the need for a new tool for investment analysis. *GradeDec.Net* determines the effects rail corridor investments will have on safety and highway delay and queuing. Improvements will result in the following economic benefits:

- Improvement in safety and reduced accident costs;
- Reduced travel time costs;
- Improved air quality;
- Reduced vehicle operating costs;
- Network benefits.

GradeDec.Net uses risk analysis to evaluate highway-rail grade crossing investments and the results of an analysis include probability distributions for all of the model outcomes. These outcomes are viewed with *GradeDec.Net*'s user-friendly displays of charts and statistics.

For a corridor or regional analysis, *GradeDec.Net* can evaluate up to 600 grade crossings simultaneously. The user can view model results in total

for the corridor or region, or by individual grade crossings. For example, the user can view the safety benefits of each grade crossing improvement along the corridor and the probability range associated with those benefits. Likewise, the user can view the highway vehicle operating costs savings or environmental benefits for each grade crossing.

GradeDec.Net conducts comprehensive statistical simulations in order to provide a probability range for the net present value, and other results, associated with each rail corridor-level investment plan. This enables the user to assess the risk associated with each plan. Additionally, *GradeDec.Net* conducts risk sensitivity analyses based upon the probability ranges and informs the user which factors will have the greatest impact on the outcomes. For each result the user can display a "tornado chart" that shows the eight most significant factors contributing to risk. This information is essential for planning contingencies and working to mitigate risks.

GradeDec.Net is deployed as a web-based decision support tool unlike its predecessor versions, which were desktop applications. Web deployment addresses the following issues:

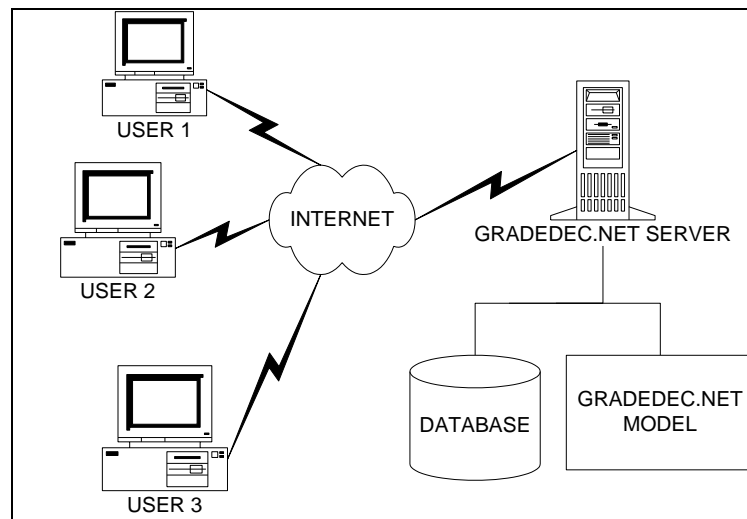
- Users are moving to secure systems and in some cases a requirement to install dedicated software is a barrier to use. *GradeDec.Net* does not require any special software, other than an Internet connection and a web browser.
- *GradeDec.Net* does not require special hardware or even a special operating system (it will run on client computers running Windows, Linux, Unix or Mac operating systems).
- Modifications and improvements to the software are immediately deployed for all users.
- FRA's most recent grade crossing data is always available to the application.
- User analyses and data run on a central database thus minimizing the need for users to track and maintain their data on their computer (users have the option of storing their data locally at the end of a session and restoring their data for use when beginning a new session).

Technical Description and Requirements

A Web-Based Application

GradeDec.Net is a web-based application deployed over the Internet. This enables many users to access the system simultaneously, while using minimal resources from each user's computer.

Figure 1 Overview Schema of GradeDec.Net



The technical description of the system that follows is presented in the form of “FAQs” (frequently asked questions). This section concludes with the “Terms of Use” that apply to system users.

Using *GradeDec.Net* - FAQs

How do I access GradeDec.Net?

Check the section below on “Software and Hardware Requirements” to verify that your computer is compliant.

Open your web browser to the address (URL) <http://gradedec.fra.dot.gov>. When the logon screen appears, enter your user name and click “Submit”, and then enter your password and click “Submit” once more. New users should click on the “Go” button on the right-hand side of the log-in screen for New User Registration.

How do I use GradeDec.Net?

After logging on, you can access all the features of *GradeDec.Net*. You navigate to the different functional areas of the system, each represented by a web page, by clicking on links of the main navigation menu (left side of the page).

You develop your data and conduct your analysis by selecting options on the web pages of *GradeDec.Net*. When you make entries and click on selections in the web browser, a request is sent over the Internet to the *GradeDec.Net* server. The server performs all the calculations and data transformations and then sends back to your browser an updated page that reflects your selections.

Where do my data reside?

During a *GradeDec.Net* session, your data reside on the *GradeDec.Net* server. You may choose to leave your data on the server between sessions, or you can store it locally on your own computer and delete it from the *GradeDec.Net* server. When you start a new session, you can restore your data to the *GradeDec.Net* server and continue your analysis.

Are my data secure?

See “Data Security” in the *GradeDec.Net* Terms of Use below.

Terms of Use

The following are the *GradeDec.Net* Terms of Use:

1. Purpose and Intended Use

GradeDec.Net, system for highway-rail grade crossing investment analysis, is an online service provided by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). It is available to the general public and its intended users are: U.S. Department of Transportation employees; state and local authorities for transportation planning and policy; railroads; consultants, academics and others engaged in grade crossing policies and issues. The intended use of the system is for the development of analyses that support grade crossing management and investment decisions.

2. General Disclaimer

Use of the *GradeDec.Net* web application, documentation, or data is without warranty of any kind by FRA. To the maximum extent permitted by applicable law, FRA further disclaims all warranties, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, and noninfringement. The entire risk arising out of

the use or performance of the *GradeDec.Net* web application, documentation, or data remains with the user. To the maximum extent permitted by applicable law, in no event shall the FRA or its contractors be liable for any consequential, incidental, direct, indirect, special, punitive, or other damages whatsoever (including, without limitation, damages for loss of business profits, business interruption, loss of business information, or other pecuniary loss) arising out of the use of or inability to use the *GradeDec.Net* web application, documentation, or data, even if FRA has been advised of the possibility of such damages.

3. Applicability of Models, Supplied Values and Assumptions

GradeDec.Net includes modeling frameworks, sample analyses and default values for a range of model parameters and input variables. FRA does not guarantee that these are well-suited for a particular analysis or situation. It is the user's responsibility to validate all inputs and assumptions for the analyses generated by *GradeDec.Net*.

4. Non-Endorsement of Results

Results that are obtained from *GradeDec.Net* analyses are solely the responsibility of the user and are not endorsed by FRA.

5. Availability of Service and Outages

FRA seeks to provide *GradeDec.Net* as an "always on" service. However, there may be service outages due to any of the following factors: disruptions in the power supply, disruptions in the data communications network, equipment failure or system maintenance. FRA is not liable for damages that might result from service outages.

6. Possible Discontinuance of Service

FRA reserves the right to discontinue this service, temporarily or permanently, and without advance notice. FRA is not liable for damages that might result from the discontinuance of service.

7. Data Security

a. Transmission

The transmission of data over the Internet between the user's computer and the *GradeDec.Net* server is not secure. There exists a possibility that data may be intercepted by an unauthorized third party during transmission.

b. Storage on the *GradeDec.Net* server

User analysis data resides on the *GradeDec.Net* server computer during an analysis session, and the user has the option of allowing data to remain on the server between analysis sessions. FRA will take reasonable measures to ensure the integrity and privacy of the user's data. However, FRA does not guarantee that the integrity or privacy of data will not be compromised due to either technical failure or the actions of an unauthorized third party. FRA is not liable for any damages that might result from the loss of data or their access by unauthorized parties. The

user has the option of storing analysis data offline on the user's computer between sessions, deleting it from the *GradeDec.Net* server computer, and restoring it to the server for use in subsequent sessions.

8. Denial of Access for Misuse

FRA reserves the right to deny access to a party that seems to be misusing the system. Misuse of the system includes, but is not restricted to: hacking, deliberately circumventing system security, overloading, attempting to deny service to others, attempting to use system resources for purposes other than the system's intended use.

Software and Hardware Requirements

Computer, Operating System and Web Browser

GradeDec.Net is designed for use with any computer and operating system running a “high level” browser (i.e., browsers that were released in the second half of 1999 or later). The system has been tested on the following web browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer 6 and 7, and Mozilla Firefox 1.5 and 2.0.

The required hardware is the same as that required to run the web browser on a specific platform (type of computer and operating system).

If for instance, you were running Internet Explorer 7 on an Intel-based computer and Windows XP SP2 operating system, then your minimum hardware requirements would be as follows:

- A 1.0 gigahertz (GHz) processor
- For Windows XP SP2: 512 megabytes (MB) of random access memory (RAM) minimum

And, of course, all browsers require a mouse (or other pointing device) and a modem or other Internet connection.

Internet Connection

GradeDec.Net requires an Internet connection. With a dial-up connection, the speed should equal or exceed 56kbps (kilobits per second). The system will operate with lower speed connections, but the user experience will be compromised.

A faster, broadband connection (either through your local area network, or from a cable or DSL connection) will enhance the user experience.

As a general guideline for what to expect, pages sent to your browser from the *GradeDec.Net* server are between 2KB (kilobytes) and 6KB (pages with graphical content are at the higher end of this range). With a 56kbps connection, the larger pages should download to your computer in less than 2 seconds. With a broadband connection, downloads should take a fraction of a second. Keep in mind that other factors, like traffic

volume on the Internet, may cause slower response times in your session with *GradeDec.Net*.

Web Browser Settings

This section discusses several browser settings that you may need to adjust in order to use *GradeDec.Net*. These settings can be accessed from your browser's main menu. In Internet Explorer use the menu option Tools>Internet Options. With Netscape, select Edit>Preferences.

Cookies

GradeDec.Net uses session cookies. Your browser should allow session cookies with most privacy settings except "Block all cookies". Session cookies promote the security of your session without compromising your privacy.

Security and Other Settings

The following security settings must be enabled in your browser in order to use *GradeDec.Net* and all of its features.

In Internet Explorer, under "Security" you must enable:

- "Active scripting"
- "Downloading of files"

With Netscape, you must check under Advanced>Scripts & Plug-Ins:

- "Enable JavaScript with Navigator"

Also with Netscape, under Navigator>Downloads> you must select one of the following options:

- "Open the download manager"
- "Open a progress dialog"

File Formats

Some of the optional features of *GradeDec.Net* involve the transfer of files between the *GradeDec.Net* server and your computer. The following are the file formats used in these transfers:

- ZIP files are used when downloading data for storage between sessions. The user has no need to access these files locally.

- PDF, or portable document files are used with *GradeDec.Net* reports. In order to view and print these files, you should have Adobe Acrobat Reader or other compatible software installed on your computer in order to read and print these files.

