
Comparison of Two-Way Slab Analysis and Design Methods (CSA A23.3-14)

A slab system can be analyzed and designed by any procedure satisfying equilibrium and geometric compatibility. Three established methods are widely used. The requirements for two of them are described in detail in CSA A23.3-14 Clauses (13.8 and 13.9) for regular two-way slab systems.

The **Direct Design Method (DDM)** is an approximate method and is applicable to flat plate concrete floor systems that meet the stringent requirements of CSA A23.3-14 (13.9.1). In many projects, however, these requirements limit the usability of the Direct Design Method significantly.

The **Elastic Frame Method (EFM)** has less stringent limitations compared to DDM. It requires more accurate analysis methods that, depending on the size and geometry can prove to be long, tedious, and time-consuming.

StructurePoint's [spSlab](#) software program solution utilizes the EFM to automate the process providing considerable time-savings in the analysis and design of two-way slab systems as compared to hand solutions using DDM or EFM.

Finite Element Method (FEM) is another method for analyzing reinforced concrete slabs, particularly useful for irregular slab systems with variable thicknesses, openings, and other features not permissible in DDM or EFM. Many reputable commercial FEM analysis software packages are available on the market today such as [spMats](#). Using FEM requires critical understanding of the relationship between the actual behavior of the structure and the numerical simulation since this method is an approximate numerical method. The method is based on several assumptions and the operator has a great deal of decisions to make while setting up the model and applying loads and boundary conditions. The results obtained from FEM models should be verified to confirm their suitability for design and detailing of concrete structures.

The following table shows a general comparison between the DDM, EFM and FEM. This table covers general limitations, drawbacks, advantages, and cost-time efficiency of each method where it helps the engineer in deciding which method to use based on the project complexity, schedule, and budget.

Applicable CSA A23.3-14 Provision	Limitations/Applicability	Concrete Slab Analysis Method		
		DDM (Hand)	EFM (Hand//spSlab)	FEM (spMats)
13.8.1.1 13.9.1.1	Panels shall be rectangular, with ratio of longer to shorter panel dimensions, measured center-to-center supports, not exceed 2.	☑	☑	
13.8.1.1 13.9.1.1	For a panel with beams between supports on all sides, slab-to-beam stiffness ratio shall be satisfied for beams in the two perpendicular directions.	☑	☑	
13.8.1.1 13.9.1.1	Column offset shall not exceed 20% of the span in direction of offset from either axis between centerlines of successive columns	☑	☑	
13.8.1.1 13.9.1.1	The reinforcement is placed in an orthogonal grid.	☑	☑	
13.9.1.2	Minimum of three continuous spans in each direction	☑		
13.9.1.3	Successive span lengths measured center-to-center of supports in each direction shall not differ by more than one-third the longer span	☑		
13.9.1.4	All loads shall be due to gravity only	☑		
13.9.1.4	All loads shall be uniformly distributed over an entire panel (q_f)	☑		
13.9.1.4	Factored live load shall not exceed twice the factored dead load	☑		
13.10.6	Structural integrity steel detailing	☑	☑	☑
13.10.10	Openings in slab systems	☑	☑	☑
8.2	Concentrated loads	Not permitted	☑	☑
13.8.4.1	Live load arrangement (Load Patterning)	Not required	Required	Engineering judgment required based on modeling technique
13.10.2*	Reinforcement for unbalanced slab moment transfer to column (M_{sc})	Moments @ support face	Moments @ support centerline	Engineering judgment required based on modeling technique
13.8.2	Irregularities (i.e. variable thickness, non-prismatic, partial bands, mixed systems, support arrangement, etc.)	Not permitted	Engineering judgment required	Engineering judgment required
Complexity		Low	Average	Complex to very complex
Design time/costs		Fast	Limited	Unpredictable/Costly
Design Economy		Conservative (see detailed comparison with spSlab output)	Somewhat conservative	Unknown - highly dependent on modeling assumptions: 1. Linear vs. non-linear 2. Isotropic vs non-isotropic 3. Plate element choice 4. Mesh size and aspect ratio 5. Design & detailing features
General (Drawbacks)		Very limited applications	Limited geometry	Limited guidance non-standard application (user dependent). Required significant engineering judgment
General (Advantages)		Very limited analysis is required	Detailed analysis is required or via software (e.g. spSlab)	Unlimited applicability to handle complex situations permissible by the features of the software used (e.g. spMats)
* The unbalanced slab moment transferred to the column M_{sc} (M_{unb}) is the difference in slab moment on either side of a column at a specific joint. In DDM only moments at the face of the support are calculated and are also used to obtain M_{sc} (M_{unb}). In EFM where a frame analysis is used, moments at the column center line are used to obtain M_{sc} (M_{unb}).				