



**Condition Assessment of In-Service Timber
Utility Poles Utilizing Advanced Digital Signal
Processing and Multi-Sensors Array**

By

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February 2015

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Table of Contents

1	Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Research Scope.....	4
1.3	Research Objectives	7
1.4	Summary of Contributions	9
1.5	Outline of the Thesis	11
2	Chapter 2: Literature review.....	15
2.1	Timber poles as a critical infrastructure	15
2.2	Timber piles/poles condition assessment criteria	17
2.3	Conventional methods for assessment of timber structures	18
2.3.1	Visual inspection method.....	18
2.3.2	Probing	19
2.3.3	Sounding	19
2.3.4	Drilling and coring	20
2.4	Non-Destructive Evaluation (NDE)	20
2.5	Non-destructive evaluation methods for assessment of timber structures	21
2.5.1	Sonic-Echo method (SE).....	22
2.5.2	Bending wave method.....	25
2.5.3	Ultraseismic method.....	28
2.6	Waveguide propagation in the cylindrical timber pole	30
2.7	Digital Filters.....	34
2.7.1	Finite Impulse Response filters.....	36
2.7.2	Infinite Impulse Response.....	37
2.7.3	Digital filter designs	39

2.8	Signal Processing of the conventional surface stress-wave-based methods	39
2.8.1	The discrete and fast Fourier transform	39
2.8.2	Short-Kernel Method (SKM)	41
2.9	Limitations of conventional surface stress-wave-based NDT	43
2.10	Summary	44
3	Chapter 3: Review of advanced digital signal processing techniques applicable on timber pole assessment	45
3.1	Introduction	45
3.2	Timber pole as a Linear Time-Invariant System	45
3.3	Deterministic Signal Separation	48
3.3.1	Deconvolution	48
3.3.2	Wiener Deconvolution and filter	48
3.3.3	Wiener deconvolution and filter theory	49
3.3.4	Predictive Deconvolution	51
3.4	Blind Signal Separation	52
3.4.1	Principal Component Analysis	53
3.4.2	Singular Value Decomposition	54
3.4.3	<i>K</i> -mean clustering [9]	55
3.5	Frequency-Wavenumber (F-K) Analysis	58
3.6	Summary	59
4	Chapter 4: Experimental Test Setups for timber poles	61
4.1	Introduction	61
4.2	Test Equipment	61
4.2.1	Hammer impact	61
4.2.2	Accelerometers	62
4.2.3	Signal Conditioning, data acquisition cards and computer	63

4.2.4	Laboratory testing frame	64
4.3	Testing Scenarios	66
4.3.1	Testing Procedure.....	66
4.3.2	Test specimens	68
4.3.3	Test set-up for Sonic-Echo Method	69
4.3.4	Test Set-Up for Bending Wave Method.....	70
4.4	Field tests on Timber utility poles	71
4.4.1	Mason park not in-service timber poles embedded in soil.....	71
5	Chapter 5: Application of the conventional surface stress-wave-based tests on condition assessment of the timber pole.....	74
5.1	Introduction	74
5.2	Digital Filters Investigation.....	75
5.2.1	FIR vs. IIR filters	77
5.2.2	Different FIR filter design methods investigation	77
5.2.3	NDT digital filtering toolbox	87
5.3	Finite Element modeled timber pole data analysis.....	88
5.3.1	Finite Element modelled timber pole specifications.....	88
5.4	Sonic-Echo method: Single Sensor Analysis	89
5.4.1	Isotropic Embedded in 1.2 m soil	91
5.4.2	Orthotropic Embedded in 1.2 m soil	93
5.5	Sonic-Echo: Multi-Sensors array analysis	95
5.5.1	Isotropic Embedded in 1.2 m soil	96
5.5.2	Orthotropic Embedded in 1.2 m soil.....	98
5.6	Short Kernel Method (SKM) utilizing the Bending wave	100
5.6.1	Isotropic Standing-on-soil.....	101
5.6.2	Isotropic Embedded in 1.5 m soil	105

