

# RECENT EXAMPLES OF SEISMIC PROTECTION OF STRUCTURES IN LATIN AMERICA

Carlos Mendez-Galindo, Borja Baillés and Gianni Moor

**Biography: Carlos Mendez-Galindo**, born in 1981, received his PhD in earthquake and structural engineering from Hokkaido University in Japan. He is currently Manager for Seismic Devices at Mageba International, and General Manager at Mageba Mexico. He has twice been presented with the Best Young Researcher Award by the Japanese Society of Steel Construction, in 2006 and 2007, and is a member of IABSE, where he serves on the working group “Earthquake Resistant Structures” and other scientific committees.

**Borja Baillés**, born 1984, received his civil engineering degree from the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC). He joined Mageba in 2010, and since transferring to the company’s New York offices in 2015 has been Area Manager for the Canadian and Latin American markets.

**Gianni Moor**, born in 1968, received his civil engineering degree from the Swiss Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland (ETHZ), and was later awarded an MBA degree by the Business School IESE (Barcelona, Spain). Today, he is Deputy General Manager and COO of Mageba Group, and CEO of Mageba USA.

## ABSTRACT

The design of structures to withstand the effects of earthquakes continues to gain importance all over the world, and Latin America is no exception. This paper presents some recent applications of seismic protection in the region, including, in particular, seismic isolation using lead rubber bearings and energy dissipation by means of viscous dampers.

**Keywords:** Seismic isolation, LRB, energy dissipation, dampers, Latin America.

## INTRODUCTION

The application of seismic protection strategies to protect structures from earthquakes is becoming increasingly popular and more widely demanded in regions that are prone to seismic activity – including, in particular, a number of countries in Latin America. The main objective of any seismic protection system must always be people's safety, but the ability of key structures, such as bridges and important buildings, to survive an earthquake and remain in service immediately afterwards is critical for an effective emergency response. The cost associated with making such critical elements of a region's infrastructure earthquake-proof is likely to be negligible compared to the economic impact of loss of serviceability after an earthquake and during the long reconstruction phase<sup>1</sup>.

The most important methods of seismic protection of structures today include **seismic isolation**, whereby violent ground movements are isolated from the structure by suitably designed bearings, and **energy dissipation**, whereby the excess energy introduced to a structure during an earthquake is safely dissipated, e.g. by means of viscous dampers. A further method of limiting or preventing damage to a bridge during an earthquake is the use of "**fused**" **expansion joints** in its deck, which will fail in a controlled, designed way when excessively large horizontal movements arise during an earthquake. Each of these methods is described below, and illustrated by case studies from recent applications in Latin America.

## SEISMIC ISOLATION

Seismic isolation involves the provision of specially designed bearings, known as seismic isolators, which will support a structure's superstructure in normal circumstances but isolate them, primarily in the horizontal plane, from the violent, destructive ground movements that might occur during an earthquake. The flexibility thus provided in the horizontal plane **lowers the structure's natural frequency**, increasing its natural period and thereby reducing the accelerations to which it is subjected as shown in **Fig. 1**. Seismic isolators generally also provide some degree of **energy dissipation**, which further reduces the destructive accelerations as shown in **Fig. 2**. Another important contribution of an effective seismic isolation system is the **re-centering** it can provide after an earthquake, avoiding residual displacements which would otherwise disrupt the structure's serviceability. It is very often possible to retrofit seismic isolation to an existing structure if required, by temporarily lifting the superstructure and replacing its conventional bearings with suitably designed isolators<sup>2</sup>.