Overview of this Manual

The remainder of this document describes how to conduct a *GradeDec.Net* analysis and use the pages that are encountered during an analysis. The manual concludes with a glossary of terms and an index.

Note that the *GradeDec.Net Model Reference Manual* is the companion piece to this *User's Manual* and may be required to fully understand some of the features and processes of *GradeDec.Net* that this manual describes.

In the text, the following conventions are used:

- Bold text is used to refer to a page in *GradeDec.Net* (e.g., **Settings** page). The same bold text will be used when referencing the links to these pages from the main navigation menu.
- Italics are used to designate drop down list options and selections in *GradeDec.Net* (e.g., *Add new crossing*)

Using *GradeDec.Net*

Introduction

This chapter gives general guidance on working with *GradeDec.Net*. The first section describes the principal modes of use for *GradeDec.Net*. The section that follows describes the management of data in *GradeDec.Net*. The final section describes the steps taken to conduct an analysis for each of the modes of use.

The subsequent chapter, "GradeDec.Net Page-by-Page", provides detailed descriptions of all the features of *GradeDec.Net*.

Modes of Use

GradeDec.Net has several modes of use, and the specific mode of use that you choose will depend upon the type of decision that your analysis should support. This section identifies and describes the two principal modes of use with *GradeDec.Net*. These are:

- Safety analysis, and
- Full investment analysis

Safety Analysis

For a safety analysis, the user examines predicted accidents at grade crossings and for the corridor (or region) as a whole. The safety analysis is, essentially, a comparison of a "before" and "after" situation, where "before" represents the *status quo* and "after" reflects the impact of crossing improvements (through device upgrade, closures, separations, traffic management measures, etc). The safety analysis is restricted to examining the safety impacts at a crossing. The safety analysis reflects a snapshot of current conditions and does not account for the forecast growth of highway traffic or rail operations.

Full Investment Analysis

A full investment analysis supports resource allocation and planning decisions. The full investment analysis accounts for safety benefits and, as well, other highway user costs. These user costs include time savings, vehicle operating costs and emissions. The full investment analysis monetizes the benefits from each benefits category and sums the benefits from the improvements over the time horizon of the investment. This analysis includes user assumptions regarding the forecast of traffic growth, by highway and rail, and analyzes the risk associated with the forecast values.

A “safety analysis” will involve a subset of the *GradeDec.Net* features required for a “full investment analysis”. The following table shows the two modes of use, purposes associated with each, and the functional pages in *GradeDec.Net* used in each type of analysis.

Table 1 GradeDec.Net Modes of Use

Mode of Use	Purpose	Functional Pages in <i>GradeDec.Net</i> to Use
Safety analysis	Calculate accident risk and impacts of improvements, identify improvement programs, analyze safety regulatory impacts Support safety and regulatory compliance decisions.	Settings, Import, Crossings, Parameters
Full investment analysis	Benefit-cost and risk analysis of programs of improvements; analyze safety, delay and user cost impacts Support resource allocation and investment decisions. Support planning process.	Settings, Import, Crossings, Parameters, Scenario, Simulation, Results

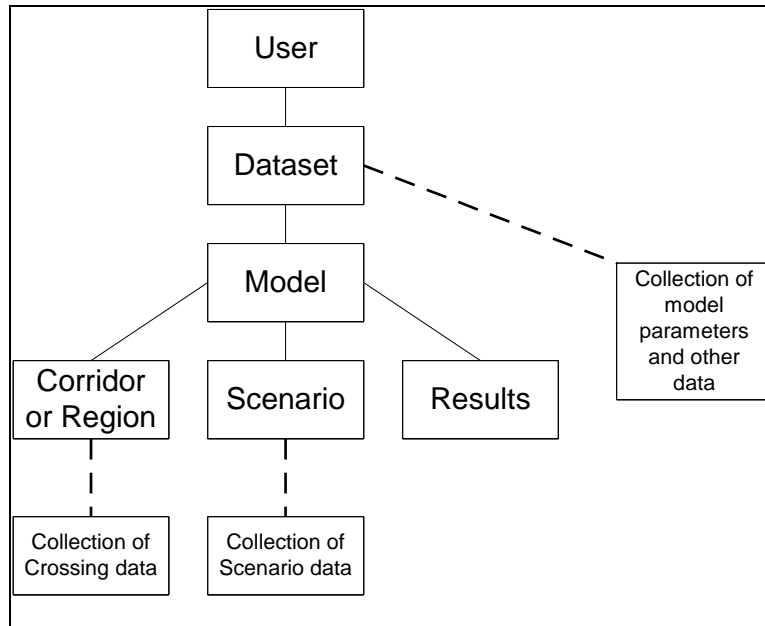
The Data Hierarchy in *GradeDec.Net*

In order to conduct analyses effectively in *GradeDec.Net* you should be familiar with its data hierarchy.

Every active session of *GradeDec.Net* has a data hierarchy that is populated with values at all times. These values correspond to the current selections of data collections that are viewable, editable and are used in *GradeDec.Net* model calculations. You navigate among different data collections by making selections on the **Settings** page, which sets the values in the data hierarchy.

The data hierarchy is shown in the figure below. A brief description of each of the nodes (boxes) in the figure follows at the end of this section.

Figure 2 Data Hierarchy in GradeDec.Net



The connecting lines in the data hierarchy figure mean that the lower node is a “child” of the parent node above it to which it is connected. When you change the value of a parent node (by making a selection in the **Settings** page) you are also re-populating the nodes in the hierarchy below the parent with values that represent data collections belonging to the newly selected parent node value.

For example, when a newly registered user logs on, the data hierarchy is populated with values like in the table below.

Table 2 Data Hierarchy at New User Logon

Data Hierarchy Node	Value
User	Your user id
Dataset	“Initial dataset”
Model	“Corridor Model”
Corridor	“South Empire”
Scenario	“Strong rail growth”
Result	“Placeholder – Corridor Model”

Suppose the user then changes the Model selection in the **Settings** page to “Regional Model”. The data hierarchy will then be populated with the following values (changed values in italics):

Table 3 Data Heirarchy After Changing Model

Data Hierarchy Node	Value
User	Your user id
Dataset	“Initial dataset”
Model	“ <i>Regional Model</i> ”
Region	“ <i>Montgomery, MD</i> ”
Scenario	“ <i>Strong highway growth</i> ”
Result	“ <i>Placeholder – Regional Model</i> ”

For every parent node value there are designated default values for its child nodes, which fill the data hierarchy when the parent node value is selected. When you first register as a *GradeDec.Net* user you are assigned an “Initial Dataset” that includes data collections with sample values, and the system designates some of these data collections as defaults. You can never delete a data collection that is a default of its parent node. You can designate another data collection to be a default, and then delete the collection that was previously designated as default. You can create and delete data collections, set their defining values and set defaults from the **Settings** page.

The following are descriptions of the nodes in the data hierarchy.

User

When you log in to *GradeDec.Net*, a value representing your user account is set in the User node. This never changes during your session and ensures that users can only access their own data and not those of others.

Dataset

User data for analyses are organized in datasets in the *GradeDec.Net* database. A user may create and maintain up to 10 datasets. A dataset is a comprehensive container of data collections used in *GradeDec.Net* analyses. Note that data from different datasets cannot be combined in a single analysis. You can use datasets to preserve a baseline analysis, and then develop new analyses from copies of the baseline. You can download a dataset to your computer and restore it to the system at a later date. You can also share data with a colleague by sending him or her your downloaded dataset, which your colleague can then upload during a session with *GradeDec.Net*.

Access the options for selecting, creating, deleting, downloading and uploading datasets from the **Settings** page.

Model Parameters and Other Data

Each dataset contains a set of model parameters including: crossing device effectiveness rates; model coefficients for emissions and fuel consumptions calculations; high speed rail model calculations – see the *Model Reference* for a full description. “Other data” refers to traffic time-of-day distributions and cost data for grade crossings device and supplementary safety measures.

These parameters and data are specific to the selected dataset and can be viewed and modified from the **Parameters** page.

Model

GradeDec.Net has both a corridor model and a regional model. The data requirements are slightly different for each model so that data collections below the Model node are specific to the selected model.

Corridor

A corridor has a set of defining values (these can be viewed and modified in the data grid at the bottom of the **Settings** page – see Section 2.1 Settings Page below) and refers to a collection of grade crossings along a single rail alignment. A corridor is selected in the data hierarchy only if the Model node is set to the corridor model. A dataset will contain at least one corridor and may contain as many as 50.

Create and delete corridors and modify their defining values in the **Settings** page. After selecting a corridor, view or modify its crossings data from the **Crossings** page.

Region

A region has a set of defining values (these can be viewed and modified in the data grid at the bottom of the **Settings** page – see Section 2.1 Settings Page below) and refers to a collection of grade crossings in a designated region. A region is selected in the data hierarchy only if the Model node is set to the regional model. A dataset will contain at least one region and may contain as many as 50.

Create and delete regions and modify their defining values in the **Settings** page. After selecting a region, view or modify its crossings data from the **Crossings** page.

Scenario

A scenario has a set of defining values (a description, start year, last year of near term, and end year) and an associated collection of scenario data. A dataset will contain at least one scenario for each of the two models and a dataset may contain as many as 30 scenarios for each model.

Create and delete scenarios and modify their defining values from the **Settings** page. After selecting a scenario, view and modify the scenario data from the **Scenario** page.

Results

GradeDec.Net sets the defining values of a results set automatically when you run a simulation. You can set the description for a results set.

Create and delete result sets and modify its description from the **Settings** page. After selecting a results set and running a simulation, view results from the **Results** page.

Steps in Conducting a *GradeDec.Net* Analysis

Overview

The following table shows a sample set of steps that you would undertake to conduct each of the two analyses. The sections that follow walk you through these steps in a sample analysis. Additional detail is provided in the “*GradeDec.Net Page-by-Page*” chapter, including screen snapshots.

Table 4 GradeDec.Net Modes and Sample

Mode of Use	Functional Steps	Page
Safety analysis	(Optional) Create and select a new dataset	Settings
	Create and select a new corridor (or region)	Settings
	Set values for corridor (or region)	Settings
	(Optional) Set default crossing device cost data	Defaults
	Import data from Grade Crossing Inventory	Import
	Verify and refine data, assumptions and choice of alternative	Crossings
	Calculate predicted accidents, view/print reports and charts	Crossings
Full investment analysis	Conduct all of the steps in the “Safety analysis” mode of use listed above	
	Create new results set	Settings
	Create new scenario	Settings
	Populate the scenario data with forecast data and assumptions	Scenario
	Verify and modify parameters and other data values	Parameters
	Set the simulation parameters and run the simulation	Simulation
	View results table and charts, print report	Results

Safety Analysis

In this example you will set up an analysis for 10 crossings in a freight rail corridor in Lincoln County, Nebraska.

(Optional) Create and select a new dataset

If you skip this step, then in subsequent steps you will be using the default or other existing dataset.