5.6.3	Orthotropic Standing-on-soil	109
5.6.4	Orthotropic Embedded in 1.5 m soil	111
5.7	Ultraseismic	113
5.7.1	Isotropic Standing-on-soil	114
5.7.2	Isotropic Embedded in 1.5 m soil	116
5.7.3	Orthotropic Standing-on-soil	118
5.7.4	Orthotropic Embedded in 1.5 m soil	119
5.8	Experimental Data Analysis	121
5.8.1	Sonic-Echo	121
5.8.2	Short Kernel Method utilizing the bending wave	124
5.8.3	Ultraseismic	131
5.9	Conclusions	135

6 Chapter 6: Application of the advanced Digital Signal Processing on the Condition assessment of the timber poles 140

6.1	Introduction	140
6.2	Applications of the Deterministic signal separation and the Frequency-Wavenumber analysis on the Finite Element modeled timber pole	140
6.2.1	Isotropic Standing-on-soil	141
6.2.2	Isotropic Embedded in soil	151
6.2.3	Orthotropic embedded in soil	157
6.3	Applications of the blind signal separation methods on the Finite Element modeled timber pole	174
6.3.1	Principal Component Analysis (PCA)	174
6.3.2	Singular Value Decomposition (SVD)	180
6.3.3	<i>K</i> -mean clustering	187
6.4	Experimental tests data analysis	193
6.5	Conclusions	201

7	Chapter 7: Ultrasonic narrowband chirped pulse: an alternative proposition	206
7.1	Introduction	206
7.2	Review of the Theory	209
7.3	Signal processing procedure.....	211
7.4	Experimental test setup	213
7.4.1	Ultrasonic Transducers.....	213
7.4.2	Receiver signal amplifier circuit	213
7.4.3	Data Acquisition Systems	214
7.4.4	Data Acquisition Software	215
7.5	Laboratory test setups.....	215
7.6	Experimental Data Analysis	218
7.6.1	The Ultrasonic Single Frequency tests.....	218
7.6.2	The Ultrasonic Narrowband Chirp pulse tests	221
7.7	Conclusions	227
8	Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations	229
8.1	Summary	229
8.2	Concluding remarks	231
8.3	Recommendations of the future studies	241
9	Appendices.....	243
9.1	Appendix-A: Guided wave equations for the cylindrical structures	243
9.2	Appendix-B: Investigations on the repeatability of the captured signals, and effectiveness of the advanced digital signal processing methodologies on the in-field timber utility poles.....	250
10	Bibliography.....	284

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Procedure diagram of this research project	6
Figure 2.1: Three principal axes of wood with respect to grain direction and growth rings [16]	17
Figure 2.2: Possible decay patterns in underground sections of utility poles [19]	18
Figure 2.3: Three different kinds of stress waves [26].....	22
Figure 2.4: Sonic-Echo method [2].....	23
Figure 2.5: Captured signal in the Sonic-Echo method test (ibid).....	23
Figure 2.6: Huang et al investigation on damage depth LD and size RD . (ibid).....	24
Figure 2.7: Bending wave method test setup [15].....	27
Figure 2.8: The Ultraseismic vertical profiling test setup [15]	29
Figure 2.9: Stacked, gained and filtered record of US testing [46].....	30
Figure 2.10: plane waves' propagation in one-dimensional theory	30
Figure 2.11: The illustration of (a) one-dimensional wave, and (b) guided wave in the plate-like structure [48]	31
Figure 2.12: The spectrum curves of the cylindrical timber poles in (a) the isotropic; and (b) the orthotropic cases. Dashed lines represent the flexural wave branches and hard lines represent the longitudinal branches [52]	33
Figure 2.13: (a): Low-pass, (b): High-pass, (c): band-pass, and (d): Stop-band digital filters	35
Figure 2.14: Block Diagram of the FIR filters [53].	36
Figure 2.15: Filter design specifications for low pass FIR filter [54].....	37
Figure 2.16: Block diagram of the IIR filters [53]	38
Figure 2.17: Kernel shifted along signal [15]	43
Figure 3.1: Depicts a seismic data model. Here we see that an impulse source is convolved (*) with a reflectivity function (that is related to the geological sub-surface) and with additive random noise, produces the noisy seismic trace [69].....	46
Figure 3.2: Timber pole as the LTI system	47
Figure 3.3: FIR Wiener filter block diagram	50
Figure 3.4: PCA data transformation, first and second principal components	54

