

Bridge official will retire today - Paisant says - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - October 31, 2008 - page 01

October 31, 2008 | Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) | Paul Rioux West Bank bureau | Page 01

For the second time in three months, a top official overseeing the **Crescent City Connection** has decided to retire as the state legislative auditor's office and three outside firms conduct four audits of the bridge's finances.

Randy Paisant, assistant executive director of the bridge authority, said he is retiring for personal reasons that have nothing to do with the recent scrutiny of the agency.

Paisant, 60, a 36-year employee who has earned enough credits for maximum retirement benefits, will stop working after today and use accumulated leave time through February.

He said he is prohibited from commenting further by policies of the state Department of Transportation and Development, which oversees the bridge authority.

A DOTD spokeswoman did not return calls seeking comment Thursday.

Alan LeVasseur, who retired Aug. 1 after 19 years as the bridge's executive director, had also cited personal reasons for leaving.

John Evanco, a DOTD official in Baton Rouge, was appointed acting executive director, but he, too, is retiring. It is unclear who will head the 200-employee agency as the DOTD searches for a permanent executive director.

Several West Bank legislators, led by Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, called for a performance audit of the bridge authority earlier this year.

Connick questioned why the bridge authority has not used toll money to finance several West Bank road projects outlined in the state law that reauthorized tolls in 1998.

Bridge officials have said mounting maintenance costs, especially for the three Mississippi River ferry routes operated by the agency, have eaten into the anticipated surplus for such transportation projects.

In addition to the probe by Legislative Auditor Steve Theriot, the DOTD commissioned three separate studies on the agency's accounting, police department and bridge and ferry operations.

DOTD Secretary William Ankner said the three audits commissioned by his agency are nearing completion.

The audit of the bridge's 30-plus-member police department found that it is run efficiently, Ankner said at Tuesday's meeting of the bridge authority's oversight board.

Ankner said a "forensic" audit of the agency's accounting found no evidence of theft or malfeasance. He said transportation officials are "still digesting" recommendations from the bridge and ferries audit.

None of the audits has been made public.

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