

BATON ROUGE -- A House committee spent more than an hour Tuesday debating a bill to transfer control of New Orleans-area ferries from the **Crescent City Connection** to the state transportation department, but postponed a vote until Monday to give state officials time to address concerns cited as reasons for the transfer.

Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, said the ferries do not pay for themselves and eat into the \$22 million a year the CCC generates in tolls. He said the **Crescent City Connection** Division, an agency of the state Department of Transportation and Development, has used toll money to renovate headquarters and for unrelated projects "while my citizens suffer" with poor service and must pay bridge tolls.

Connick said some of the bridge toll revenues were supposed to be used for road projects near the bridge and its approaches but only about \$200,000 has been spent on studies for those projects.

Connick said the agency generates a little more than \$230,000 a year in ferry tolls but pays more than \$270,000 a year in salary and benefits to crews to run them, relying instead on bridge tolls to subsidize operations. Drivers with toll tags pay 40 cents to cross the span while those without them pay \$1. Ferries are free to pedestrians and cost \$1 per vehicle. In other parts of the state, pedestrians pay 25 cents to ride ferries.

"If we are going to charge things up there (in north Louisiana) we should charge them down here," said Rep. **Sam Little**, R-Bastrop. Little asked the panel to consider a fee for pedestrians but no amendment was offered to impose a pedestrian toll on the New Orleans-area ferries.

Newly appointed department Secretary **William Ankner** said that he has been looking into the issues Connick has raised but has not had enough time "to get my own arms around the (toll) situation."

Because it would cost the department about \$9 million a year to run the ferries, Ankner said he is "not favorably disposed to this legislation." He asked the panel "to give me time to come back and report to you" on the use of the bridge tolls.

Connick said that the \$22 million a year the bridge tolls generate should be used to operate the span and pay for improvements to the streets near the West Bank Expressway, as state law requires. "We are not a bank," he said. "My bill makes DOTD pay attention. Let's look inside the **Crescent City Connection**" and its operations.

Connick's proposal is House Bill 389.

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