

TOLL EXTENSIONS THROUGH 2009 KILLED BY HOUSE - - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - April 18, 1998 - page A4

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BATON ROUGE Led by West Bank lawmakers, the House on Friday killed a bill to extend tolls on the Crescent City Connection through 2009.

Reps. Jackie Clarkson, D-Algiers, Bennie Rousselle, D-Belle Chasse, and Joseph Toomy, R-Gretna, implored the House to reject what had been called a compromise bill fashioned by the Senate.

After rewriting House Bill 10 in the Senate, senators approved the measure 29-6 and sent it back to the House for approval or rejection of the changes. But the House failed to muster the 70 votes needed to approve the measure, 58-32.

That vote sent the bill to a conference committee to work out differences but the House members, with 45 minutes left in the session, refused to meet.

Both Rep. Juba Diez, D-Gonzalez, and Sen. Ron Landry, sponsors of the bill, said the issue can be considered at the fiscal session starting April 27.

Even though the bill addressed several legislators' concerns, the West Bank lawmakers hammered away at the lack of an oversight authority to monitor and prioritize bridge-related projects financed by the tolls.

"We have worked out about the best deal we can," Diez told the House. "This is about as best as it is going to get."

But Clarkson said the bill came back to the House in a different form than what the chamber had approved Monday. She said the Senate stripped an amendment that would have set up a bridge authority to oversee the spending of toll revenue, something Gov. Foster said he favored.

"Now it (oversight) is back under the command of Gen. (Frank) Denton and we know how he will deal with this," she said, referring to the head of the Department of Transportation and Development. Clarkson has criticized Denton for not moving fast enough to install a transit lane over the Crescent City Connection to carry two or more people in a vehicle.

"The oversight has been stripped," Rousselle said. "There is no reason to vote for this."

"The governor's office said he was committed to a local board that would see how money would be spent and in setting the priorities on how the local money will be spent," Toomy said.

The tolls on both the CCC and the Sunshine Bridge near Donaldsonville are due to expire June 30, 1999. The original version of HB 10 would have extended them 13 1/2 years, through Dec. 31, 2012.

But the House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works voted to reduce the extension through 2006. The Senate earlier Friday raised the extension to 2009 for the CCC.

Sen. Louis Lambert, D-Prairieville, added an amendment that would have cut the tolls on the Sunshine Bridge in half starting July 1, 1999 and ending them Dec. 31, 2004.

Sen. Paulette Irons, D-New Orleans, added amendments that would require engineering contracts for inspections of the CCC be bid out. She said the same firm has been making about \$850,000 a year from a contract for at least 13 years.

West Bank lawmakers also added amendments to get downramps and on-ramps added to the span from the CCC tolls but they all died when the bill died.

The CCC tolls generate about \$20 million a year, with about \$15 million going to operate and maintain the CCC and the ferries. The other \$5 million is used on bridge-related road construction.

The Sunshine Bridge tolls generate about \$2 million a year to operate and maintain the span.

Diez and Landry said the extension was needed to allow payment on the bonds that financed bridge construction to be made and the \$48 million in CCC repainting to proceed.

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#ART:

ROLL CALL

How New Orleans area members of the House voted on

extending tolls on the Crescent City Connection:

FOR: Chaisson, D-Destrehan; Copelin, D-New Orleans;

Downer, D-Houma; Dupre, D-Montegut; Farve, D-New Orleans;

Faucheux, D-LaPlace; Martiny, R-Kenner; Morrell, D-New

Orleans; Murray, D-New Orleans; Odinet, D-Arabi; Powell,

R-Ponchatoula; Pratt, D-New Orleans; Quezaire,

D-Donaldsonville; Schneider, R-Slidell; Theriot,

D-Raceland; Thomas, D-Bogalusa; Triche, D-Thibodaux;

Willard, D-New Orleans.

AGAINST: Ansardi, D-Kenner; Bowler, R-River Ridge;
Bruneau, R-New Orleans; Clarkson, D-Algiers; Damico,
D-Marrero; Donelon, R-Metairie; Green, D-Marrero;
Heaton, D-New Orleans; Landrieu, D-New Orleans; Rousselle,
D-Belle Chasse; Scalise, R-Jefferson; Schwegmann, D-New
Orleans; Toomy, R-Gretna; Vitter, R-Metairie; Warner,
D-Chalmette; Windhorst, R-Terrytown; Winston, R-Covington.

ABSENT/NOT VOTING: Alario, D-Westwego; Alexander,
D-New Orleans; Lancaster, R-Metairie; Strain, D-Abita
Springs; Thornhill, R-Slidell.

GRAPHIC

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#ART:

ROLL CALL

How New Orleans area members of the Senate voted on
extending **tolls** on the Crescent City Connection:

FOR: Bagneris, D-New Orleans; Bajoie, D-New Orleans;
Hollis, R-Metairie; Johnson, D-New Orleans; Lambert,
D-Prairieville; Landry, D-LaPlace; Robichaux, D-Mathews;
Schedler, R-Slidell; Short, R-Covington.

AGAINST: Dean, R-Caernarvon; Heitmeier, D-Algiers; Irons,
D-New Orleans; Lentini, R-Kenner; Ullo, D-Marrero.

ABSENT/NOT VOTING: Hainkel, R-New Orleans.

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