

HOUSE BLOCKS EFFORT TO EXTEND TOLLS - SPONSOR - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - May 21, 1998 - page A5

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BATON ROUGE The House late Wednesday rejected a bill extending tolls on the Crescent City Connection past 1999, but the sponsor said he will give it another try, possibly today.

The 66-32 tally fell four votes short of the 70 needed to approve House Bill 250. It would extend the tolls through Dec. 31, 2012, on both the New Orleans bridge and the Sunshine Bridge near Donaldsonville.

The sponsor, Rep. Juba Diez, D-Gonzales, said the 13 1/2 -year extension is needed to generate revenue to paint the Crescent City Connection, a \$48 million project, and to improve roads near the bridge.

Diez said he thinks he can corral four more votes to send the bill to the Senate, where a rival bill is pending action next week.

Tolls on both bridges are scheduled to expire June 30, 1999.

They generate about \$20 million a year on the Crescent City Connection. About \$15 million goes to maintain and operate the bridge, its police force and the ferries that run in the New Orleans area. The other \$5 million is used on ancillary road projects, mainly on the West Bank.

The Sunshine Bridge tolls generate \$2 million a year.

Diez said Wednesday's setback came when some members of the New Orleans delegation were not allowed to offer amendments to permit toll revenue to be used on road projects in the city. Debate on the bill was cut off before Rep. Ed Murray, D-New Orleans, and other New Orleans lawmakers could offer amendments to tap the \$5 million toll surplus for such projects as lighting and landscaping along Florida Avenue from North Broad Street to the St. Bernard Parish line and along Claiborne Avenue from Poydras Street to Franklin Avenue.

Murray complained that the bill should be killed because New Orleans residents on the east bank of the Mississippi River do not get anything from tolls. He said they pay into a special highway program that helps supplement the bridge tolls yet they have no say on how the money is spent and get no benefit from the tolls.

"Because of the shape this bill is in, I am going to urge you to vote against it," said Rep. Sherman Copelin, D-New Orleans. "Mr. Murray had an amendment for east bank projects that didn't have a chance to be discussed before consideration of amendment was cut off."

Rep. Jackie Clarkson, D-Algiers, a toll opponent, also asked that the bill be killed to give all sides a chance to regroup. "We want to kill this bill and start over," she said.

She said the state Department of Transportation and Development, which operates the bridges, should not be given the use of toll money for another 13 1/2 years.

"Do any of you realize what DOTD can do with our money in 13 years, my God in heaven?" she asked.

Earlier, Rep. Steve Windhorst, R-Terrytown, lost 23-76 in an attempt to end the tolls in 2004. He also lost 23-77 in an attempt to cut the tolls from \$1 to 50 cents for regular users and from 50 to 30 cents for special toll-tag users.

The rival Senate measure, Senate Bill 77 by Sen. Ron Landry, D-LaPlace, would cut tolls on the Crescent City Connection to an unspecified level and extend them to Dec. 31, 2012. It also would remove most of the ancillary road projects that have not been started.

Landry's bill would reduce the Sunshine Bridge tolls to 50 cents for regular users and 25 cents for toll-tag users and extend them through 2004.

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#ART:

ROLL CALL How New Orleans area members of the House voted on renewing

the tolls on the Crescent City Connection:

FOR: Ansardi, D-Kenner; Bowler, R-River Ridge;

Chaisson, D-Destrehan; Downer, D-Houma; Dupre, D-Montegut;

Faucheux, D-LaPlace; Lancaster, R-Metairie; Martiny,

R-Kenner; Odinet, D-Arabi; Powell, R-Ponchatoula; Quezaire,

D-Donaldsonville; Rousselle, D-Belle Chasse; Schneider,

R-Slidell; Strain, D-Abita Springs; Theriot, D-Raceland;

Thomas, D-Bogalusa; Thornhill, R-Slidell; Triche,

D-Thibodaux; Warner, D-Chalmette.

AGAINST: Alexander, D-New Orleans; Bruneau, R-New

Orleans; Clarkson, D-Algiers; Copelin, D-New Orleans;

Damico, D-Marrero; Donelon, R-Metairie; Farve, D-New

Orleans; Green, D-Marrero; Heaton, D-New Orleans; Landrieu,

D-New Orleans; Murray, D-New Orleans; Pratt, D-New Orleans;

Schwegmann, D-New Orleans; Toomy, R-Gretna; Vitter,

R-Metairie; Willard, D-New Orleans; Windhorst, R-Terrytown;

Winston, R-Covington.

ABSENT/NOT VOTING: Morrell, D-New Orleans; Scalise,

R-Jefferson.

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GRAPHIC

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