Figure 3.5: K-mean algorithm flowchart	56
Figure 4.1: Impact hammer	62
Figure 4.2: Typical response of hammer impact [108]	62
Figure 4.3: Piezoelectric accelerometer model PCB 352C34	63
Figure 4.4: Accelerometers mounted to the timber pole utilizing magnets and screws .	63
Figure 4.5: Multi-channel signal conditioner - model PCB 483B03	64
Figure 4.6: A personal computer for laboratory and field testing.....	64
Figure 4.7: Steel frame used as a container.....	65
Figure 4.8: Using scaffold and scissor lift to build and access the top of the frame.....	65
Figure 4.9: Captured raw signals in all eight sensors in one of the field tests which were repeated five times	67
Figure 4.10: Testing procedure: (a) setting up of equipment, (b) mounting of accelerometer, (c) attached impact screw and accelerometers and (d) execution of the test.	68
Figure 4.11: Timber pole in (a): standing-on-soil, and (b): embedded in soil conditions	69
Figure 4.12: Test set-up of embedded testing in laboratory.....	70
Figure 4.13: Schematic of the bending wave tests set-up	71
Figure 4.14: Location of the Mason Park (courtesy of Google Maps)	71
Figure 4.15: Location of timber poles at Mason Park.....	72
Figure 4.16: Timber poles before installation in Mason Park.....	72
Figure 4.17: Timber poles after installation in Mason Park.....	73
Figure 5.1: Frequency spectrum and the time domain representation of Synthetic data	76
Figure 5.2: Frequency spectrum and the time domain representation of Field test data	77
Figure 5.3: (a) Triangular, and (b) Hanning, Hamming, and Blackman windows time and frequency spectrum applied on the synthetic data. (Because of similarity of figures of these three filters, only the Hamming's output is provided).	79
Figure 5.4: The frequency and time domain results of (a) the Triangular, (b) Hanning, Hamming, and Blackman windows applied on the captured signals from the in-service timber poles.....	81
Figure 5.5: Zero-phase FIR filtering process.	82

Figure 5.6: Non-Zero-Phase FIR filtering results	82
Figure 5.7: Zero phase FIR filtering results.....	82
Figure 5.8: The frequency and time domain results of the Equiripple filter with 1 dB ripple in the pass-band applied on the field tests data.....	84
Figure 5.9: The frequency and time domain results of the Equiripple filter with 0.01 dB ripple in the pass-band applied on the field tests data.....	84
Figure 5.10 : The Equiripple filter with (a) 1 ripple, and (b) 0.01 ripple in the pass-band	85
Figure 5.11: (a): Equiripple (0.01 dB ripple), and (b): Kaiser filter characteristics.	86
Figure 5.12: Main page of the designed digital filtering toolbox	87
Figure 5.13: Sonic-Echo test set up.....	90
Figure 5.14: Acceleration signal captured from the simulated isotropic embedded in 1.2 m soil timber pole in (a) sensor S0 and (b) sensor S1.....	91
Figure 5.15: The length estimation errors for sensors S1-S8 in the Sonic-Echo method for the simulated isotropic timber pole with embedded in 1.2 m soil condition.....	93
Figure 5.16: Acceleration signal captured from the simulated orthotropic embedded in 1.2 m soil timber pole in (a) sensor S0 and (b) sensor S1	94
Figure 5.17: The length estimation errors in sensors S1-S8 in the Sonic-Echo method applied on the orthotropic embedded in 1.2 m soil simulated timber pole	95
Figure 5.18: waterfall plot of the velocity analysis procedure and fitting accuracy utilizing S1 to S8 for (a) down-going wave, and (b) reflection wave.....	97
Figure 5.19: The embedment length estimation procedure, results and estimation error for isotropic embedded in 1.2 m soil simulated timber pole.....	98
Figure 5.20: The waterfall plot of the velocity analysis procedure and the fitting accuracy utilizing S1 to S8 for (a) the down-going wave, and (b) the reflection wave..	99
Figure 5.21: length estimation procedure, results and estimation error for orthotropic standing-on-soil simulated timber pole.....	100
Figure 5.22: The bending wave test setup for the simulated timber pole for the both standing-on-soil and embedded conditions.....	101
Figure 5.23: The Frequency response Functions of S1-S4 for the isotropic standing-on-soil simulated timber pole	102
Figure 5.24: The SKM outputs with the seed frequency of 1120 Hz in (a):S1-S2, and (b): S3-S4.	103

