

Panel passes screen in front seat of cars - Action - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - May 24, 2011 - page A 02

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BATON ROUGE -- Despite some concerns for safety, a House committee Monday unanimously approved legislation that would allow a "split-view" screen in the front seat of vehicles that would allow passengers, but not drivers, to watch a movie or music video.

The Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works sent House Bill 243 by Rep. Helena Moreno, D-New Orleans, to the House floor for more debate.

"Last week, we killed a bill on cell phone use" by drivers, said Rep. Sam Little, R-Bastrop. "Now, we are here trying to get John Wayne movies (in vehicles)?"

Moreno said the technology exists now that allows passengers to watch a video on one side of the screen while drivers see just a GPS system or other navigational aids, but cannot see the video, unless they "leaned over completely" into the passenger seat.

"This would be no different than listening to the radio or a book on tape," she said.

Moreno said that although Mercedes-Benz is the only vehicle now offering the feature, other auto lines are expected to have them installed in future model years.

Backers of the bill said that at least 34 other states allow the "split-view" screen function, but Louisiana car dealers cannot legally sell those vehicles under state law.

On another issue, the panel deferred to the wishes of Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, and took no action on his House Bill 551 to create a commission to oversee the operations of the **Crescent City Connection** and advise the state Department of Transportation and Development on the future of the bridge tolls and other policy matters.

The tolls are set to expire next year.

Connick asked the panel to defer action on his bill so he and other New Orleans-area lawmakers can work on a resolution to create a task force of business and civic leaders to advise the department on the tolls and other matters.

Connick showed a slide presentation outlining the shortcomings of the bridge's operations, including \$15 million in surplus earthquake and flood insurance over existing policies, missing contracts and projects that have not been funded as planned from bridge tolls that were renewed in 1998.

"There has been illegal use of toll money," said Connick, a longtime critic of the span's operations. Department officials say they have tightened oversight of bridge operations.

Connick said he wants to see the tolls expire Dec. 31, 2012, but said the task force should look into the issue, although its members are getting involved late in the process. "I think they will be fishing behind the net," he said.

Connick said he will meet with Sen. David Heitmeier, D-Algiers, and others to discuss the task force. Heitmeier also has a bill this session that calls for the creation of a commission to better oversee the CCC.

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Ed Anderson can be reached at eanderson@timespicayune.com or 225.342.5810.

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