On the **Settings** page, click on the link “Create New Dataset” on the row with “Selected Dataset”. This will transfer you to the **New Dataset** page. On this page you choose to either “Create new dataset by copying a dataset” – in which case you select one of your datasets from the drop down list – or choose “Create new dataset from sample data”. Select the second option.

Enter a name for the new dataset (e.g., “Sample analyses”) and then click create. This will transfer you back to the **Settings** page. From the dataset drop down list, select the dataset that you just created and click “Go”.

Create and select a new corridor (or region)

This section will assume that the Corridor Model is suitable for your analysis.

Select the “Corridor Model” (or ensure that it is selected) by clicking the appropriate button on the “Select Model” line.

On the **Settings** page, click on the link “Create New Corridor” to the right of “Selected Corridor”. This will transfer you to the **New Corridor** page. On this page select “Create a new, empty corridor”. Enter a name for the new corridor (e.g., Lincoln 1) and then click create. This will transfer you back to the **Settings** page.

Enable the “Corridor” drop down list by selecting the radio button by “Selected Corridor” (or ensure that it is selected).

From the “Selected Corridor” drop down list, select the corridor that you just created.

Set values for corridor (or region) characteristics

In the table at the bottom of the **Settings** page you need to set the characteristics that correspond to your corridor. This includes: the number of daily trains by type, the time-of-day distribution for rail operations in the corridor, specify yes/no whether highway traffic signals in the corridor are synchronized with crossing signals.

In this example, set:

- Daily Passenger Trains to 0
- Daily Freight Trains to 108
- Daily Switch Trains to 1
- Rail TOD (time-of-day) distribution to Uniform
- Signal Synchronization to false by leaving it unchecked

Set the values in the table by clicking on the “Edit” button, which will open the table for editing. Enter your changes and save them by clicking the “Update” button.”

(Optional) Modify or Add Time-of-Day Traffic Distributions.

If the sample time-of-day traffic distributions provided adequately reflect the distributions of highway traffic at crossings and for rail movements in the corridor, then skip this step. Otherwise, browse to the **Parameters** page by clicking on the link on the main navigation menu. On this page select from the toolbar at the top “Other data”.

Add new time-of-day crossings distributions as needed.

(Optional) Set default crossing device cost data

If in your analysis of safety you have no interest in the costs of improvements, then skip this step.

Browse to the **Parameters** page by clicking on the link on the main navigation menu. On this page select from the toolbar at the top “Other data”. From the drop down list select crossing device costs. Enter alternative values to the ones listed, as needed.

Import data from Grade Crossing Inventory

From the main navigation menu, select the **Import** page. From the drop down lists on the left select:

- State: *Nebraska*
- County: *Lincoln*
- Area: *Whole County*

The “Selected Areas” table will show your selection. Click on the button “Create list of corridors in selected areas”. The list of corridors will appear as options in the following drop down list. Select the corridor: *UP Nebr Eastern 4 Crossings*. This is the corridor with crossings in the selected area for the UP railroad, Nebraska division, Eastern subdivision. In this example there are four crossings.

You can view the National Grade Crossings Inventory data for the selected crossings at the table at the bottom of the page. You can modify the options and criteria that appear on the right side of the page (see the section 5.1 Import Page section for full description), or you can just click on “Import crossings data” to import your data to your Lincoln 1 corridor. After clicking import, your browser will automatically shift to the **Crossings** page.

Verify and refine data, assumptions and choice of alternatives

In the **Crossings** page you can browse the imported data and make any modifications that you need. Also, in the “General” section you can view and modify the choices for the improvement alternative.

Calculate predicted accidents, view/print reports and charts

When you are satisfied with the data and the alternative selections, on the “APS model” section click on the “Calculate predicted accidents” link in order to calculate the predicted accidents for each crossing and for the whole corridor.

You can generate a report for viewing and printing by selecting the option under “Crossings” on the Main Menu. You can view a chart of the predicted accidents by selecting the “View chart” link in the “APS Model” section of the **Crossings** page.

Full Investment Analysis

For a full investment analysis, complete the steps above for the safety analysis. Then perform the following steps.

Create new results set

On the main navigation menu, click on the link **Settings** to return to the **Settings** page. On the **Settings** page, click on the radio button “Results” on the “View in table below the selected” . Then , on the “Selected results set” line, click the ”Create New Results Set” links. This will launch the **New Results** page. On this page, enter the name of the new results set “Lincoln UP, Base” and then click the “Create” button. Your browser will create the results set and shift back to the **Settings** page. Now from the drop down list select the newly created results set.

Create new scenario

Now click on the radio button ”Scenario” on the “View in table below selected” line. Then click the “Create New Scenario” button on the “Selected Scenario” line. This will launch the **New Scenario** page. Select “Create a new scenario by copying an existing scenario” and select from the drop down list the sample “Base scenario” scenario. Enter a name for the scenario (e.g., Lincoln base) and click on “Create”. Your browser will create the scenario and shift back to the **Settings** page. Now from the drop down list select the newly created scenario.

You can leave the year settings (Start year: 2003, last year near term: 2007, end year: 2027) at their default values or modify them if you wish. These vales determine the first and last years of the analysis time horizon and the periods in which the respective near-term and far-term growth rates are applied.

Modify the scenario data with forecast values and assumptions for your analysis

Click on the **Scenario** link of the main navigation menu. Your browser will transfer to the **Scenario** page. This page will display the scenario that you selected. This scenario is pre-populated with the sample values copied from the “Base scenario”. Modify these values to suit your analysis.

The scenario data variables are organized by topic areas: rail operations, highway, social costs and prices. You select a topic area by using the drop down list on the top-center of the page. You view a variable within a topic area in the table in the lower part of the page. Clicking the “Edit Distributions” and “Edit Values” buttons allows you to edit the variable data in the table.

The data for the scenario variables are either a fixed value or several values that define a probability distribution. Click on the “Edit Distributions” button to select the type of probability distribution using the drop down lists (skewed bell, normal, uniform or triangle – or set the variable to be a “Fixed Value”). After setting the probability distribution types for all the variables on the page, click “Update”. Then click the button “Edit Values”, which will open the table to allow editing of the values. **After entering the values for the probability distributions on**

the page, click the “Update” button to save your entries. Be sure to always click “Update” to save your entries before navigating away from your current page.

Verify or modify parameters and other data values

Browse to the **Parameters** page by clicking on the link on the main navigation menu. On this page select from the toolbar at the top “Model Parameters”. Select from the drop down list a table of values to view. If for your analysis you have local information that is better suited than the standard values supplied with *GradeDec.Net*, then edit the model values here (see the *Model Reference* for documentation of the equations in *GradeDec.Net*).

Set the simulation parameters and run the simulation

Browse to the **Simulation** page by clicking on the link on the main navigation menu. On this page set the parameters for running a risk analysis of the benefit-cost of the program of improvements defined in **Crossings**, with the probability distributions described in **Scenario**. You can run your simulation with the default values, or modify them and take advantage of the options on this page. When ready, click on the “Run Simulation” button. When completed, your browser will shift to the **Results** page.

View results table and charts, print report

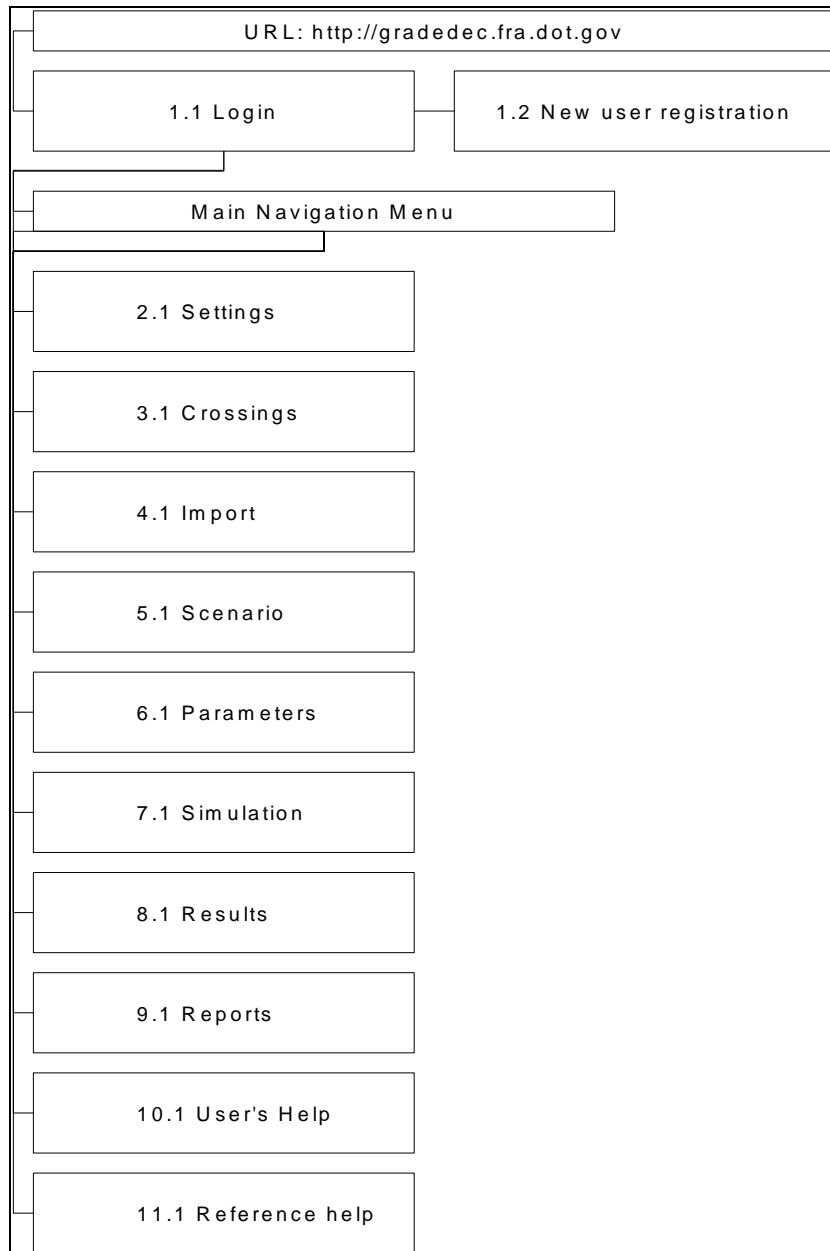
On the **Results** view your analysis results on the tables and charts that this page makes available.

***GradeDec.Net* Page-by-Page**

Introduction

The figure below shows the pages in *GradeDec.Net* and the means for accessing each page (pages directly connected to the main navigation menu are accessed from it. Access other pages from the connecting page to its left in the figure). The following descriptions of pages each contain an Overview and a Features section.