Figure 5.25: Original Signals captured by S1 and S2	103
Figure 5.26: The estimated phase velocities for all of the seed frequencies utilizing S1-S2, and S3-S4 (the calculated phase velocities with S1-S2, and S3-S4 are same)	104
Figure 5.27: The FRF in all of the sensors in the bending wave test on the simulated isotropic embedded in 1.5m soil timber pole	106
Figure 5.28: The SKM outputs with the seed frequency of 1120 Hz in (a):S1-S2, and (b): S3-S4	107
Figure 5.29: The SKM outputs with the seed frequency of 1400 Hz in (a):S1-S2, and (b): S3-S4	107
Figure 5.30: The estimated velocities in the different seed frequencies with their related analytical results.....	108
Figure 5.31: FRF in all of sensors in orthotropic standing-on-soil simulated timber pole	109
Figure 5.32: The velocity calculations for the different seed frequencies in the simulated orthotropic timber pole standing-on-soil.....	110
Figure 5.33: SKM output plots in S1-S2 and S3-S4 for the seed frequency of 1320 Hz	110
Figure 5.34: FRFs in all of the sensors in the orthotropic embedded in 1.5 m simulated timber pole	111
Figure 5.35: The SKM output plots with the seed frequency 1320 Hz for the orthotropic embedded in 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole	112
Figure 5.36: The velocity calculations for the different seed frequencies in the orthotropic embedded 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole.....	113
Figure 5.37: Ultraseismic velocity analysis procedures for (a) the down-going and (b) the reflection waves in the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	115
Figure 5.38: (a) Ultraseismic plot of all of the sensors, the estimated length value, and the estimation error, and (b) Raw signals captured from sensors in the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	116
Figure 5.39: Velocity analysis procedures for (a) the down-going and (b) the reflection waves for the isotropic embedded in 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole.....	117
Figure 5.40: Ultraseismic plot of all of the sensors, the estimated length value, and the estimation error for the isotropic embedded in 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole	118

Figure 5.41: Ultraseismic plot of the signals after the low-pass filtering for the orthotropic standing-on-soil simulated timber pole	118
Figure 5.42: Velocity analysis procedure for (a) the down-going and (b) the reflection waves for the orthotropic standing-on-soil simulated timber pole.....	119
Figure 5.43: Ultraseismic plot of data after low-pass filtering in orthotropic embedded in 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole case.	119
Figure 5.44: Velocity analysis procedures for (a) down-going and (b) reflection waves for orthotropic embedded in 1.5 m soil simulated timber pole case.	120
Figure 5.45: The test setups for the Sonic-Echo method in the standing-on-soil and the embedded conditions.....	121
Figure 5.46: Velocity analysis procedure for (a) the down-going, and (b) the reflection wave in the experimental Sonic-Echo test	122
Figure 5.47:Raw captured signals of the Sonic-Echo method test in the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	123
Figure 5.48: Length estimation procedure of the Sonic-Echo method test in the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	123
Figure 5.49: Velocity analysis procedure in the Sonic-Echo method for the timber pole embedded in 1 m soil	124
Figure 5.50: Length estimation procedure of the Sonic-Echo test in the timber pole embedded in 1 m soil. S5 is not considered in the analysis since its signal is out of the range of the others. (Red signal)	124
Figure 5.51: Bending wave laboratory test setup.....	125
Figure 5.52: FRFs of S1, S2, S3.	125
Figure 5.53: Velocity calculation results utilizing several seed frequencies	126
Figure 5.54: 1360 Hz seed frequency SKM results in (a) S1, (b) S2, and (c) S3	127
Figure 5.55: 1360 Hz seed frequency SKM results of S1, S2, and S3 comparison.....	128
Figure 5.56: FRFs in S1, S2, and S3 for the embedded timber pole in 1 m soil.....	128
Figure 5.57: Velocity calculation results utilizing several seed frequencies	129
Figure 5.58: 760 Hz seed frequency SKM results in (a) S1, (b) S2, and (c) S3	130
Figure 5.59: 760 Hz seed frequency SKM results of S1, S2, and S3 comparison.....	131
Figure 5.60: Ultraseismic laboratory test set up.....	132
Figure 5.61: Velocity analysis and the length estimation procedure on the laboratory Ultraseismic test data in the standing-on-soil condition	133