### **Lead Rubber Bearings (LRB)**

A particularly effective, efficient and user-friendly type of seismic isolator is the LRB – a relatively simple solution which combines the key isolation, energy dissipation and re-centering functions in a single compact unit (**Fig. 3**). LRBs are similar to standard reinforced elastomeric bearings with steel connection plates at top and bottom for connection to the superstructure and substructure, with one key difference: they also include a lead plug at the core, joining one connection plate to the other, which deforms plastically when subjected to large horizontal forces during an earthquake and thus dissipates energy, reducing it locally by up to 30%, through hysteretic damping and heat generation. Thanks also to its relatively small size and robustness, and corresponding advantages in relation to installation in a new structure, retrofitting in an existing structure and inspection and maintenance (generally limited to

periodic visual inspections), LRBs are the most widely used seismic isolation solution in the world. Some recent examples of their use in Latin America follow<sup>3</sup>.

### **Case Study: Seismic isolation of Hotel Via Vallejo, Mexico City, Mexico**

This building, housing two different Marriot hotels, the Courtyard and the Fairfield, is being constructed on top of a large new mall called Via Vallejo in the center of Mexico City. The 10-floor building, shown in **Fig. 4**, has been designed to not only withstand the effects of the severe earthquakes in Mexico City, but also to ensure the serviceability of the hotel during and after the seismic event. To improve the seismic response of the building, the responsible design engineers performed extensive, complex, three-dimensional dynamic analyses which confirmed that the best strategy was to seismically isolate the hotel from the mall underneath. This is being achieved by the provision of 18 LRBs to support the entire hotel structure (**Fig. 5**). The technical specifications and dynamic properties of the isolators are shown in **Table 1**.

### **Case Study: Seismic isolation of Sky Building, Guayaquil, Ecuador**

The Sky Building (**Fig. 6**) in Guayaquil, Ecuador will be part of a commercial complex called Aerocity. This 15-floor building, which consists of four parking levels and eleven office floors, has been designed in accordance with the latest advances in terms of seismic protection, to ensure that it will be able to survive a severe earthquake without suffering damage that could jeopardize its serviceability at any time. The seismic protection strategy chosen for this building is based on the seismic isolation principle, with 64 LRBs installed on top of the parking structure to support the hotel structure (**Fig. 7**), isolating the movements of one from the other. Three different types of LRB were designed for different loading scenarios, with 44

flat sliders also contributing to the isolation system. **Table 2** presents the technical specifications and dynamic properties of the LRBs designed for this project.

### **Case Study: Seismic isolation of PDVSA Oil Refinery, Falcon, Venezuela**

In the process of making an oil refinery in a seismically active part of Venezuela safe from the destructive effects of earthquakes, heat exchange tanks were seismically isolated from ground movements in 2012 (**Fig. 8**). The uninterrupted operation of such refineries is of great importance to the Venezuelan economy, with revenue from petroleum exports accounting for over 50 % of the country's GDP and roughly 95 % of total exports. This project required the use of six LRBs with a diameter of 220 mm and height of 165 mm including 20 mm steel connection plates. The lead core at the bearing's vertical axis has a diameter of 44 mm. Each bearing is designed for a vertical service load of 780 kN and to allow seismic displacements of up to 100 mm, as shown in **Table 3**.

### **ENERGY DISSIPATION / DAMPING**

Energy dissipation is another very important way of protecting structures from the effects of earthquakes. Since energy can neither be created nor destroyed, the potentially enormous amount of energy introduced to a structure during an earthquake must be safely transmitted to connecting structures or dissipated (**Fig. 2**) if it is not to cause severe damage. As described above, seismic isolators very often include an element of energy dissipation, but energy dissipation can also be provided by other means such as shock absorbers (viscous dampers). Independent damping solutions such as shock absorbers can provide a much higher degree of damping than seismic isolators, and may be the only solution where seismic isolators cannot be retrofitted to an existing structure or in structures where seismic isolation cannot be recommended (e.g. in the case of soft soils). Quite frequently, optimal seismic isolation and

energy dissipation performance can be ensured by combining seismic isolators with independent shock absorbers on the same structure.