Figure 3 Key to Pages in GradeDec.Net



1.1 Login Page

Figure 4 View of Login Page (Login and registration section)



Overview

After directing your browser to the *GradeDec.Net* URL (<http://gradedec.fra.dot.gov>), the **Login** page appears. The **Login** page contains a toolbar with selections that offer information about *GradeDec.Net*. When “Login” is selected, you will see the “Login and Registration” section as it appears above.

Enter your user ID and click “Submit”. Then enter your user password and click “Submit” to begin a *GradeDec.Net* session.

First-time users should click the “Go” button on the right in order to invoke to the **Registration** page for new user registration.

1.2 Registration Page

Figure 5 View of Registration Page



Overview

On this page, first-time users register with *GradeDec.Net*. Required information includes the user ID, password, first name, last name and an email address. The user ID and password must each be at least six characters in length. Please note and save your user ID and password in a safe place because you will need these for logging in to *GradeDec.Net* in future sessions.

After entering your information, click “Submit”. Missing or invalid information will result in red error messages on the page. If you see any such messages, correct as needed and click “Submit” again. After you register, your browser will be redirected to the **Settings Page**.

2.1 Settings Page

Figure 6 View of Settings Page



Overview

With the **Settings** page, use the controls on the page to set and manage the data collections for your analysis (see the section on “The Data Hierarchy in *GradeDec.Net*”). You can also modify the defining values for data collections, set or restore defaults and launch the page to create new data collections or delete existing ones.

Features

The Settings page is divided into two main sections: 1) the object selection form (top of the page) and 2) the data grid (bottom of the page). Use the controls in the object selection form to select an object (corridor or region, scenario or results set) and edit the object’s characteristics in the data grid. Click the “Edit” button in order to make entries in the data grid and click “Update” to save your entries. The following subsections describe in detail the features of the page.

- **Select Dataset** drop down list – if you have more than one dataset, select the one to use with this control.
- **Go/Enable** toggle buttons – By clicking one of these buttons when it says “Enable” you enable the drop down list to its left for use. By clicking one of these buttons when it says go, you select the item in the drop down list on the left. Item selection will

cause the grid at the bottom of the page to be populated with data defining the selection.

- **Select Model** toolbar – within the selected dataset, select the model (Corridor or Regional) to use by clicking the respective button on the toolbar. The Corridor model examines crossings along a designated rail alignment and calculates impacts in the corridor, while the Regional model looks at all crossings in a specified region.
- **Select Corridor/Region, Scenario, Results Set** toolbar – this toolbar has three buttons, and one of these will always be selected. The toolbar selection determines: a) the options available in the **Object** drop down list, b) the “Create” and “Delete” object links. When selecting one of the options:
 - **Corridor or Region** (“Corridor” will be the first option if “Corridor Model” is selected in the **Select Model** toolbar. If “Regional Model” is selected then the first option will be “Region”). – Selecting corridor or region will populate the **Object** drop down list with the Corridors or Regions in the dataset. The “Create” link will display “Create new corridor/region” and the “Delete” link will display “Delete corridor/region”.
 - **Scenario** – Selecting “Scenario” will populate the **Object** drop down list with the scenarios in the dataset. The “Create” link will display “Create new scenario” and the “Delete” link will display “Delete scenario”.
 - **Results Set** – Selecting “Results set” will populate the **Object** drop down list with the results sets in the dataset. The “Create” link will display “Create new results set” and the “Delete” link will display “Delete results set”.
- **Object** drop down list – Select the corridor or region, scenario or results set for your analysis. Use the **Go/Enable** toggle button to the right of the drop down list in order to execute your selection.
- **Data Collection** data grid (located at the bottom of the **Settings** page) – After selecting a data collection with the drop down lists above, its defining values will appear in the data grid at the bottom of the page. You can edit some of the values in the table by clicking the “Edit” button. Some values are modified by the program and cannot be manually edited. After clicking the “Edit” button, editable values will show a control (a text box, drop down list, or check box) that can be modified. After making edits, click the “Update” button saves the edits, or click the “Cancel” button to delete the edits you made.
- **Create New Dataset** link - Invoke the page for creating a new dataset.

- **Delete Dataset** link – Delete the selected dataset (note that you cannot delete a default dataset – if it is default, then select a different dataset and set it as default (using “Save current selections as defaults” from the **Navigation Menu Submenu**) and then delete the originally selected dataset.
- **Create New Corridor, Region, Scenario or Results Set** link - Invoke the page for creating a new data collection (corridor/region, scenario or results set, depending upon which you have selected from the **Select Corridor/Region, Scenario, Results Set** toolbar).
- **Delete Corridor, Region, Scenario or Results** link – Delete the selected data collection (note that you cannot delete a default data collection – if it is default, then select a different data collection and set it as default and then delete the originally selected data collection).
- **Navigation Menu Submenu** – from this menu (on the left side of the page) under the ‘Settings’ option, access the following:
 - Reload defaults – Some of your data collections are designated as “defaults”, which are set as “selected” when you begin your *GradeDec.Net* session. This action restores set your default settings as the current settings.
 - Save current selections as defaults – This action will replace your default settings with the ones that are current.
 - Archive dataset to local disk – When you archive a dataset, you download a ZIP file to your computer that contains a replica of all the data in your dataset. The archived dataset is for storage and sharing with another user. It is not in a suitable format for offline modification of data. After downloading your dataset you can delete the dataset (if you so choose – see “Delete Dataset Link” above) from the *GradeDec.Net* server database and restore the archived dataset to the server at a later date.
 - Restore archived dataset – Select this action to upload and restore an archived dataset to the *GradeDec.Net* server.

New Data Collection (Dataset, Corridor, Region, Scenario, Results) Page

Figure 7 View of New Data Collection Page



Overview

Invoke this page from the **Settings** page and use it to create a new data collection. Each page will request that you specify “Create new data set from sample data” or “Create new data set by copying a data set.” For a new data set, select the first radio button, to copy an existing data set, choose the second button. In both cases, you need to assign a new name to the data collection.

For a new corridor or region, selecting a “new empty” corridor or region, creates a placeholder region or corridor that contains no grade crossings. You must add grade crossings afterwards either manually (from the **Crossings** page or by importing data (through “Quick Import” on the **Crossings** page or from the **Import** page.

3.1 Crossings Page

Figure 8 View of Crossings Page with the Corridor Model



Figure 9 View of Crossings Page, with Corridor Model and Capital Programming, Devices Displayed



Overview

Use this page in safety or investment analysis to:

- View crossing data.
- Add, modify and delete crossing data.
- Calculate predicted accidents using both the Accident Prediction and Severity Model and the High Speed Rail Model
- Print the crossings reports
- View charts ranking the crossings

The **Crossings** page shows data and permits editing data for the crossing selected in the list at the top of the page. The toolbar in the middle of the page permits selection of the section of data to view for the crossing. For the Corridor Model the toolbar shows the following sections:

- General
- Devices
- Highway
- Rail
- Cost
- APS (Accident Prediction and Severity) Model
- HSR (High Speed Rail) Model

For the Regional Model the toolbar shows the following sections:

- General

- Devices
- Highway
- Rail
- Cost
- APS (Accident Prediction and Severity) Model

Additionally, if the crossing variable (in the Highway section) called “Traffic Management Measure?” is set to “True” then the toolbar will include the following section:

- Highway (Alt.)

Similarly, if the crossing variable (in the APS model section) called “Include Aggravating Factors?” is set to “True” then the toolbar will include the following section:

- Aggravating Factors

The items listed in some of the sections will vary, depending upon whether the user has set “Allow Capital Planning” to “True” for the corridor or region (on the **Settings** page). Without capital planning, the user is selecting a Base Case and an Alternate Case, with all upgrades implemented in the base year for the alternate case. With capital planning, the user can set the year for implementing the improvement for each crossing. The user can also specify with capital planning two phases of upgrades (i.e., upgrade to gates in year 3 then grade separate the crossing in year 15).

Features

The Crossings page is divided into two main sections: 1) the crossings selection form (top of the screen), and, 2) the data grid (bottom of the screen). Data entry and modifications to crossing data are entered on the data grid subsequent to clicking the Edit button. You navigate among topics for the crossings by clicking on the buttons in the middle of the page. Note that the Crossings page appears different depending upon whether the “Allow Capital Programming?” setting is set to true. See Figures 8 and 9 above. (You set the setting “Allow Capital Programming?” in the Settings Page by editing the data for the selected corridor).

If set to true, then in the General Information section, there will be data entry drop down lists for two alternatives (Phase I and Phase II) and their respective years for implementation. Also, on the toolbar at the top of the page the user can specify the year for comparing base and alternate accident risk, which will account for the improvements in the alternate case for the year specified.

Several buttons on the form facilitate updates, calculations and navigation among crossings and are discussed below.

Other features can be accessed from the **Crossings** link in the navigation menu.

The Crossing List Box

This box displays a list of all the crossings in the corridor or region. You can select a crossing to view and edit by first clicking on the crossing (which highlights the crossing in the box) and then clicking on the “Go” button. You can also select a crossing by using the up and down arrows.

Up and Down Arrows

Clicking on these arrows moves the selection to the next or previous crossing in the crossing list box. When the selected item changes, the data grid displays the data of the selected crossing.

Delete Crossings Mode

When the page is in “Delete Crossings Mode” you can delete one or multiple crossings. To put the **Crossings** page into “Delete Crossings Mode”, click the Enter “Delete Crossings Mode” link in the upper right-hand corner of the page. Select a crossing by clicking on it from the menu and use either the shift or ctrl keys to select multiple ones. When your selection has been made, click the Delete the selected crossings link where the Enter “Delete Crossings” Mode link once was. Click the Exit “Delete Crossings” mode to return to the **Crossings** page.

Navigation Menu Submenu

Access the Navigation Menu Submenu on the Navigation Menu (on the left side of the page under the “Crossings” option). The following describe the components of the menu.

- Add new crossing - This action will create a new crossing in the corridor or region and will populate it with sample values. Using the “Edit” feature, you should modify the sample values with your crossing data.
- Quick Import - This page is invoked from the Navigation Menu Submenu under the Crossings option when the Crossings page is displayed. Use Quick Import to import a small number of crossings to the corridor or region, whose FRA grade crossing ID numbers you already know.
- Set default costs (this crossing) - This action will apply the default costs (see the Parameters page) to the selected crossing in the corridor or region.
- Set default costs (all crossings) - This action will apply the default costs (see the Parameters page) to all of the crossings in the corridor or region.
- Generate corridor report - This action generates a report (.PDF file) containing information on accidents and safety in the region

or corridor for each crossing. It contains the predicted annual accidents in the base and alternative cases from trains, highways and both combined. The report contains highway and train characteristics such as the composition of highway traffic and the speed of trains.

- **Generate HSR Report** - This action generates a report (.PDF file) containing information on accidents and safety in the region or corridor for each crossing as produced by the HSR Model. It is similar to the corridor report discussed previously.