Figure 5.62: (a) Velocity analysis and (b) the length estimation procedure on the laboratory Ultraseismic test data in the embedded condition	134
Figure 5.63: Velocity analysis and the length estimation procedure on the Field-test data for the Ultraseismic test	135
Figure 5.64: Spectrum curves of the cylindrical timber poles with orthotropic material properties. Dashed lines represent the flexural wave branches and the hard lines represent the longitudinal wave branches [52].....	138
Figure 6.1: Simulated timber pole test setup for both of the standing-on-soil and the embedded conditions.....	141
Figure 6.2: Ultraseismic plots for the simulated timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition (a) before the low-pass filtering, and (b) after the low-pass filtering	142
Figure 6.3: A comparison of the original and the filtered signal with 2.5 KHz cut-off frequency in a single sensor in (a) time domain, and (b) frequency domain	143
Figure 6.4: Captured signals by eight in-field sensors (a) before and (b) after low-pass digital filtering.....	144
Figure 6.5: Predictive deconvolution procedures in a single sensor.....	145
Figure 6.6: Low-pas filtered data before and after applying the predictive deconvolution in a single sensor for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	146
Figure 6.7: Ultraseismic plot of (a) the low-pass filtered data, and (b) the outputs of the predictive deconvolution on 241 sensors for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	147
Figure 6.8: In-field sensors signals after (a) low-pass filtering, and (b) applying the predictive deconvolution for the simulated isotropic timber pole with standing-on-soil condition.....	148
Figure 6.9: Velocity analysis procedures for (a) the first arrivals, and (b) the reflection peaks for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	149
Figure 6.10: Length estimation procedures for the simulated isotropic timber pole with standing-on-soil condition.....	150
Figure 6.11: Frequency-Wavenumber (F-K) domain illustration of the low-pass filtered signals for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	150

Figure 6.12: Captured signal in all of the 241 sensors (a) before and, (b) after the low-pass filtering for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition....	151
Figure 6.13: Captured signals by the in-field sensors (a) before, and (b) after the low-pass filtering for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition....	152
Figure 6.14: Ultraseismic plot of (a) the low-pass filtered data, and (b) the outputs of the predictive deconvolution on the 241 sensors for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	153
Figure 6.15: In-field sensors signals after (a) the low-pass filtering, and (b) applying the predictive deconvolution for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	154
Figure 6.16: Low-pas filtered data before and after applying the predictive deconvolution in a single sensor for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	154
Figure 6.17: The velocity analysis procedure for (a): the first arrivals, and (b): the reflection peaks for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	155
Figure 6.18: Length estimation procedure for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	156
Figure 6.19: Frequency-Wavenumber (F-K) domain illustration of the low-pass filtered signals for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	156
Figure 6.20 : Captured signal in all of the 241 sensors (a) before and, (b) after the low-pass filtering for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	157
Figure 6.21 : Captured signals by the in-field sensors (a) before, and (b) after the low-pass filtering for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	158
Figure 6.22: Ultraseismic plot of (a) the low-pass filtered data, and (b) the outputs of the predictive deconvolution on the 241 sensors for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	159
Figure 6.23: In-field sensors' signals after (a) the low-pass filtering, and (b) applying the predictive deconvolution for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with standing-on-soil condition.....	160
Figure 6.24: Velocity analysis procedures of the detected (a) first arrivals peaks, and (b) the reflection peaks after applying the predictive deconvolution for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	161

