

BATON ROUGE -- With the authority of the state House of Representatives behind him, Rep. Patrick Connick, R-Harvey, has called on Legislative Auditor Steve Theriot to look into "certain aspects" of the **Crescent City Connection's** spending and bidding habits.

Connick persuaded the House to approve his House Resolution 114 calling for another audit of the **Crescent City Connection Division**, a unit of the Department of Transportation and Development in Baton Rouge.

Theriot said he had an audit of the bridge division scheduled to start in August and finish "by the end of the year." Theriot said his staff will pay special attention to certain areas that Connick's resolution addresses.

Transportation Department Secretary William Ankner said he does not think any wrongdoing has occurred at the **Crescent City Connection**, but he will await the audit findings.

Last year, at Connick's prodding, Theriot audited the division, finding lax controls by the Baton Rouge department's headquarters staff over the unit that operates the bridge and ferry service in the New Orleans area.

Auditors also said they were uncertain they could find all contracts for the audit. The audit showed the bridge unit ran a \$25 million deficit and reduced a \$61 million reserve to \$36 million, money that Connick said could have been spent on road projects on the West Bank.

Connick's resolution calls for Theriot's staff to:

-- "Examine all bids, contracts, change orders, and payments to vendors, contractors and subcontractors . . . which in any way concern new construction and renovation of **Crescent City Connection** offices and the purpose and need for such expansion and renovations."

-- Look into the "purpose, need and requirements of surplus insurance and the amounts paid . . . for such insurance since Jan. 1, 2003," as well as "all bids by and payments made to insurance companies, brokers and agents" for the coverage.

-- "Determine the current location and amounts of all fund balances" or surpluses that pertain to the CCC unit and its predecessor, the Mississippi River Bridge Authority.

"We need to see where the money is going before we extend the tolls," now set to expire in 2012, Connick said Tuesday, explaining why he pushed the resolution as the session was winding down last week

Connick has complained for months that the bridge unit spent \$10 million to \$12 million in

insurance premiums for coverage he said was unnecessary. Ankner has since terminated the contract.

Connick also said the bridge unit spent \$3.8 million on a 6,000-square-foot addition and extensive renovations to three-fourths of the 11,000-square-foot building that dates to the 1980s.

Connick said the expansion of executive offices at the structure "makes the DOTD secretary's offices look like a broom closet."

Ankner said the project was well under way when he was named transportation secretary by Gov. Bobby Jindal. If he had been in office when it started, he said, "I would have said no, but it was not my decision to make."

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Ed Anderson can be reached at eanderson@timespicayune.com or 225.342.5810.

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