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In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Greater New Orleans Foundation has established the Rebuild New Orleans Fund designated to build healthier, more vibrant communities for all citizens.

The Greater New Orleans Foundation has been headquartered and has been building partnerships in the city of New Orleans for over two decades. GNOF is proud of its political neutrality, historical stability, trustworthiness and proven results through thoughtful grantmaking.

Please call for information on making your tax-deductible contribution or to discuss partnering with the Greater New Orleans Foundation in the rebuilding process.

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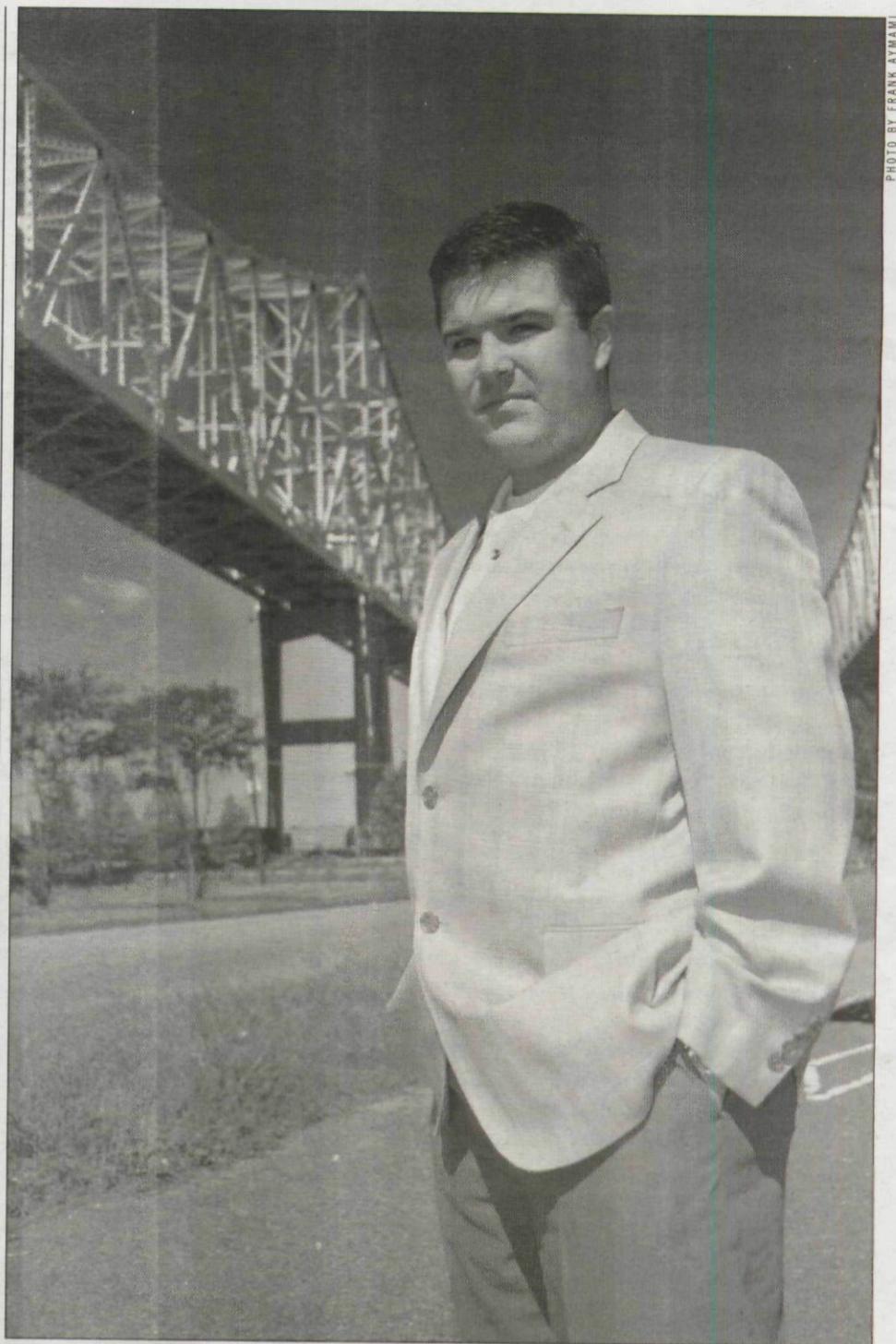


PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAWI

Jefferson Parish Councilman Chris Roberts opposes a bill to raise the cost of toll tags on the Crescent City Connection bridge, saying the state, not motorists, should foot the bill.

Roberts takes up fight against CCC toll tag hike

By Jaime Guillet

Staff Writer

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THE LOUISIANA Legislature may soon pass a bill to raise the cost of toll tags for the Crescent City Connection on the premise that a loss of New Orleans residents has deprived the bridge of revenues for operations and maintenance.

Toll revenues from the bridge and three Mississippi River ferries — Algiers-Canal Street, Gretna-Jackson Avenue and Lower Algiers-Chalmette — fund the operation and maintenance of the Crescent City Connection Division, from paying Bridge Police and toll collectors to the upkeep of paint and infrastructure.

House Bill 415, authored by State

Rep. Roy Quezaine, D-Donaldsonville, proposes increasing the crossing fee for toll-tag users from 20 cents to 35 cents per axle, meaning most cars would pay 70 cents per trip from the West Bank. The bill does not call for an increase for drivers paying cash, who are charged \$1 to cross the bridge. Tolls are not collected on the East Bank.

Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development spokesman Mark Lambert says the CCC collects an average of \$20 million per year in toll revenue and by law that money is placed in an account to fund only bridge projects and operations.