Figure 6.25: F-K illustration of the original data captured from the simulated orthotropic timber pole with embedded condition (the blue oval refers to the desired area to be preserved by the F-K velocity filter).....	162
Figure 6.26 : Illustration of the Tucky windows design in the F-K domain velocity filtering.....	163
Figure 6.27: Results of the F-K velocity filter on the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	163
Figure 6.28: Outputs of (a) the low-pass filtering and (b) the velocity filtering outputs followed by the low-pass filtering in all 241 sensors for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	164
Figure 6.29: Outputs of the low-pass filtering with 1.5 kHz cut-off frequency in all of the 241 sensors for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	165
Figure 6.30: Outputs of (a) the 1.5 kHz low-pass filtering, and (b) the low-pass filtering followed by the predictive deconvolution for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	166
Figure 6.31: Outputs of (a) the 1.5 kHz low-pass filter and (b) the predictive deconvolution in the range of the in-field tests for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	167
Figure 6.32: Velocity analysis procedure after the 1.5 kHz low-pass filtering followed by the predictive deconvolution for (a) the first arrivals, and (b) the reflection peaks for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	168
Figure 6.33: Phase changes vs. the frequency components in a simple non-dispersive LTI system	170
Figure 6.34: Simple LTI system includes one LTI system with the linear phase and the other with the nonlinear phase distortions	170
Figure 6.35: Magnitude and the phase responses of (a) the FIR filter with non-linear phase shift, and (b) the FIR filter with linear phase shift.....	171
Figure 6.36: Illustration of (a) the LTI system input, the outputs of the FIR filter with (a) linear, and (b) non-linear phase shifts, and (d) the overall output of the LTI system	172

Figure 6.37: Illustration of (a) the LTI system input, the outputs of the FIR filter with (a) linear, and (b) non-linear phase shifts, and (d) the overall output of the LTI system	172
Figure 6.38: Dispersion curves of the cylindrical timber poles in (a) the isotropic; and (b) the orthotropic cases. Dashed lines represent the flexural wave branches and hard lines represent the longitudinal branches [52]	174
Figure 6.39: Principal components of the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	175
Figure 6.40: (a): Original captured signals; and the signals that transferred back to the time domain using (b): the first 10 most important principal components, and (c) the rest of the principal components for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	176
Figure 6.41: Principal components of the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded in 1.5 m soil condition	177
Figure 6.42: (a): Original captured signals; and the signals that transferred back to the time domain using (b): the first 10 most important principal components, and (c) the rest of the principal components for simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	178
Figure 6.43: Principal components of the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	178
Figure 6.44: (a): Original captured signals; and the signals that transferred back to the time domain (b): using the first eight most important principal components, and (c) using the rest of the principal components for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition	180
Figure 6.45: Singular values of the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	181
Figure 6.46: (a) Original signals, and the transferred signals to the time domain (b): using the low singular values, (c): using the medium singular values, and (d): using the high singular values for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	182
Figure 6.47: Singular values of the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	182

Figure 6.48: (a) Original signals, and the transferred signals to the time domain (b): using the low singular values, (c): using the medium singular values, and (d): using the high singular values for the simulated isotropic timber pole with the embedded in 1.5 m soil condition.....	184
Figure 6.49: Singular values of the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the embedded condition.....	185
Figure 6.50: (a) Original signals, and the transferred signals to the time domain using (b): the low singular values, (c): the medium singular values, and (d): the high singular values for the simulated orthotropic timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition .	186
Figure 6.51: Two-dimensional FFT of the original data, which is going to be fed into the K-mean clustering algorithm	187
Figure 6.52: Silhouette plot of the output of the K-mean clustering algorithm.....	188
Figure 6.53: Third cluster of the K-mean algorithm, which contains the desired output (The longitudinal wave)	189
Figure 6.54: (a) original data captured from the simulated orthotropic timber pole after low-pass filtering with 4500 Hz (Hammer impact frequency range), (b): the data of the third cluster which is transferred back to the time-space domain, and (c): The data obtained from the rest of the clusters which is transferred back to the time-space domain	191
Figure 6.55: (a) low-pass filtered data with 1.5 kHz cut-off frequency, and (b): output of the third cluster of the K-mean clustering algorithm	192
Figure 6.56: Outputs of the digital FIR filter on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	193
Figure 6.57: Outputs of the digital FIR filter followed by the predictive deconvolution on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	194
Figure 6.58: Output signals of the low-pass filtering with 1.5 kHz cut-off frequency on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	194
Figure 6.59: Outputs of the digital FIR filter on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the embedded condition.....	195
Figure 6.60: Outputs of the digital FIR filter followed by the predictive deconvolution on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the embedded condition	195

