

HOUSE OKS EXTENDING TOLLS FOR TWO BRIDGES - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - June 10, 1998 - page A3

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BATON ROUGE Tolls on the Crescent City Connection will remain another 13 1/2 years, while those on the Sunshine Bridge near Donaldsonville will be collected for another six, lawmakers decided Tuesday.

The House voted to go along with Senate changes to House Bill 250 by Rep. Juba Diez, D-Gonzalez, which also lowers some of the **tolls**.

The bill heads to Gov. Foster, who can sign the bill, veto it or let it become law simply by taking no action.

The House approved the Senate changes 75-26 after Reps. Sherman Copelin, D-New Orleans, and **Jackie Clarkson**, D-Algiers, failed to muster the votes to derail it.

A major point of contention came over a Senate change barring east bank New Orleans House members, but not senators, from a new 13-member advisory board that will oversee how surplus toll money will be used.

"We have to draw the line somewhere," Copelin said. "House members from (the east bank of) New Orleans are not represented here. There has got to be some parity in this situation between House and Senate members."

Clarkson criticized the Senate's reinstatement of various road projects financed by surplus toll money after they had been removed by Sen. Francis Heitmeier, D-Algiers.

"This is the third capital outlay bill" to finance pork-barrel projects, Clarkson said. "It has gotten berserk."

Still, the House approved the extension of Peters Road south to Louisiana 23; the widening of Lapalco Boulevard from two to four lanes from Victory Drive to U.S. 90; the upgrading of Peters Road with the addition of toll-tag lanes for cars entering from the Algiers area; a downramp to Mardi Gras Boulevard; additional ramps to ease access to Destrehan Avenue; and \$48 million for repainting the span.

The bill also requires the state to open a mass-transit lane on the Crescent City Connection for vehicles carrying two or more passengers and to install video or photo monitoring equipment.

The **tolls** on the Crescent City Connection generate about \$20 million a year, while those on the Sunshine Bridge generate about \$2 million. About \$15 million of the Crescent City Connection's **tolls** are used to operate and maintain the span and the three ferries that operate in the New Orleans area. The other \$5 million goes to finance nearby bridge and road projects.

The **tolls** on both spans expire June 30, 1999.

As the bill left the House, the **tolls** on the Crescent City Connection would stay at \$1 for regular fares but would dip from 50 cents to 40 cents for toll-tag users. The **tolls** would remain in place through Dec. 31, 2012.

Changes by Sen. Louis Lambert, D-Prairieville, would drop **tolls** on the Sunshine Bridge from \$1 to 50 cents for regular drivers and from 50 cents to 25 cents for toll-tag users. The reduced **tolls** would be in place from July 1, 1999, through June 30, 2004.

Lowering the toll-tag fares from 50 to 40 cents on the Crescent City Connection will make less money available for projects, about \$3 million instead of \$5 million, Diez said.

Copelin wanted Diez to throw the bill into a conference committee because the senators have "put all their patronage in it," but Diez said that would risk the bill's survival.

"I am scared we might end up with no bill," Diez said.

Failure to approve the amended bill, he said, would mean lawmakers' road projects might not be done as quickly as planned because transportation money, not toll revenue, would be used to finance the expensive bridge repainting.

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#ART:

ROLL CALL

How New Orleans area members of the House voted on

extending the **tolls** on the Crescent City Connection:

FOR: Alario, D-Westwego; Ansardi, D-Kenner;

Bowler, R-River Ridge; Bruneau, R-New Orleans;

Chaisson, D-Destrehan; Damico, D-Marrero; Downer,

D-Houma; Dupre, D-Montegut; Faucheux, D-LaPlace;

Heaton, D-New Orleans; Lancaster, R-Metairie;

Martiny, R-Kenner; Odinet, D-Arabi; Powell,

R-Ponchatoula; Quezaire, D-Donaldsonville; Rousselle,

D-Belle Chasse; Scalise, R-Jefferson; Schneider,

R-Slidell; Strain, D-Abita Springs; Theriot,
D-Raceland; Thomas, D-Bogalusa; Thornhill, R-Slidell;
Toomy, R-Gretna; Triche, D-Thibodaux; Warner,
D-Chalmette; Winston, R-Covington.

AGAINST: Alexander, D-New Orleans; Clarkson,
D-Algiers; Copelin, D-New Orleans; Donelon,
R-Metairie; Farve, D-New Orleans; Green, D-Marrero;
Landrieu, D-New Orleans; Morrell, D-New Orleans;
Murray, D-New Orleans; Pratt, D-New Orleans;
Schwegmann, D-New Orleans; Vitter, R-Metairie;
Willard, D-New Orleans; Windhorst, R-Terrytown.

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GRAPHIC

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