### **Shock Absorbers (Viscous Dampers)**

Shock absorbers are velocity-dependent devices that consist primarily of a piston, a piston rod and a cylinder pipe (**Fig. 9** and **Fig. 10**). They allow free movements of a structure during service conditions, but control displacements and dissipate energy during sudden movements due to earthquakes or during exceptional loading from traffic, wind, etc. The resistance force provided by the unit depends on the flow of a viscous fluid from one chamber of the cylinder pipe into the other, through small holes whose size determine the damping characteristics of the shock absorber. By dissipating energy from sudden, exceptional loading, shock absorbers reduce the impact on the structure, protecting it from damage. This allows the design of the structure to be optimized, avoiding conventional strengthening which might be rarely or never needed during the lifetime of the structure. Shock absorbers dissipate over 30 % of the energy introduced, which can be additional to the energy dissipation effect of seismic isolators if also used to protect the same structure.

The viscous fluid used is protected against aging by special additives, while the fluid itself protects the device from inner corrosion. Viscosity of the fluid remains nearly constant with respect to temperature variations, making the system thermally compensated. The sealing, which prevents the loss of the fluid and consequent diminishing performance, is the most critical element of the hydraulic system and must be designed and constructed to the highest quality standards. Only high-grade seals that demonstrate quasi-zero wear and absolute physical and chemical compatibility with the viscous fluid should be used.

### **Case Study: Seismic energy dissipation at Lerma 256 Building, Mexico City, Mexico**

Telmex, the largest telephone company in Mexico, owns several buildings in Mexico City. One of these buildings is currently obsolete due to the new seismic specifications in the city. The Lerma Building is a 17-floor structure including four parking levels, twelve office floors and one penthouse, as shown in **Fig. 11**. The building's dimensions are 25 m x 15.3 m. The high risk of damage in a very likely earthquake motivated the development of a retrofitting plan. After a detailed evaluation of the options, it was decided to add dampers at different levels in order to improve the dynamic response. Following evaluation of multiple configurations of dampers, considering variations of loads, displacements and number of devices, it was decided to install 76 shock absorbers (**Fig. 12**) at carefully selected locations on the building. Two types of shock absorber were required, for maximum loads of 800 kN and 600 kN respectively, each with a displacement capacity of 50 mm. The details of the dynamic properties of the shock absorbers are presented in **Table 4**.

#### **Case Study: Damping of Mérida Cable Car, Venezuela**

The Mérida Cable Car in Venezuela connects the city of Mérida, at 1,640 m above sea level, to Espejo Peak in the adjacent mountains, which is at an altitude of 4,765 m. Climbing over three kilometers along its route of 12.5 km, it is one of the longest and highest cable car systems in the world. It was opened in 1960, and closed in 2008 having reached the end of its service life. The construction of a new system to replace the old one was completed in 2016 (**Fig. 13**). The project required two shock absorbers, complete with connection brackets, each designed for a maximum load of 480 kN and maximum stroke of +/- 50 mm, as shown in **Table 5**. For quality control purposes and to ensure that the dampers perform as designed, one shock absorber was subjected to a low velocity test, a constitutive law test and a damping efficiency test, while both units were subjected to pressure and stroke verification tests.

## ***FUSE-BOX SEISMIC PROTECTION FOR BRIDGE EXPANSION JOINTS***

*Fuse-Box* consists in principle of a triangular steel “nose” at one side of an expansion joint, which rests (with a connection of designed shear capacity) on a steel ramp that is permanently fixed to the main structure. In the event of an earthquake which causes the joint movement capacity to be exceeded, the connection between nose and ramp will fail, allowing the nose (and joint to which it is connected) to break free of the main structure in a controlled, designed manner. After the earthquake, the joint will remain in place across the bridge gap, and with little or no effort should be capable of permitting the passage of emergency and evacuation traffic. It can also with relatively little effort be reconnected to the bridge to allow normal traffic flow to resume. The principle of the system is illustrated in **Fig. 14**.