Generate capital plan report - This action generates a pdf file (readable with Adobe Acrobat Reader) that shows the year-by-year capital expenditure and the crossing device status for each year of the alternative. This option only appears in the menu if you have checked (set to true) the option "Allow Capital Planning?" on the Settings page for the corridor or region.

The Data Category Toolbar

Crossing data are divided into several categories for viewing and modification. The data category toolbar is used to select the data category. Clicking on a button in the toolbar causes the selected data to be shown in the data grid at the bottom of the page. The data categories are explained below.

Crossing Data Grid

Use the data grid to view and modify crossing data. The following describes the data categories and the features of the data grid.

Crossing Data Categories

- **General Information** - The **Crossings** page contains general information about the crossing, locational factors and its physical characteristics. Using the mouse, click the Edit button and click on the field where you wish to enter data.
- **Devices** - The devices data block includes the base and alternate warning device type and supplementary safety measures for the crossing are the "before" and "after" improvement crossing types, respectively. For "Base Device Type" and "Alternate Device Type", use the drop down lists. If your corridor or region allows capital programming, then you can set a Phase I and a Phase II alternate and you must specify the years of implementation for each.
- **Highway** - The highway data category includes data entry boxes for the number of lanes, AADT and percentages of trucks (and of trucks, percent truck-trailers) and buses. The data category also includes pull-down menus where the user specifies the time-of-day traffic distribution for auto, truck and bus traffic.

- **Rail** - In the rail data category the user specifies the number of tracks and train speeds. The user specifies the maximum timetable speed at the crossing and the average speeds traveled by trains of different types at the crossing. The regional model requires additional rail-related data inputs.
- **Costs** - The cost data category contains the cost data for the crossing in the base and alternate cases. You can enter the data manually for each crossing, or you can use the default costs by selecting "Set default costs" from the **Crossings** link in the navigation menu. Additionally, you can specify whether you would like to set the default costs to the selected crossing or all of the crossings in the model.

If a crossing device type is set to "Lights and Gates" and a supplementary safety measure is chosen, then the user can specify the costs for the supplementary measure in the appropriate boxes.

- **APS Model** - This data category contains one data entry box for the number of accidents at the crossing in the preceding five-year period (for the Corridor Model) and five boxes for each year (for the Regional Model). It also includes a checkbox "Include Aggravating Factors?" If this is selected then the toolbar will contain a tab for "Aggravating Factors", and aggravating factor variables will influence the calculation of predicted accidents and their severity. The other information on this section of the form is the predicted number of accidents for the crossing and the corridor (calculated based upon the data for the crossing and corridor). Predicted accidents are updated when the user presses the "Recalculate" link. The "Show chart" link provides the user with the "Crossing risk chart page" in a new window. This page has histograms containing the data found in the table found in the **Crossings** page. The rates and predicted accidents are calculated using the US DOT Accident Prediction and Severity Formulas and Resource Allocation Method (see the *GradeDec.Net* Model Reference and Documentation).
- **Aggravating Factors (Shown if "Include Aggravating Factors?" variable is checked in APS Model view)** – The form for aggravating factors has as toolbar for selecting the base case or the alternate case for viewing and editing data. The form has two sections. The top section of the form specifies factors that affect accident occurrence and the bottom section specifies factors for accident severity. The aggravating factors result in a calculated score for occurrence between 0 and 60 and a score for severity between 0 and 60. The occurrence score will scale the predicted accidents down by 30 percent for a score of 0 and up by 30 percent for a score of 60. Intermediate scores will linearly scale the predicted accidents between plus and minus 30 percent. The severity score will similarly scale up or down the number of predicted fatal and injury accidents. If the fatal and injury

accidents are impacted by aggravating factors then the property damage only accidents will be calculated as the remainder from total accidents less the fatal and injury accidents.

- **HSR Model (Corridor Model Only)** - This portion of the data entry form shows the predicted accidents using the High Speed Rail Model. The predicted accidents on this block of the form are updated when the user presses the "Recalculate" link. The "Show chart" link provides the user with the "Crossing risk chart page" in a new window. This page has histograms containing the data found in the table found in the **Crossings** page.

"Edit, "Update" and "Cancel" Buttons

You can modify the data for the selected crossing by clicking the "Edit" button:

Note: For corridors, changing the milepost value to one that is identical to another crossing will result in the deletion of that other crossing when you click "Update".

Note: For regions, changing the crossing ID value to one that is identical to another crossing will result in the deletion of that other crossing when you click "Update".

After entering or modifying the data for a grade crossing, press the "Update" button to save the new data in the crossings database or the "Cancel" button if you do not wish to save the changes made. If you move to another crossing in the item list or exit the **Crossing** page without pressing the "Update" button or the "Calculate Predicted Accidents" button, you will lose any information that you entered since you last pressed "Update".

Note: Pressing the "Update" button does not recalculate the predicted accidents and rates based upon new or changed crossing or corridor data. In order to recalculate the rates and save them in the crossing database you must press the "Calculate Predicted Accidents" button.

"View All"

On the left side of the data table next to each item is a link that says "View All". When you click this link a page will pop up that enables you to view and enter data for the item for all crossings in the corridor or region. This page has an "Edit" button that enables editing, and "Update" and "Cancel" buttons for saving and exiting edit mode. The page will display the item for 20 crossings at a time. If your corridor or region has more than 20 crossings, you can view and additional crossings in the corridor or region by using the paging feature in the lower left corner of the "View All" page. When you have finished making edits with this

page (don't forget to click "Update" to save your edits) close this pop up page.

Quick Import Page (invoked from the Crossings Page)

Overview

This page is invoked from the Navigation Menu Submenu under the Crossings option when the **Crossings** page is displayed. The **Quick Import** page pops up as a separate browser window.


"Quick Import" allows the user to import data quickly from the National Grade Crossing Inventory into your selected corridor or region. In order to use "Quick Import" you need to know the FRA IDs of the grade crossings that you seek to import. Unlike the "Import Page", with "Quick Import" you cannot select crossings by geographic location and you cannot screen the imported crossings according to a number of criteria.

Features

There are two methods for employing "Quick Import", one is by entering up to five grade crossing IDs, and the other is importing based on a list that is stored in a text file. You select which of these two methods to use by:

Option 1 - Enter Up to Five IDs

Figure 10 View of Quick Import Page

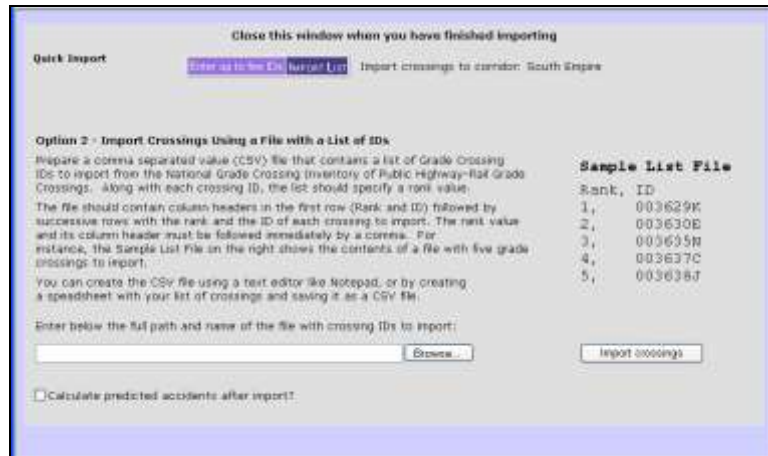


The screenshot shows a browser window titled "Quick Import" with a close button. Below the title bar, there is a text input field for "Import crossings to corridor: South Empire". The main content area is titled "Option 1 - Import Up to 5 Crossings - Enter Crossing IDs on Page" and contains the instruction "Enter below the identification number(s) of the crossing(s) to import to the current corridor:". There are five input fields labeled "Crossing 1" through "Crossing 5". Below these fields is a button labeled "Import the crossings". At the bottom left, there is a checkbox labeled "Calculate predicted accidents after import?".

Use this option to enter up to five grade crossings. Enter the FRA grade crossing IDs into the boxes. Check the box if you want *GradeDec.Net* to calculate predicted accidents for the imported grade crossings. Click "Import Crossings" after you have entered the information.

Option 2 - Import List

Figure 11 View of Import List



Use this option to import any number of grade crossings for which you know the FRA grade crossing IDs. Prepare a comma separated value (CSV) file that contains a list of grade crossing IDs to import from the National Grade Crossing Inventory of Public Highway-Rail Grade Crossings. Along with each crossing ID, the list should specify a rank value.

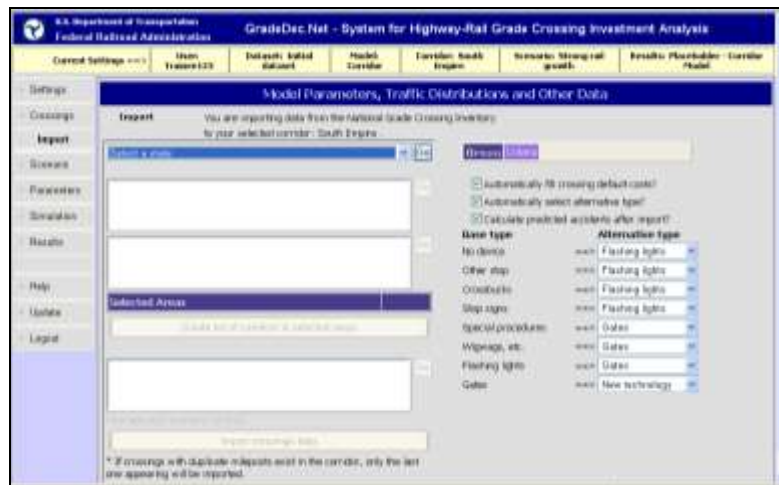
The file should contain column headers in the first row (Rank and ID) followed by successive rows with the rank and the ID of each crossing to import. The rank value and its column header must be followed immediately by a comma. For instance, the Sample List File on the right shows the contents of a file with five grade crossings to import.

You can create the CSV file using a text editor like Notepad, or by creating a spreadsheet with your list of crossings and saving it as a CSV file.

Use the “Browse” button to select the CSV file that you have prepared. Click the “Import Crossings” button after you have entered the information.

4.1 Import Page

Figure 12 View of Import Page



Overview

Use this option to enter up to five grade crossings at a time.

The purpose of this page is to enable the analyst to import data from the National Inventory of Highway-Rail Grade Crossings database into *GradeDec.Net* for analysis. The page lets the user build a query based on geography, identified corridors and grade crossing characteristics. The page also enables the specification of automatic mapping to *GradeDec.Net* fields. The following sections describe the different parts of the page and their functions. You can use this option repeatedly to import more than five crossings.

Features

Importing Data from the National Inventory of Grade Crossings

When the Import page opens in the browser use the following drop down lists to select the region under consideration:

"Select a State", "Select a County", "Select Area"

Choose the state first and then the county from the respective lists. After selecting the county, you should select an area, which is an area within the county (i.e., "the whole county", a specific city, or "not in any city"). After selecting the area, it will appear in the "Selected Areas" data grid.

