

House panel votes to put CCC force under State - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - April 14, 2010 - page A 02

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BATON ROUGE -- A House committee Tuesday took the first step toward shifting the **Crescent City Connection** police force from the state transportation department to the authority of State Police.

The Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works voted 8-3 for House Bill 493 by Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, sending it to the House floor for debate.

Connick has been critical of the operations of the **Crescent City Connection**, which has been under the Department of Transportation and Development since he took office two years ago. He said State Police should have the power to oversee how bridge officers are deployed and how they operate.

Connick said troopers will not patrol the span and the 14 miles of roadway on either side of it -- from the Superdome to Avondale.

He said State Police will not incur additional costs, since the bridge toll money that now flows to the **Crescent City Connection** Division of the transportation agency would be re-directed to State Police.

"Let the DOTD run the roads, not a police force," Connick said. "Allowing State Police to come in will do wonders. ... Give some confidence back to the public that pays the tolls. The public has no confidence in this organization."

Connick said the police force numbers about 35 officers, but although police cruisers are parked unused near the span, they are rarely seen.

Sherry LeBas, the interim secretary of the transportation agency, asked the panel to hold off on making the change. She said that in 2012 the tolls on the bridge are set to expire -- unless extended by the Legislature -- and that would be the time to look at the change.

"Why look at this now?" LeBas said.

LeBas aide Sean Wilson said the department has made changes in the operation of the division as well as personnel who run the bridge. The division was recently cited by the legislative auditor for not keeping track of the operations of the New Orleans unit from its Baton Rouge office.

"We have totally new leadership now," LeBas said. "We did have issues (at the bridge division). Our bridge police are doing a good job."

Connick said the department promised a year ago to come up with a plan of action to deal with the span's police, but it has not done so.

Although some progress has been made, Connick said, "State Police need to come in and say, 'This is what needs to be done.'"

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