Figure 6.61: Output signals of the low-pass filtering with 1.5 kHz cut-off frequency on the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the embedded condition....	196
Figure 6.62: Frequency spectrum of the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the embedded condition	196
Figure 6.63: Frequency spectrum of the experimental data captured from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	197
Figure 6.64: Singular values obtained from the experimental signals captured from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	197
Figure 6.65: (a) Original captured signals, and the time signals obtained from (a) the 1 st and 2 nd , (b) the 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th , and (c) the 6 th and 7 th singular values obtained from the captured experimental signals from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition	199
Figure 6.66: Principal components of the captured signals from the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	200
Figure 6.67: (a): Original captured signals; and the signals that transferred back to the time domain (b): using the first two most important principal components, and (c) using the rest of the principal components for the timber pole with the standing-on-soil condition.....	201
Figure 7.1: The Ultrasonic time-of-flight diffraction test setup.....	207
Figure 7.2: utilized simple linear chirp signal with 2 kHz bandwidth (a) time domain, signal is zoomed in up to 0.4 s for better illustration, and (b) spectrogram.....	210
Figure 7.3: Illustration of transmitting (green line) and receiving (dashed red line) chirped pulse in transmission through ultrasonic NDT.....	211
Figure 7.4: proposed signal processing procedure for fast and accurate ultrasonic chirped pulse NDT	212
Figure 7.5: The block diagram of implemented ultrasonic NDT system.....	213
Figure 7.6: The Ultrasonic 40 kHz transducer	213
Figure 7.7: The receiver signal amplifying circuit (a) the schematics, and (b) implemented on the perfboard	214
Figure 7.8: (a) the transmitter, and (b) the receiver data acquisition systems	215
Figure 7.9: The transmission through or time-of-flight tests setup for the ultrasonic single frequency excitation	216

Figure 7.10: The Ultrasonic narrowband chirped pulse air test setup	216
Figure 7.11: The Ultrasonic narrowband chirped pulse test setups in the 4 m timber for the transmission-through or the time-of-flight test (two transducers on both sides)	217
Figure 7.12: Transmitted and captured signals in the ultrasonic Single Frequency (40 kHz) time-of-flight tests with (a) one, (b) ten, (c) 40, (d) 80, and (e) 100 cycles per pulse	220
Figure 7.13: Ultrasonic single frequency (40 kHz) time-of-flight tests' length estimation errors for different pulse duration in the 1 m timber beam specimen	221
Figure 7.14: Output signals from the proposed chirp pulse signal processing algorithm for the transmitting signals with (a) 10 ms, (b) 12 ms, and (c) 14 ms duration in the TOF tests in the air	222
Figure 7.15: Output signals from the proposed chirp pulse signal processing algorithm for the transmitting signals with (a) 6 ms, (b) 8 ms, (c) 10, (d) 12, and (e) 14 ms duration in TOF tests on the 4 m timber beam	225
Figure 7.16: Ultrasonic chirp pulse TOF tests' length estimation errors for the different pulse duration	226
Figure 7.17: Comparison between the ultrasonic single frequency and the ultrasonic chirp pulse TOF tests on the timber beams	226
Figure 8.1: Conclusion diagram of this research	234
Figure 8.2: The spectrum curves of the cylindrical timber poles in (a) the isotropic; and (b) the orthotropic cases. The dashed lines represent the flexural wave branches and the hard lines represent the longitudinal branches [52]	239
Figure A. 1: Guided wave propagation and coordinate directions for cylindrical pile/pole [51]	243
Figure B. 1: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency	251