For Corridor Model

After selecting the areas for inclusion, use the item list to select crossings that are identified as being in a specific corridor, using the shift or ctrl

keys to make multiple selections. After making this selection, the records from the Grade Crossing Inventory to be imported will be viewable in the data grid at the bottom of the page.

For Regional Model

After selecting the areas for inclusion the records from the Grade Crossing Inventory to be imported will be viewable in the data grid at the bottom of the page.

Press the “Delete” link in the “Selected Areas” data grid to delete a selected area.

Criteria

The “Criteria” section allows the user to restrict the crossings to import to those that meet specific criteria. The criteria include: average annual daily traffic, number of trains per day and number of accidents in the previous 5 years.

Note: While *GradeDec.Net* allows you to import records that have no train or highway traffic, be aware that the absence of either at a grade crossing will cause a computational error in the model (e.g., divide by zero). To avoid this, you should either exclude crossings with no traffic, or enter data manually for these crossings (assuming that this reflects actual conditions at the crossings).

Import Options

Use this section to determine the automated filling of *GradeDec.Net* fields when importing data. You can specify to use default cost data, or leave cost data blank for manual data entry. The base grade crossing type is the type specified in the National Inventory of Highway-Rail Grade Crossings database. The alternative grade crossing type can be automatically designated using the pull-down menus, or the user can specify that alternative crossing types will be manually entered.

Import Crossings Data

By clicking on the button “Import Crossings Data”, the selected records are imported to the selected corridor or region, and your browser transfers to the **Crossings** page. The instructions that you specified in the **Import** page for automatic field fill are executed and the new data records are appended to the existing records in the selected region. After importing, predicted accidents are calculated for all crossings as well as a summary for the corridor or region.

If upon importing data a record already exists with the same crossing ID as a newly imported crossing, the existing record in the region is overwritten by the imported data.

5.1 Scenario Page

Figure 13 View of Scenario Page



The screenshot displays the 'GradeDec.Net - System for Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Investment Analysis' interface. The main window is titled 'Scenario: Strong rail growth'. A table lists various variables and their associated probability distributions. The table has columns for 'Variable', 'Distribution', '10% Lower', 'Median', and '10% Upper'. The variables include rates of growth in passenger and freight rail traffic (near and long term) and freight/passenger rail cars per train. The distributions are categorized as Skewed Bell, Triangle, or Fixed Value.

Variable	Distribution	10% Lower	Median	10% Upper
Rate of growth in passenger rail traffic, near term, %	Skewed Bell	2.4	2.75	3.1
Rate of growth in passenger rail traffic, long term, %	Skewed Bell	1.3	2	2.5
Rate of growth in freight rail traffic, near term, %	Skewed Bell	2.6	2.95	3.3
Rate of growth in freight rail traffic, long term, %	Skewed Bell	1.3	2	2.5
Rate of growth in switch rail traffic, near term, %	Skewed Bell	1.8	2.05	2.2
Rate of growth in switch rail traffic, long term, %	Skewed Bell	1.1	2	2.5
Freight rail cars per train	Triangle	Minimum: 35	Mode: 40	Maximum: 45
Passenger rail cars per train	Triangle	Minimum: 5.5	Mode: 6	Maximum: 6.5
Switch cars per train	Fixed Value	Fixed Value: 5		
Average length of freight rail car, feet	Triangle	Minimum: 45	Mode: 50	Maximum: 60

Overview

The Scenario Input Screen is where you view and edit scenario data for an analysis. Scenario data for a model input variable can be either a fixed value or several values that describe a probability distribution.

Probability distributions are used to derive analysis results with Monte Carlo simulation. For a discussion of simulation see the section “About Simulation” in section “7.1 Simulation Page”.

This page possesses a number of features that let you easily visualize data and quickly develop probability distributions that best reflect available information and judgments on operations, future developments and social costs. These features include:

- Ease of navigation among variables
- Instant viewing of statistics and charts
- Instant validation and saving of ranges

GradeDec.Net can store many different scenarios for analysis. Scenario data categories include: rail operations, highways, social costs and price inflation. Scenarios are initially defined and selected in the **Settings** page (change to the Scenario view clicking the “Scenario” button in the “Viewing in table below the selected” line of the **Settings** page).

Remember that the data in the selected scenario are the data that will be used by the *GradeDec.Net* model to conduct the benefit-cost analysis on the strategies and cases defined elsewhere in the model. If you wish to work with data from another scenario and use that data in the analysis, that scenario must be selected from the **Settings** page (see section above on the **Scenario** page). You can vary the baseline assumptions for an analysis by creating multiple scenarios (for instance, one each for high, moderate and low traffic growth).

Features

The **Scenario** page is shown above. The scenario input variables in *GradeDec.Net* are organized into data groups according to a functional classification. The data groups are:

- Rail Operations
- Highway
- Social Costs
- Price Inflation

When you link to the **Scenario** page the Rail Operations sheet is loaded and the first variable in that sheet is selected and shown in the chart and tables. You browse among the different sheets using the drop down list in the upper right-hand corner of the form.

The remainder of this section describes each component of the **Scenario** page and their functions.

Data Group Pull Down List

Use this drop down list on the left side of the upper toolbar to select the data group to view and edit.

The data groups accessible from the **Scenario** page offer the analyst great flexibility in specifying the present and future travel, cost, and policy environment that will affect a project. The content of the major groups are summarized below. Note that each data group allows the analyst to specify a range of uncertainty around any of the values entered for that group (see the Variable Data Grid below).

- “Rail Operations” and “Highway” data on this page (see Figure 13) interact with other model variables set on the Settings and Crossings pages to determine: the levels of rail and highway traffic; user costs, and benefits.
- “Social costs” data are entered in this **Scenario** page view. Most of the cost items (including discount rate, value of travel time, value of statistical life and injury, etc.) are self-explanatory and are set to default values taken from FRA sources, but can be edited by the user.
- The “Price Inflation” view includes data growth rates for general price inflation by year and growth rates for fuel price inflation by year. A real fuel price index is calculated from the nominal fuel price index divided by the general price index. The real fuel price index is applied to the fuel and oil components of the vehicle operating costs. All other cost and benefit components of the analysis are unaffected by inflation (i.e., future streams are calculated in terms of constant dollars

and relative prices excluding fuel and oil are assumed to remain constant).

Generate scenario report (Invoked from the Navigation Menu Submenu)

This feature generates a report in pdf format (readable with Adobe Acrobat) of the **Scenario** page. Use this feature by selecting “Generate scenario report” from the **Scenario** option in the Navigation Menu on the left side of the page.

Edit Distribution

This feature allows for the distributions to be changed for each of the variables on the page. The probability distributions and their corresponding input values are described below. For each scenario input variable, you can specify a probability distribution. The choice of probability distribution type and the input values for the distribution determine the probability distribution for the input variable.

For each scenario input variable, you can specify a probability distribution. The input values and the choice of probability distribution type determine the probability distribution for the input variable.

After clicking “Edit” the types of probability distributions that appear in a drop down list and from which you can choose are:

- **Fixed Value (single input value required)** - When you choose fixed value, there is no distribution and the variable assumes a single, fixed value in a simulation. For a fixed value, no statistics are shown and only the middle percentile box is enabled for data entry. No chart is shown for a fixed value.
- **Skewed Bell (three input values required – 10, 50 and 90 percentiles)** - The skewed bell distribution is derived from three points: the 10% lower value, the 50% value (or, median) and the 10% upper value. For non-skewed input values (e.g., the distances between the median and the lower and upper values are equal) the distribution is normal. This distribution is useful when the exact form of the distribution is not known yet good estimates on the median and boundary values are available.
- **Normal (two input values required – mean and standard deviation)** - Use this distribution type when you have data indicating the variable is non-skewed and normally distributed.
- **Uniform (two input values required – maximum and minimum)** - With the uniform distribution every point on an interval is equally likely. Minimum and maximum input values are required for this distribution.

- **Triangle (three input values required – maximum, minimum and mode)** - All values for this distribution lie between the minimum and the maximum and its density function forms a triangle with its peak at the mode. Use this distribution when the variable and data indicate firm bounds on the maximum and minimum values and a most likely value.

When editing the distributions the page displays the “Update” and “Cancel” buttons, which are used to save or discard the edits you have made to the variable distributions.

Edit Values

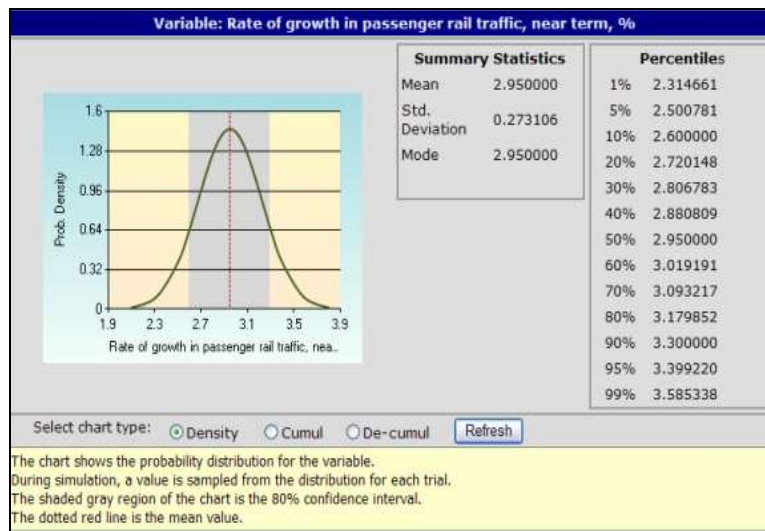
This feature allows you to edit the values that define the probability distribution for the variable. For each distribution type (including “Fixed Value”) there will be either one, two or three values that define the distribution. When editing values there will be headings and text boxes that correspond to the distribution for each variable (see [Table 5](#)). When editing the values the page displays the “Update” and “Cancel” buttons, which are used to save or discard the edits you have made to the variable distributions.

Table 5 Probability Distributions and their Displays on the Scenario Page

Probability Distribution	First Value	Second Value	Third Value
Fixed Value	Fixed value		
Uniform	Minimum value	Maximum value	
Skewed Bell	10 th percentile	50 th percentile	90 th percentile
Normal	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Triangle	Minimum value	Mode	Maximum value

Scenario Input Variable Chart

Figure 14 View of Scenario Input Variable Chart



Overview

Clicking on “View” for a variable on the **Scenario** page will cause the scenario input variable chart to pop up, showing a chart and data for the selected variable. The page contains a chart, a summary statistics table, a percentiles table and option buttons for selecting alternative chart types.

For a fixed value, the chart will display the message “No Chart for Fixed Value” and the tables will reflect the information for the single, fixed value.

There are three chart types and each shows a shaded region that represents the 80% confidence interval. A dotted red line marks the mean value of the distribution.

