

Joint Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works

Minutes of Meeting
2023-2024 Interim
January 30, 2024

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Ryan Bourriaque, chairman of the House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

HOUSE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Ryan Bourriaque, chairman
Representative Chad Michael Boyer
Representative Jacob Braud
Representative Tehmi Jahi Chassion
Representative Kellee Hennessy Dickerson
Representative Bryan Fontenot, vice chairman
Representative Steven Jackson
Representative C. Travis Johnson
Representative Patricia "Pat" Moore
Representative Tammy T. Phelps
Representative Rodney Wayne Schamerhorn
Representative Joy Walters
Representative Jeffrey Fons "Jeff" Wiley

SENATE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Patrick Connick, chairman
Senator Mark Abraham
Senator Gary M. Carter Jr., vice chairman
Senator William "Bill" Wheat Jr.

SENATE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Heather Cloud
Senator Patrick McMath
Senator Edward J. "Ed" Price

HOUSE STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Allison Williams, legislative analyst
Jennifer Winkler, legislative analyst
Darcas Deverteuil, committee administrative assistant

SENATE STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Archana Cadge, attorney
Christine Peck, attorney

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Myrtis Jarrell, sergeant at arms

III. BUSINESS**To consider and vote on the Department of Transportation and Development entering a Public Private Partnership (P3) contract for the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge Project**

Joe Donahue, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only and presented a presentation entitled, "I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge", Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records.

Representative Schamerhorn asked the secretary if government funds could be used to prorate the fees and the interest rates that are built into the P3 contract to which Mr. Donahue answered that extra funds and the revenue generated by the toll will be used to lower the toll rates, shorten the toll term, or to build other infrastructure projects in the five-parish area. Representative Schamerhorn asked the secretary if the initial bridge design reviewed cut out the extra lights and cables that were contributing to substantial cost of the bridge. Secretary Donahue stated that the fundamental design of the bridge has not changed and the aesthetics that Representative Schamerhorn was referring to are not finalized.

Senator Abraham asked a series of questions about the P3 contract in areas pertaining to funding, cost savings, and auditing. The secretary informed Senator Abraham that the \$409M is estimated potential funding for bonding value and is dependent upon market rate at financial close. He also explained that there are numerous provisions in the contract to ensure a great deal of oversight, but the primary one is that the company will have to provide an annual independently audited financial statement to the department.

Representative Phelps asked the secretary what the department did in order to lower the toll rates. He responded that they changed the vehicle classification for the locals to be at a discounted rate. To reduce the rates for local big trucks the department agreed that the additional public funds received will be used to bring down the rates that were previously quoted to the committee back in October of 2023. He reiterated to the committee that the tolling on the bridge would not begin until construction was completed on the bridge, roughly a seven year time frame.

Senator Connick asked a series of questions in regards to the contract and the negotiations that took place. The secretary explained that the contract will be available to the public. In reference to Senator Connick's question as to whether a toll tag in one area will be viable in another, he responded that the system that will be used on the toll is not running and this matter is not under the department's control, but tags should be interoperable.

Senator Carter asked if there were any other tolling bridges on the interstate system and how tolls would be handled in the event of a evacuation. Secretary Donahue answered by stating that there are tolling bridges on the interstate system but this project would be the first operating toll on I-10. The secretary also explained that in the case of an emergency evacuation, tolls can be suspended for about a day without charge but if the suspension should extend longer than a day the state will have to make a payment to cover lost revenue.

Representative Bourriaque asked the secretary to work with Mayor McMillin of Westlake to make sure that the relocations of the pipelines and railroads align with the community needs to which the secretary agreed to do.

Jay Derr, Reason Foundation, 825 Forge Avenue, Westlake, LA 70669, spoke in support of the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Cully Frisard, Frisard Companies, 705 E. Airline Highway, Gramercy, LA 70052, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Patrick Hay, Hay Brothers Inc., 1805 Burnett Bay Lane, Lake Charles, LA 70611, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Larry Terrell, 14405 S. Lakeshore, Covington, LA 70435, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Randy Guillot, Triple G Express/LMTA, 800 St. George Avenue, Jefferson, LA 70121, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Brad Nelson LMTA/Freedom Trucks, 2203 W. Sole Road, Lake Charles, LA 70605, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Todd Hine, LMTA/Hine Environmental Services, 4327 Highway, 27 S., Sulphur, LA 70665, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project.