By breaking free from the bridge deck in this controlled manner, damage to the deck, and to the expansion joint itself, is minimized. As a result, repair costs will also be minimized, and it should be possible to return the bridge to service much more quickly than would otherwise be the case. It should be noted that *Fuse-Box* is primarily designed to prevent, or at least limit, the most destructive effects on a bridge (at its expansion joints) of an earthquake – i.e. those which would result from the deck’s movement gap closing more than it is designed to do. Should the bridge gap open much wider than it should, it is possible that the nose, having broken free, could fall into the bridge gap, making it more difficult, if possible at all, to reconnect it. However, all things considered, the potentially enormous benefits that could be provided by a *Fuse-Box* feature on an expansion joint – not least, by facilitating a speedy return to service of a bridge immediately after an earthquake, when it is needed most – make its serious consideration for seismically endangered bridges highly recommendable.

### **Case Study: *Fuse-Box* protection of Chilina Bridge, Arequipa, Peru**

The Chilina Bridge in the Peruvian city of Arequipa, which opened to traffic in 2014, is a segmental continuous pre-stressed concrete viaduct. With an overall length of 562 m, it is the longest urban bridge in the country, with spans of up to 157 m. Its two 11.3 m-wide decks are box girders with variable depths, as shown in **Fig. 15**. It is in a highly seismic area, requiring large seismic movements to be allowed for in the design. The bridge is equipped with four modular expansion joints - two at each end, one per structure. Each has seven individual movement gaps in its driving surface, allowing service movements of up to 560 mm (80 mm per gap). To accommodate the yet larger seismic movements that might arise at some point during the bridge's service life, the joints feature *Fuse-Box* seismic protection, which, similar to seismic isolation bearings, will prevent the transmission of enormous destructive forces from one part of the structure to another in case of an earthquake.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The use of seismic protection strategies such as seismic isolation and energy dissipation has proven to be a sensible approach to the challenges presented by the need to make important structures seismically safe in accordance with current seismic design standards. By providing an alternative to conventional earthquake resistance design measures, it saves the major strengthening works which would otherwise be required. The referenced applications of such seismic protection technologies demonstrate the potential they have to significantly reduce seismic risk without compromising the safety, reliability, and economy of structures.

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**Table 1 – Technical specifications of LRB designed for Hotel Via Vallejo.**

| Parameter               | Symbol    | Unit  | Type A |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Diameter                | $D$       | mm    | 750    |
| Total height            | $H$       | mm    | 329    |
| Maximum static load     | $N_{sd}$  | kN    | 6,350  |
| Maximum seismic load    | $N_{Ed}$  | kN    | 5,500  |
| Design displacement     | $d_{bd}$  | mm    | 200    |
| Horizontal force        | $V_{bd}$  | kN    | 597    |
| Post-elastic stiffness  | $K_d$     | kN/mm | 2.18   |
| Effective stiffness     | $K_{eff}$ | kN/mm | 2.99   |
| Characteristic strength | $Q_d$     | kN    | 161    |

|                             |       |      |        |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| Energy dissipated per cycle | $EDC$ | kN-m | 129.31 |
| Damping ratio               | $\xi$ | %    | 17     |

**Table 2 – Technical specifications of LRB designed for Sky Building.**

| Parameter                   | Symbol    | Unit  | Type A | Type B | Type C |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Diameter                    | $D$       | mm    | 850    | 750    | 700    |
| Total height                | $H$       | mm    | 340    | 340    | 347    |
| Maximum static load         | $N_{Sd}$  | kN    | 10,000 | 6,000  | 6,000  |
| Maximum seismic load        | $N_{Ed}$  | kN    | 8,500  | 7,000  | 5,000  |
| Design displacement         | $d_{bd}$  | mm    | 200    | 200    | 200    |
| Horizontal force            | $V_{bd}$  | kN    | 734    | 578    | 506    |
| Post-elastic stiffness      | $K_d$     | kN/mm | 2.68   | 2.09   | 1.84   |
| Effective stiffness         | $K_{eff}$ | kN/mm | 3.67   | 2.89   | 2.53   |
| Characteristic strength     | $Q_d$     | kN    | 198    | 161    | 154    |
| Energy dissipated per cycle | $EDC$     | kN-m  | 158.5  | 129.31 | 111.5  |
| Damping ratio               | $\xi$     | %     | 17     | 17     | 17     |