Figure B. 2: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 253

Figure B. 3: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 256

Figure B. 4: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 258

Figure B. 5: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 260

Figure B. 6: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 262

Figure B. 7: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency..... 264

Figure B. 8: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off

frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	266
Figure B. 9: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	268
Figure B. 10: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	270
Figure B. 11: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	273
Figure B. 12: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	275
Figure B. 13: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	278
Figure B. 14: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency.....	280

Figure B. 15: (a) Repeatability of the five tests in all sensors, (b): FFT of all sensors, (c): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency, (d): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 2600 Hz cut-off frequency followed by predictive deconvolution, and (f): Captured signals in all sensors after low-pass filtering with 1500 Hz cut-off frequency283

List of Acronyms

1D	One Dimensional
2D	Two Dimensional
BW	Bending Wave
CW	Compression Wave
DFT	Discrete Fourier Transform
FEM	Finite Element Model
FFT	Fast Fourier Transform
FIR	Finite Impulse Response
F-K	Frequency Wavenumber
FT	Fourier Transform
FW	Flexural waves
GW	Guided Wave
IFFT	Inverse Fast Fourier Transform
IIR	Infinite Impulse Response
IR	Impulse Response
LW	Longitudinal Wave
NDE	Non Destructive Evaluation
NDT	Non Destructive Testing
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
QNDE	Quantitative Non-Destructive Evaluation
SE	Sonic Echo
SKM	Short Kernel Method
SVD	Singular Value Decomposition

Abstract

Timber utility poles play a significant role in the infrastructure of Australia as well as many other countries. There are over 5 million timber utility poles currently used in Australian energy networks, which are more than 80% of total utility poles in the network. Due to the advanced age of Australia's timber pole infrastructure, significant efforts are undertaken by state authorities on maintenance and asset management to prevent utility lines from failure. However, the lack of reliable information regarding their in-service condition, including the embedment length or the degree of deterioration or damage below ground level makes it extremely difficult for the asset managers to make decisions on the replacement/maintenance process with due consideration to economy, operational efficiency, risk/liability and public safety. For example, in order to avoid any failure and considering the public safety, each year approximately 300,000 poles are replaced in the Eastern States of Australia with up to 80% of them still being in a very good serviceable condition, resulting in significant waste of natural resources and money.

In order to address this problem, an R&D program commenced in 2011 at the University of Technology Sydney in collaboration with the Electricity Network Association of Australia. The aim of this study is to design and develop a Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) method with acceptable accuracy, whilst being cost efficient for the condition assessment of the in-service timber utility poles. This research project contains three phases, which will be explained briefly in the following paragraphs.

Several stress wave based NDT methods are currently available and have been used in field applications over the past decades as simple and cost-effective tools for identifying the condition and underground depth of embedded structures, such as poles or piles in service. In this regard, in the first phase of this research, the applicability and efficiency of the currently available NDT methods on the condition assessment of the timber utility poles is investigated through simulation and laboratory tests. Results of the first phase reveal that these surface NDT methods face significant challenges in the condition assessment of the timber utility poles. These challenges are due to presence of uncertainties such as complicated material properties and imperfect body (i.e. timber

pole natural cracks), environmental conditions, interaction of soil and structure, defects and deteriorations as well as an impact excitation type. It is necessary to mention that access to the top of the in-service timber utility poles is prohibitive due to the presence of the electrical or communication wires. In this regard, the hammer impact is applied to the timber pole on its side.

In order to address these complicating factors, in the second phase of this research some advanced digital signal processing methodologies are selected, modified, and employed from different groups of methodologies that can most probably provide solutions. The efficiency of these methodologies is investigated through simulation, laboratory, and field tests. Results of the second phase of this research illustrate that the behaviour of the timber pole under the lateral hammer impact excitation is very complicated. In fact, if dealing with this high level of complexities is not impossible, it is a very difficult task.

In this regard, in the third phase of this research a novel, fast, and accurate ultrasonic narrowband NDT method is proposed as an alternative proposition for the condition assessment of the timber structures. The efficacy of the proposed methodology is verified through the laboratory experiments.