Jefferson Parish District 1 Councilman Chris Roberts opposes the bill, saying other bridges and highways in the state are maintained through the

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DOTD. If the Crescent City Connection hasn't produced enough revenue to maintain itself, the state should "step up" and make up the difference — not motorists, says Roberts.

Roberts said he received reports the Crescent City Connection Division, the arm of the DOTD that oversees the bridge, was having financial issues and could not complete certain projects because the state had "raided" the CCC's coffers for other projects.

"The reason these projects have been put on hold ... is the money that was earmarked for this from the bridge authority through the tolls had been taken and spent on other parts of the state," said Roberts.

According to state law, CCC toll revenues cannot be used for anything other than maintenance and operation of the bridge, said Lambert. Lambert says CCC toll money has not been used to fund projects in the past two years because there is no longer an excess of funds.

Roberts disputes the argument there are fewer motorists using the bridge due to the decrease in population in the New Orleans area following Hurricane Katrina. There has been an insurgence of construction and out-of-town recovery workers who do not have tags and are paying \$1 cash toll to cross, said Roberts.

"I'm saying if there is a shortfall, I think the state needs to pick that up out of its transportation budget," said Roberts. "There are projections today that because of oil and gas prices this city is going to have an additional \$500 million in revenues from oil and gas royalties that they were not expecting and that's based upon gas prices and what the current market is bringing.

"So there's obviously a pool of money that can be tapped into in order to try and take care of (projects)."

Quezaire did not return calls seeking comment on his bill.

Roberts said citizens should have a full understanding of the CCC's funds before a bill is passed.

"(There should be) an accounting of what's happened with the funds that have been collected through the years," said Roberts. "At one time there were tens of millions of dollars in a fund balance. Now they're saying there's not enough funds to operate. It just doesn't seem right."

House Bill 415 is assigned to the House Transportation, Highways and Public Works Committee. •

Bridging the gaps

Current tolls for the Crescent City Connection

- 40 cents for a two-axle vehicles with a toll tag
- \$1 for a two-axle without a toll tag

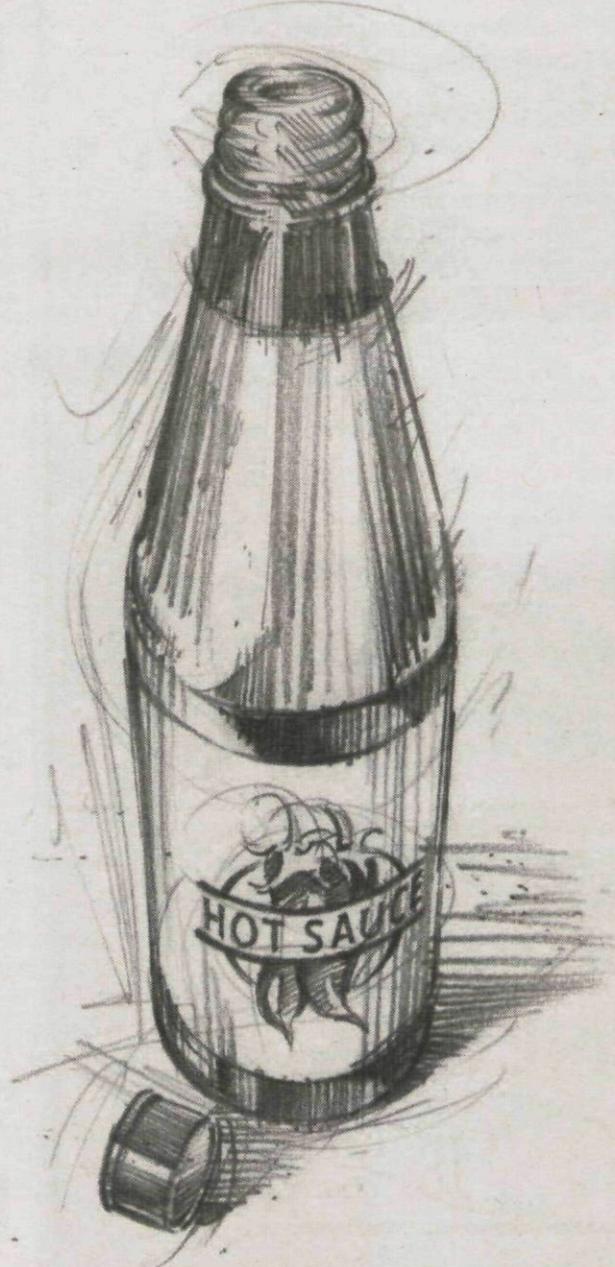
Proposed tolls for the Crescent City Connection, per House Bill 415

- 70 cents for a two-axle vehicles with a toll tag
- \$1 for a two-axle vehicle without a toll tag

Source: Crescent City Connection Division

Hot Stuff

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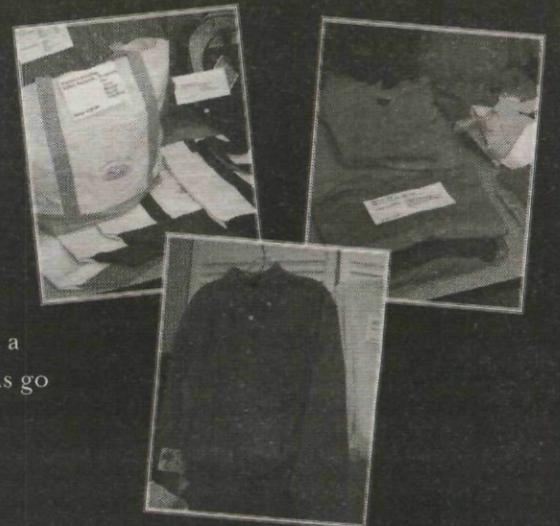
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