**Table 3 – Technical specifications of LRB designed for PDVSA Oil Refinery.**

| Parameter                   | Symbol    | Unit  | Type A |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Diameter                    | $D$       | mm    | 220    |
| Total height                | $H$       | mm    | 165    |
| Maximum static load         | $N_{Sd}$  | kN    | 780    |
| Maximum seismic load        | $N_{Ed}$  | kN    | 450    |
| Design displacement         | $d_{bd}$  | mm    | 100    |
| Horizontal force            | $V_{bd}$  | kN    | 59     |
| Post-elastic stiffness      | $K_d$     | kN/mm | 0.42   |
| Effective stiffness         | $K_{eff}$ | kN/mm | 0.59   |
| Characteristic strength     | $Q_d$     | kN    | 186    |
| Energy dissipated per cycle | $EDC$     | kN-m  | 87     |
| Damping ratio               | $\xi$     | %     | 17     |

**Table 4 – Technical specifications of Shock Absorbers designed for Lerma 256 Building.**

| Parameter                    | Symbol   | Unit | Type A   | Type B   |
|------------------------------|----------|------|----------|----------|
| Diameter                     | $D$      | mm   | 220      | 180      |
| Length (at central position) | $L$      | mm   | 1,004    | 969      |
| Maximum load                 | $N_{Sd}$ | kN   | 800      | 600      |
| Maximum stroke               | $d_{bd}$ | mm   | $\pm 50$ | $\pm 50$ |
| Alpha                        | $\alpha$ | -    | 0.1      | 0.1      |

|                             |       |           |        |        |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Constitutive law parameter  | $C$   | kN/(mm/s) | 484    | 364    |
| Energy dissipated per cycle | $EDC$ | J         | 66,000 | 49,600 |

**Table 5 – Technical specifications of Shock Absorbers designed for Mérida Cable Car.**

| Parameter                    | Symbol   | Unit      | Type A   |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Diameter                     | $D$      | mm        | 160      |
| Length (at central position) | $L$      | mm        | 980      |
| Maximum load                 | $N_{Sa}$ | kN        | 480      |
| Maximum stroke               | $d_{bd}$ | mm        | $\pm 50$ |
| Alpha                        | $\alpha$ | -         | 0.3      |
| Constitutive law parameter   | $C$      | kN/(mm/s) | 70.16    |
| Energy dissipated per cycle  | $EDC$    | J         | 21,300   |

## FIGURES

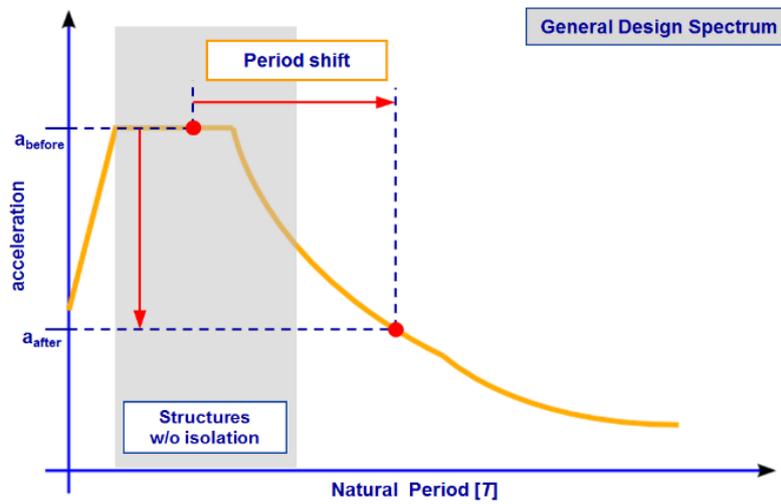


Fig. 1–Reduction of accelerations by period shifting.