The x-axis on all the charts ranges between the values whose probabilities are 0.1 and 99.9 percent, respectively. The different chart types are

selected using the option buttons below the chart (click “Refresh” after making a selection).

Features

Density/Cumul/De-Cumul option buttons

The selected option determines which of the three chart formats:

- Probability density
- Cumulative probability
- De-cumulative probability

are displayed for the selected variable (see the Glossary for definitions).

Summary statistics tables

The summary statistics frame displays the mean, mode, and standard deviation of the distribution. See the glossary for the definitions.

Percentiles

The percentiles frame displays the percentiles of the input distribution. A percentile indicates the probability that the value of the input variable would fall below the given value of the x-axis. For instance, in Figure 17, the chance that the sampled input value of “the rate of growth in passenger traffic, near term, %”, would fall below 3.3 is 90 percent, given the distribution specified by the users.

6.1 Parameters Page

Figure 15 View of Parameters Page

The screenshot shows the 'Parameters' section of the GradeDec.Net interface. It features a table titled 'Vehicle Emissions Rates (grams of emissions per minute of idling)'. The table has columns for 'Vehicle Type', 'HC', 'CO', 'NOx', and 'SOx'. The data is as follows:

Vehicle Type	HC	CO	NOx	SOx
Cars	0.30200	4.05000	0.191000	0.00000
Buses	0.60000	13.0000	0.380000	0.00000
Trucks	0.20000	3.10000	0.270000	0.00000
Trucks	0.20000	3.10000	0.270000	0.00000

Below the table, a note states: "Values in red are Federal Highway Administration default values that are vehicles of Federal average."

Overview

The **Parameters** page is where you can view and modify model parameters and other data values in *GradeDec.Net*. Parameters include:

- Vehicle emission coefficients;

- Fuel and oil burn coefficients
- Effectiveness rates, and,
- High-speed rail model coefficients

Other data include:

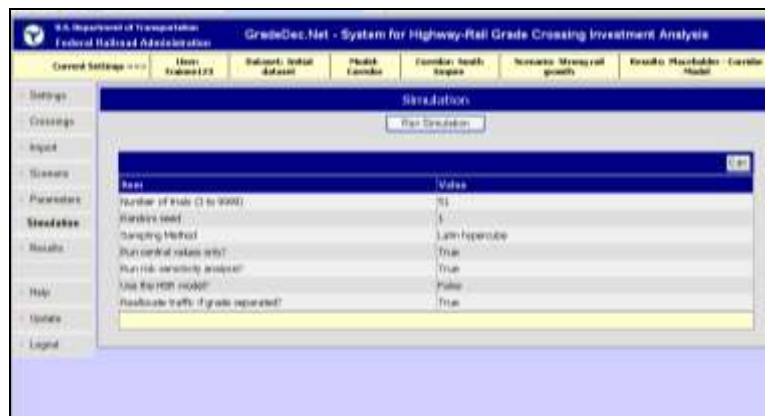
- Traffic time-of-day distributions
- Default costs of grade crossing devices
- Default costs of supplementary safety devices

See the *GradeDec.Net Model Reference* for additional explanations.

The page enables the user to access model parameters other data values for reference and for editing, if necessary. In most applications it is unlikely that you will wish to modify the emission and fuel burn coefficients. You may wish to modify or add to the time-of-day traffic distributions if localized information is available that better characterizes these distributions. There may well be local guidance on grade crossing operating and maintenance costs and these should be modified as needed.

7.1 Simulation Page

Figure 16 View of Simulation Page



Overview

Use the **Simulation** page to set the simulation parameters and begin a simulation. You should browse to this page only when you are ready to conduct a simulation, that is, after having made all required modifications to data, and after having selected the corridor (or region), scenario and results file.

In the data grid, note that the items “Reallocate traffic if grade separated?” and “Use the HSR Model” appear only with the corridor model and not with the regional model.

You also have the option of selecting the results that will be reported upon completion of the simulation page.

Features

The **Simulation** page is used to run a simulation. Use the page to set the simulation parameters and initiate the simulation. The simulation parameters are discussed below.

About Simulation

GradeDec.Net uses simulation, or risk analysis, to generate result forecasts. By specifying probability distributions for scenario inputs, the user quantifies their variability and uncertainty. The impact of this uncertainty on the outcomes, as reflected in the *GradeDec.Net* analytic model, is quantified using simulation.

With simulation, rather than solving the model once using "best guess" values for inputs, *GradeDec.Net* solves the model for many independent trials. In each trial, a random sample is taken from the distribution of each scenario input. Each trial produces an outcome (i.e., a set of values for the result variables) that is as likely to be achieved as any other. By applying statistical analysis to a set of outcomes, *GradeDec.Net* derives descriptive statistics for each result variable. Thus, for instance, *GradeDec.Net* will tell us not only that "the answer is 50", but also that "with 90% probability the answer lies between 30 and 75". As opposed to point estimates or sensitivity analysis (where one variable is arbitrarily varied), risk analysis supports better decisions by explicitly reporting the probability distributions of the results.

Also see the section "Why *GradeDec.Net*?" in the Introduction.

Data Grid Items

The following describes the items found in the table of the **Simulation** page. Click the "Edit" button to make the appropriate modifications to the existing values.

"Run central values only"

Check this box to run your model using only the central values. The reported results will be point values without probability ranges. When this box is checked, the trials box and random seed box are disabled. Choosing this option will result in a minimum run time and is useful when analyzing large corridors or regions.

"Number of Trials"

Enter the number of trials for the simulation. The number of trials is the number of times that the program will sample from the scenario input distributions, solve the model and generate results. More trials will yield

more stable results and will take more time to run. While a number of factors will determine the minimum number of trials needed to achieve stable results, 500 trials will almost always be adequate. You must use at least 3 trials to run a simulation.

Recommended Practice: To save time, when testing your data and assumptions, use a small number of trials (50 or less). When you are satisfied that there will be no more changes to the data, run a simulation with a large number of trials to arrive at your final result.

Expert Option: The user can select Latin Hypercube, the default, as the simulation method, or, alternately, the user can select the regular Monte Carlo method for simulation via the “Sampling Method” item. Latin Hypercube is a stratified sampling method and will usually converge to the true result distribution with fewer trials than the Monte Carlo method. If you wish to know more on this subject, a good technical reference is "Latin Hypercube sampling (A Program Users Guide)", by R.L. Iman J.M. Davenport and D.K. Zeigler, Technical Report SAND79-1473, Sandia Laboratories, Albuquerque (1980)

“Sampling Method”

See “Expert Method” in the description for “Number of Trials”.

“Random Seed”

The random seed determines the sequence of pseudo-random numbers that are generated by the simulation engine. Any positive integer value will generate a unique sequence of pseudo-random numbers for the simulation. Two simulations with identical data, number of trials and random seed will generate identical results.

Changing the random seed is an expert option. You may want to change the random seed to test the effects of the randomness of the sampling on the result distributions.

“Run Risk Sensitivity Analysis?”

The risk sensitivity analysis, which is executed after the simulation, runs the *GradeDec.Net* model with all the input variables except one set to their mean values. The exception input variable is set to its 10 percent lower value and the model is solved. This input variable is then set to its 10 percent upper value and the model is solved again. This process is repeated for all input variables. The results of the sensitivity analysis are displayed in the tornado chart, which is invoked from the **Results** page.

By leaving this box unchecked, and thus the value false, your results file will not contain values for the tornado chart. **When there are numerous grade crossings in a region or corridor, the risk sensitivity analysis can greatly increase the time required to run a simulation.** You may

prefer to sacrifice the risk sensitivity analysis in favor of shorter run times by not checking the box.

"Reallocate Traffic If Grade Separated?"

This item appears on the Simulation page only when using the corridor model. In the *GradeDec.Net* corridor model, there is an algorithm that re-assigns highway traffic from the adjacent grade crossings to an improved crossing with grade separation. This box is checked by default making its value true and by removing the check you choose to run your simulation without the re-assignment of traffic.

"Use the HSR Model?"

This item appears on the Simulation page only when using the corridor model. If this box is checked, then the simulation uses the HSR model algorithms to calculate the safety improvements (i.e., risk reduction) at the crossings. By default, when this box is unchecked, the model uses the algorithms specified by the US DOT Accident Prediction and Severity Model. The *GradeDec.Net* Model Reference and Documentation presents a fuller description of the models and their modes of usage.

8.1 Results Page

Figure 17 View of Results Page

Variable	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Safety benefits, \$/year \$ PV	2287308	433907
Travel time savings, \$/year \$ PV	0.000	0
Environmental benefits, \$/year \$ PV	0.000	0
Net operating cost benefits, \$/year \$ PV	0.000	0
Network benefits, \$/year \$ PV	0.000	0
Total benefits, \$/year \$ PV	2287308	433907
of Pw, benefits from reduced trips, \$/year \$ PV	1.852	0.200001
of Pw, detriments from reduced trips, \$/year \$ PV	-0.010	0.000007
of Pw, investment savings value, \$/year \$ PV	85.300	0
Total costs, \$/year \$ PV	1421.288	0
Net benefits, \$/year \$ PV	869.214	433909
beneficial rate	1.800	0.292081
Rate of return (constant dollars), %	11.447	0.0057
Local benefits (not included in summary), \$/year \$ PV	210.000	61.1081

Overview

The results of a simulation are viewed in the **Results** page. When you browse to the page it displays the benefit and benefit-cost summary result group with the associated variables.

When a simulation completes, the browser automatically redirects to this page.

The purpose of this page is to navigate, view and print results and their associated tables and graphics.

Features

Navigating the Results

You navigate among the results by selecting the result variable group with the drop down list in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. After selecting the result variable group, use the up and down buttons in the toolbar to find the variable of interest. Alternatively, you can scroll or point-and-click to the variable of interest in the results data grid at the bottom of the page.

The results categories are:

- Benefits and Benefit-Cost Summary
- Benefits by Crossing – Safety
- Benefits by Crossing – Travel Time Savings
- Benefits by Crossing – Environmental (emissions reduction)
- Benefits by Crossing – Vehicle Operating Cost Savings
- Total Benefits by Crossing
- Total Costs by Crossing
- Intermediate Safety Results
- Intermediate Non-Safety Results
- Salvage value by crossing
- Maximum queue length, first year, by crossing
- Maximum queue length, last year near term, by crossing
- Maximum queue length, last year, by crossing

The summary shows the results of the analysis for the analysis period in thousands of present value dollars for all crossings. The intermediate safety results show the reduction in predicted accidents by accident type category (fatal, injury, property damage only) for the selected years (first, last year near term and last). The intermediated non-safety results show the reduction in delay and fuel consumption in each of the selected years. The other result categories show metrics for each crossing. The maximum queue length results show the maximum vehicle queue at the crossing for the base case device in the selected year.

