

Jindal vetoes Barataria Boulevard work - Bill - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - July 15, 2008 - page 01

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Saying it was not authorized by state law, Gov. Bobby Jindal vetoed a \$5.8 million project that would widen two sections of Barataria Boulevard in Marrero using toll money from the **Crescent City Connection**.

Rep. Patrick Connick, R-Harvey, who added the project in a massive state capital spending bill, said he will try for a second opinion from Jindal but acknowledged the project's short-term future is unlikely.

"I'm going to ask him to reconsider, and I'll do my best to let the West Bank and the state know what's going on at the **Crescent City Connection**," Connick said.

Connick and several other West Bank legislators have questioned why the authority that oversees the bridge has not used toll revenue to pay for numerous West Bank road projects outlined in the state law that reauthorized tolls in 1998. The law listed a number of costly projects with price tags that have skyrocketed over the past decade, but the Barataria project was among the more affordable, Connick argued when adding it to the bill.

When the language was added to the bill last month, there was opposition from William Ankner, the secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development, which oversees the bridge authority.

Jindal's veto letter notes that "legislative leadership requested the veto of this amendment. Therefore, I am vetoing this item."

His letter also says the project, one of 258 items totaling \$16.1 million vetoed by Jindal, does not comply with the list of road projects outlined in the 1998 state law. The law has a provision for "improvements to Barataria Boulevard and Terry Parkway," language that Connick says should not hold it up.

"If you read the simple, plain language of the law, it approves it, it allows for widening," he said.

The project was meant to widen sections of Barataria to six lanes between 14th Street and Richland Drive, and from Son-K Drive to Cousins Boulevard, completing previous road improvements.

The overall operations and accounting of the **Crescent City Connection** division of DOTD are under scrutiny by the state legislative auditor and several independent firms, after prodding by the Legislature. The bridge authority's executive director, Alan LeVasseur, retired earlier this month, but agency officials say it had nothing to do with the recent agency audits.