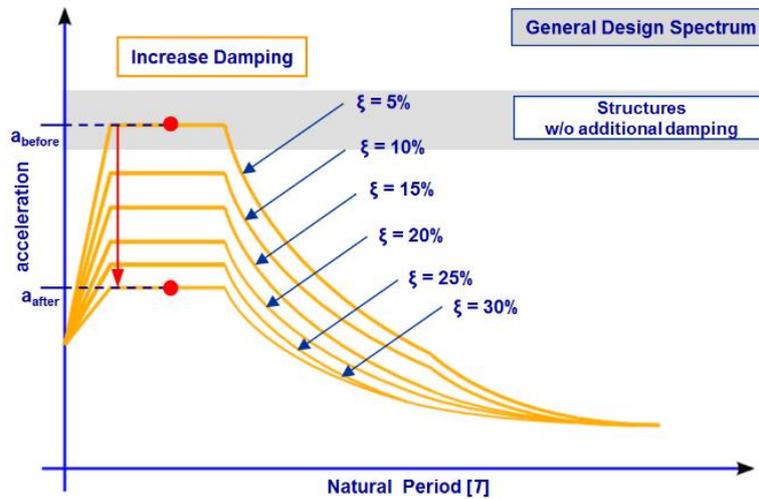
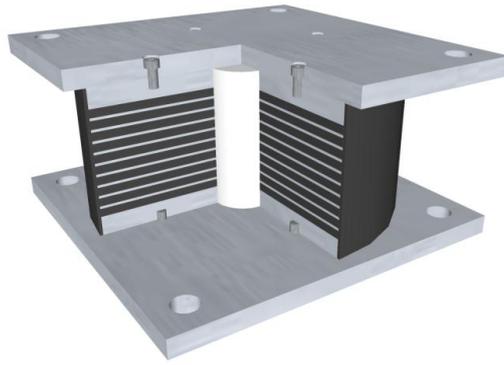


Fig. 2–Reduction of accelerations by added damping / energy dissipation.



**Fig. 3–3D model of a Lead Rubber Bearing.**



**Fig. 4–Representation of the Hotel Via Vallejo, Mexico City.**



**Fig. 5—Isolators at the base of the Hotel Via Vallejo building during construction.**



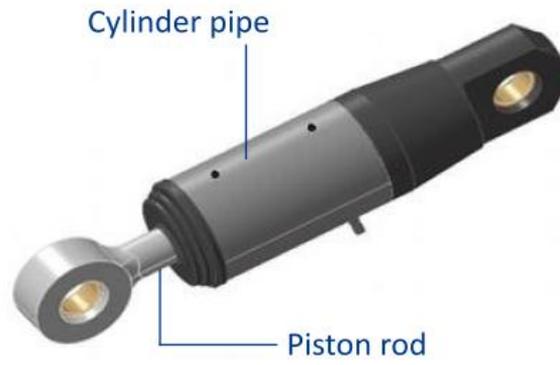
**Fig. 6—Representation of the Sky Building, Ecuador.**



**Fig. 7–Installation of an LRB during construction of the Sky Building, Ecuador.**



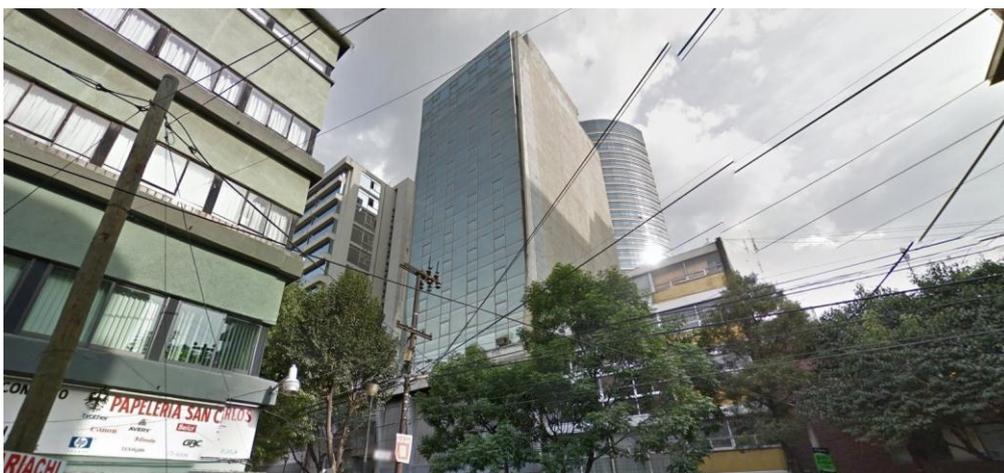
**Fig. 8–Oil refinery area equipped with elastomeric isolators.**