“View” link

In the data grid at the bottom of the **Results Page**, next to each results variable is a “View” link. If you click the “View” link, a new browser

window pops up with the “View results table and chart” page, which displays: a chart with options, a statistical summary, and a percentiles table for the selected results variable. The “View results table and chart” page is described in the following section.

“Show Summary Chart” link

This link is found near the top of the **Results** page. Clicking this link pops up a new browser window with the “Benefit-costs chart page”. This page displays charts on the benefits, costs and ranking of the crossings by benefit. See the section titled “Benefit-costs chart page” for more details.

Navigation Menu Submenu

Access the Navigation Menu Submenu from the Navigation Menu (on the left side of the page under the “Results” option). The following describe the components of the menu.

- Generate results report - This action generates a report (.PDF file) containing all of the information that is accessible from the results page. The results report shows the summary statistics and percentiles for every result variable.
- Download results to a CSV file – Use this feature to download all of the simulation results to a CSV (comma separated values) file. The CSV file can be read into MS Excel or other spreadsheet software.

View results table and chart

Figure 18 View of Results Variable Chart



Overview

Clicking on “View” for an item in the data grid on the **Results** page will cause the “View results chart and table” page to pop up. The page

contains a chart, a summary statistics table, a percentiles table and option buttons for selecting alternative chart types.

For a fixed value, the chart will display the message “No Chart for Fixed Value Result” and the tables will reflect the information for the single, fixed value.

There are three probability distribution chart types and each shows a shaded region that represents the 80% confidence interval. A dotted red line marks the mean value of the distribution. A fourth chart type is the tornado chart, which is displayable only if the user selected the “Run risk sensitivity analysis” option from the **Simulation** page.

The x-axis on all the charts ranges between the minimum and maximum values of the simulation trials. The different chart types are selected using the option buttons below the chart (click “Refresh” after making a selection).

Features

Histogram/Cumul/De-Cumul/Tornado option buttons

The selected option determines which of the three chart formats to display:

- Histogram;
- Cumulative probability;
- De-cumulative probability; or,
- Tornado (option available only if the risk sensitivity option was selected when you ran the simulation)

Histogram, Cumulative probability chart and De-cumulative probability chart

When you browse to this page a histogram chart of the first result variable is displayed with its values distributed into 20 probability bins. You can modify the granularity of the histogram by changing the number of bins using the “Bins” box in the toolbar.

Choose the “De-cumul” option button to view the de-cumulative probability chart. This chart shows the full range of values for the selected result and the probability of exceeding each value in its range.

The cumulative probability chart is displayed when you press the “Cumulative” option button on the form.

Click the “Refresh” button after making selections.

Tornado chart

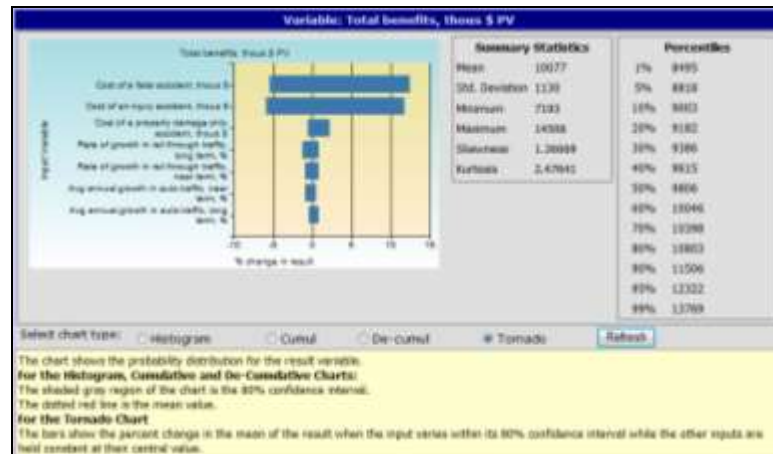
An input variable contributes to risk by means of: a) its own variance, and, b) its structural role in the *GradeDec.Net* model. For instance, an

input variable with large variance may not be a significant contributor to the risk of a result while an input variable with small variance may cause the result to be very uncertain and risky. Without the analysis of risk sensitivity it is not easy to determine which factors are the significant contributors to the riskiness of a particular result.

The tornado chart shows the impact of each random variable input factor when all the other input factors are set to their mean values and the single input factor is allowed to vary within its 80% confidence interval. The tornado chart displays in order the ten input variables that are the major contributors to the risk of a result.

This analysis of sensitivity can guide the analyst to focus on refining the estimates on the range of input variables that truly matter, and help decisions makers plan for mitigating risks.

Figure 19 A Tornado Chart



Number of Bins

Select the number of bins for the histogram chart. You may choose a value between 10 and 100. Click the “Refresh” button after making a selection.

Benefit-Cost Charts

Figure 20 View of Benefits and Costs Summary Chart



Overview

The Benefit-cost chart pops up in a new browser window by clicking the “Show summary chart” link near the top of the **Results** page.

This page contains several charts that illustrate the benefits, costs and the rankings of the crossings by benefits. The user can choose to rank crossings either by safety benefits only or total benefits.

The charts on this page are designed to support resource allocation decisions. The charts illustrate the relative magnitude of benefits, how the ranked crossings compare with one another and the cumulative benefits from crossing improvements.

One chart also compares the ranked benefits by crossing with the costs by crossing. This view of the benefits and costs assists users to quickly identify high yield improvements and to develop improvement programs accordingly.

Glossary of Terms

Bins

The range for a simulation result variable, that is, the values bounded by its minimum and maximum values, is divided into equal portions called bins. The result value from each trial "falls" into one of these bins. Charting the result value's range on the horizontal axis and the probability of a result value falling in the bins yields the histogram chart.

Cumulative Probability Distribution

A cumulative probability distribution is constructed by cumulating the frequency of the probability density function. A cumulative probability distribution is an "upwardly sloping" curve, where each point on the curve gives the probability that the variable will be equal to or less than the value on the x-axis. The y-axis of the cumulative probability distribution ranges between 0 and 1. The cumulative probability distribution equals zero for a variable's minimum value and rises to 1 at a variable's maximum value.

De-Cumulative Probability Distribution

A de-cumulative probability distribution is constructed by subtracting (or de-cumulating) a variable's probability frequency starting with a probability of 1. A de-cumulative probability distribution is a "downward sloping" curve, where the curve gives the probability of the variable exceeding the value along the X-axis. The de-cumulative probability is 1 for a variable's minimum value and is 0 for its maximum value (i.e., the y-axis ranges between 1 and 0).

Deterministic

The term deterministic indicates that there is no uncertainty associated with a given value, variable or model. Models that include random variables are called stochastic.

Histogram

A histogram shows the frequency of a discrete random variable and is used to display the frequency distribution of Monte Carlo simulation result variables. In a histogram, the result values are gathered in bins and the height of the bars correspond to the frequency with which values fall in the respective bins.

Kurtosis

Kurtosis is a statistical measure of a distribution's peakedness. Flatter distributions (with thin tails) are called platykurtic and peaked distributions (with fat tails) are called leptokurtic. The formula for kurtosis is:

$$\left(\frac{n(n+1)}{(n-1)(n-2)(n-3)} \frac{\sum_i (x_i - \bar{x})^4}{s^4} \right) - \frac{3(n-1)^2}{(n-2)(n-3)}$$

where \bar{x} is the mean of the observations, s is the standard deviation and n is the number of observations.

Latin Hypercube

Latin Hypercube is an alternative statistical sampling method to the Monte Carlo method. This is a stratified sampling method, which means that the range for each input variable is divided into strata and one random sample is taken from each stratum. This method ensures faster convergence to the result distribution than with the Monte Carlo sampling method.

Lower 10% Value

The lower 10% value is the 10th percentile value and is the lower limit of an 80% confidence interval as input by the user.

Mean Value

The mean value for a collection of observations of a random variable is its expected value and equals the sum of the observations divided by the number of observations. For skewed distributions, the mean value is off the median value and is located in the direction of the distribution's skew.

Median Value

The median value is the 50th percentile: there is equal probability that the value for a random variable will lie above or below the median.

Mode

The mode of a probability distribution is the value for which the probability density function is at a maximum. The value has the highest probability (and is sometimes called "the most likely value", not to be confused with the mean or expected value).

Monte Carlo

Monte Carlo is the method of sampling from random variables by taking a random number on the 0-1 interval, call it a , and finding the value of the random variable whose cumulative probability equals a . Repeated Monte Carlo sampling on a number of random variables that are inputs to a model and repeatedly solving the model to arrive at probability distributions for the result variables is called Monte Carlo simulation.

Probability

Probability is the likelihood of the occurrence of a value or event.

Probability Density Function

Same as probability distribution.

Probability Distribution

A probability distribution or probability density function shows a continuous random variable's frequency of occurrence over its range.

Random seed

The random seed is a number that initializes the generation of random numbers used in a Monte Carlo simulation. For the same random seed and the same number of trials given no change in the model or inputs, the results of two Monte Carlo simulations will be identical.

Risk

The term refers to uncertainty in a forecast outcome. Colloquially, risk is often associated with undesirable or downside outcomes (as in "hedging against risk"). In a risk analysis, risk is reflected in the probability distributions of result variables.

Risk Analysis

Risk analysis is a term applied to several methods for quantifying uncertainty in forecasts. The risk analysis method used in GradeDec 2000 is called Monte Carlo simulation.

Simulation

Simulation is a numeric method for finding solutions to analytically complex problems by "simulating" repeated, real world occurrences.

Skewness

Skewness is a measure of the asymmetry of a distribution. The probability density function of a skewed distribution has a longer tail on its skewed side. A right skewed distribution has skewness greater than 0 and a left skewed distribution has skewness less than 0. The formula for skewness is:

$$\frac{n}{(n-1)(n-2)} \frac{\sum_i (x_i - \bar{x})^3}{s^3}$$

where \bar{x} is the mean of the observations, s is the standard deviation and n is the number of observations.

Standard deviation

The standard deviation, which is the square root of the variance, is the principal descriptive statistic after the mean value. Knowing only a distribution's mean value and standard deviation, an upper bound can be found on the probability of any value in a variable's range. The standard deviation reported for the results is the sample standard deviation, given by the formula:

$$\sqrt{\frac{n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2}{n(n-1)}}$$

where n is the number of trials.

Trial

A trial is one solution of a model in a simulation. A simulation consists of many trials. In each trial, every input variable is populated with a data value sampled from the variable's probability distribution.

Upper 10% Value

The upper 10% value is the 90th percentile of a probability distribution and the upper limit of an 80% confidence interval.

Variable

A variable is a model element that can assume more than one value. A fixed-value input variable can assume only one value. A random variable can assume a range of values according to its probability distribution.

Variance

The variance is a measure of the dispersion of values in a probability distribution, and is a measure of risk. The variance is the average of the squared deviations about the mean. The variance gives disproportionate weight to "outliers," values that are far away from the mean. The variance is the square of the standard deviation.

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