

The **Crescent City Connection** took in \$22 million in tolls last year, but nearly \$23 million went toward the maintenance and operation of the ferries and to the salaries and benefits of the bridge's 200-plus employees, such as toll takers and the bridge's own police force.

The bridge authority gets additional federal money to pay for its mounting expenses, but the thin margins leave little for mandated improvements to infrastructure on the West Bank, including a proposed expansion of Barataria Boulevard, said state Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, at a recent West Jefferson Civic Coalition meeting at West Jefferson Medical Center.

"Those are good people over at the CCC, and I have no animosity towards them," Connick said, "but something's got to be done. When you pay that dollar, it's going to salaries. What's the purpose of waiting in traffic, with gas at \$4 a gallon, and getting nothing in return?"

"We've got to take care of those employees," Connick said, "but we can't just keep paying money just to pay money. We've got to make sure we're spending it right and not on bureaucracies."

Connick also pointed to more than \$1 million in toll revenue being diverted to the Louisiana 1 toll project in Lafourche Parish. Officials with the state Department of Transportation and Development, which oversees the bridge authority, say the money is being used for Louisiana 1 office staff working at the **Crescent City Connection** headquarters.

"We're not a bank," Connick said. "We're not a savings and loan, and we should not be using our toll money to build space in a house for another project."

As for the ferries, Connick was clear that he doesn't want to get rid of them. "Let's just run them right," he said. "Let's give them a boat that doesn't break down because of a leaky gasket."

Connick also pointed to inefficient routes and the decrepit conditions of ferry terminals, such as the one at Jackson Avenue, as evidence of the money drain the ferries have become. At one point, Connick wondered aloud what happened to the \$600,000 allocated in 2006 to replace the escalators at the Canal Street terminal.

Connick urged those in attendance to contact state Transportation and Development Secretary William D. Ankner at wda@dotd.gov to voice their concerns.

"I need your help to say, 'Hey, we need to change things,' " Connick said.

Gordon Wadge, president and CEO of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, also was on hand to update the coalition on the status of its Hope Haven campus in Marrero.

Despite the recent closure of Hope Haven's children's residential program, Wadge said that 10 of the 12 buildings on campus are still in heavy use, housing ministries such as a shelter for homeless

families, an independent living skills program and food programs for seniors as well as families.

As for the two buildings that used to house the children's residences, Wadge said the archdiocese will be re-examining how best to use them, and welcomes any input from the community.

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