**Fig. 9–Model of a shock absorber (viscous damper).**



**Fig. 10–Installed shock absorber.**



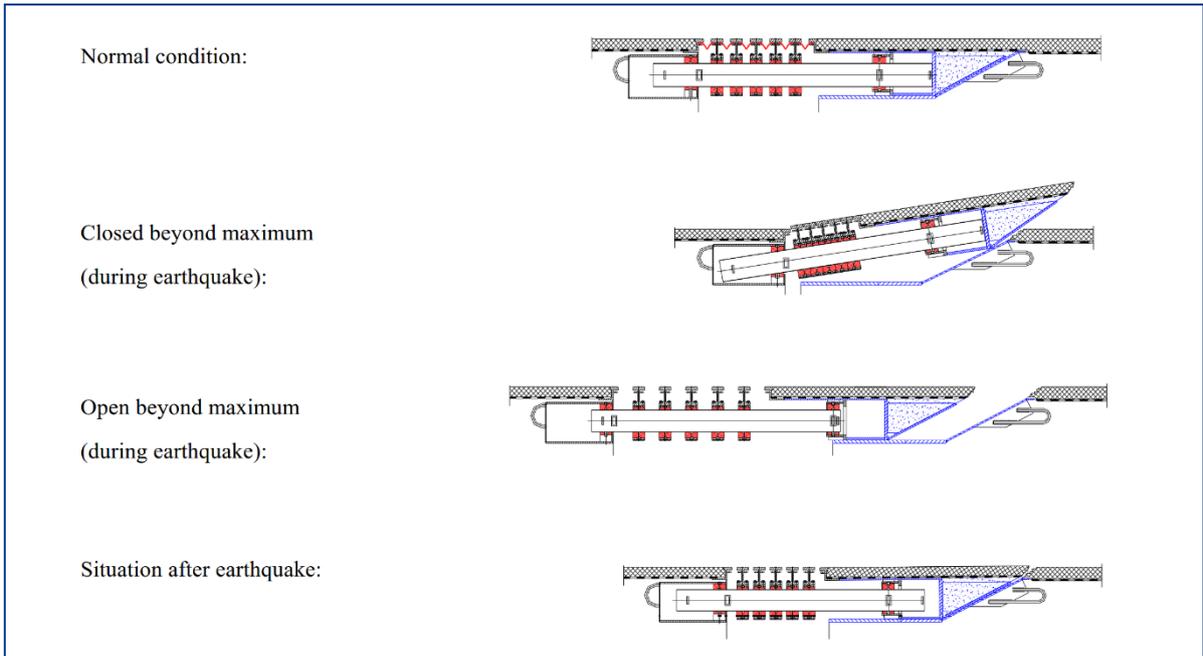
**Fig. 11–Exterior view of the Lerma 256 Building, Mexico**



**Fig. 12–Installed shock absorber on Lerma 256 Building, Mexico.**



**Fig. 13–View of the Merida cable car in Venezuela.**



**Fig. 14–Principle of the *Fuse-Box* seismic protection system for expansion joints.**



**Fig. 15–Chilina Bridge, Peru – featuring modular joints with *Fuse-Box* protection.**