Renee Amar, LMTA, 4838 Bennington Avenue, Baton Rouge LA, 70808, spoke in opposition to the Calcasieu River Bridge Project. Ms. Amar answered questions from Representative Phelps and Senator Abraham and informed the committee that most tolling is usually done on HOV Lanes or Express Lanes and that there are no tollings on the I-10 interstate system from California to Florida.

Coleman Brown, EBR Parish Chamber of Commerce, 6554 Florida Boulevard, Ste 233, Baton Rouge, LA 70806, spoke for information only on and provided a handout Exhibit B, which is included in the committee records.

Representative Jackson requested the secretary to return to the table for questions.

Representative Jackson asked the secretary questions regarding the difference between gas tax and toll tax as well as if there are any exemptions on the toll. Secretary Donahue explained that the difference between gas tax and toll tax is that gas tax is spread out across state projects and the toll tax will be paid to a financial facility. He also explained that there are some individuals who are exempt from paying the toll such as law enforcement officers, and those exemptions are outlined by statute.

Representative Moore asked the secretary if the only way to get the bridge reconstructed was by placing a toll on the bridge. Secretary Donahue explained that without the toll the state does not have the means to get a bridge in place. He stated that entering into a Public-Private Partnership (P3) would have the least impact to the state as a public contract would have resulted in higher toll rates as well as a longer operating toll.

Representative Wiley asked the secretary if there was a plan for the truckers who may have to cross the toll multiple times a day, to which the secretary stated that the state will use any extra funds and the revenue generated by the toll will be used to lower the toll rates.

Senator Abraham offered a motion to approve the department of Transportation and Development entering a Public Private Partnership (P3) contract for the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge Project for the Senate Committee on Transportation, Highways, and Public Works. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 4 yeas and 0 nays. Senators Connick, Abraham, Carter, and Wheat voted yea.

Representative Fontenot offered a motion to approve the department of Transportation and Development entering a Public Private Partnership (P3) contract for the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge Project for the House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works, to which Representative Dickerson objected. The committee administrative assistant called the roll and the project was approved by a vote of 11 yeas and 2 nays. Representatives Bourriaque, Boyer, Braud, Chassion, Fontenot, Jackson, C. Travis Johnson, Moore, Phelps, Schamerhorn, and Wiley voted yea. Representatives Dickerson and Walters voted nay.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 5 in support. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

Prepared statements were received via email for the Calcasieu River Bridge Project pursuant to House Rule 14.33.

To consider and approve the Amite River Basin Commission Annual Plan for 2024

Rachel Lambert, Amite River Basin Commission, 3535 S. Sherwood Forest, Baton Rouge, LA 70816, spoke for information only and presented a presentation entitled "Amite River Basin Commission Annual Plan 2024", Exhibit C, which is included in the committee records.

Representative Jackson offered a motion to approve the Amite River Basin Commission Annual Plan for 2024 for the House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works. Without objection the project was approved by a vote of 13 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Bourriaque, Boyer, Braud, Chassion, Dickerson, Fontenot, Jackson, C. Travis Johnson, Moore, Phelps, Schamerhorn, Walters and Wiley voted yea.

Senator Connick offered a motion to approve the Amite River Basin Commission Annual Plan for 2024 for the Senate Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 4 yeas and 0 nays. Senators Connick, Abraham, Carter, and Wheat voted yea.

Witness cards presented by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 1 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

To receive an update from the Department of Transportation and Development on the Harvey Tunnel project in Jefferson Parish

Joe Donahue, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only and presented a presentation for the Harvey Tunnel Update, Exhibit D, which is included in the records.

Scott Boyle, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only and answered a few questions from Senator Connick and Senator Carter in reference to the time line and details about project completion.

Barry Keeling, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, spoke for information only and answered questions from Senator Carter about project funding for the Harvey tunnel.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Representative Bourriaque informed the committee that the DOTD Road Show dates and meeting schedule would be sent via email.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Representative Jackson offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 12 yeas and 0. Representatives Bourriaque, Boyer, Braud, Chassion, Dickerson, Fontenot, Jackson, Moore, Phelps, