

ADVISORY GUIDE

The Cost Influence Guide

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a pattern behind almost every expensive surprise in construction. The cost of changing something rises as a project moves forward, while the ability to influence it without penalty falls. Early on, a change is a redraw. Later, the same change is rework, delay, and a contract argument. This guide explains the pattern in plain terms, shows where the window to act actually sits, and explains why an independent review before the GMP is the cheapest insurance an owner can buy. No jargon, one idea, clearly stated.

2. ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT

This guide describes a recognized industry pattern, often drawn as the cost influence curve. The figures used are general and illustrative of that pattern, not measurements from any Reltic VDC project. Reltic VDC provides advisory services only and does not perform design or BIM coordination. The model is never the deliverable.

3. PROJECT SNAPSHOT

The pattern, in numbers	Stage
Cost of a change: lowest	Design
Cost of the same change: higher	Procurement
Cost of the same change: highest	Field
Order of magnitude, early to late	Roughly 10x
Where influence is still high	Before the GMP

4. THE CURVE, STAGE BY STAGE

Design stage	● GREEN	Influence is high, cost of change is low. This is where decisions are cheap.
Procurement	● AMBER	Influence is falling. A change now ripples through buyout and award.
Field	● RED	Influence is low, cost of change is high. The same fix is now rework and delay.

5. KEY FINDINGS

Why a change gets more expensive over time

A drawing shows a finished result. Building it means achieving every intermediate state to get there. Early in a project, changing the drawing is just that, a change to the drawing. Once material is bought, the change also means re-procuring. Once it is installed, the change means cut, remove, and rebuild, plus the delay while everyone agrees whose change it was. The work itself did not get harder. Its position in the sequence did. That is why the same decision can cost roughly ten times more in the field than it would have cost on the screen.

Why influence falls as cost rises

At the start of a project almost everything is still open: scope, sequence, who carries which risk. As commitments are made, the price set, the packages awarded, the schedule fixed, each one closes a door. By the time the GMP is signed, most of the decisions that drive cost have already been made, even the ones nobody examined closely. The tragedy of the pattern is that the moment you have the most information about a project is also the moment you have the least ability to act on it cheaply.

Where the window actually sits

The widest part of the window is before the GMP is signed, while the design is still developing and the price is not yet committed. This is the only point where a soft allowance costs a conversation instead of a change order, where a fragile schedule can still be rebaselined, and where an interface gap can still be assigned on paper. An independent review at this moment is not about slowing the project down. It is about spending an hour now to avoid a month later.

6. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR AN OWNER

If the cost of a change rises tenfold from design to field, then the value of finding it early is enormous and almost always underspent. Owners routinely accept a fast, confident-looking number over a slower, more honest one, because the honest one is a harder conversation at the wrong time. The cost influence pattern is the argument for reversing that instinct: the harder conversation is cheapest before signature, and a small, independent review buys you the chance to have it while it still costs almost nothing.

7. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Treat the pre-GMP period as the main window to manage risk, not a formality before construction
- Spend the most effort where influence is highest and cost of change is lowest, which is early
- Convert what can be converted, test what can be tested, and price the rest honestly, before you sign
- Use an independent reviewer to find the soft spots while the cost of fixing them is still a conversation

8. RELTIC VDC VIEW

Every owner already knows that changes get more expensive over time. What the cost influence pattern adds is the scale of it, and the uncomfortable timing: you understand the project best at exactly the point you can least afford to change it. The whole case for an independent review before the GMP is contained in that one sentence. The question is never whether the risk is there. It is whether anyone looked while looking was still cheap.

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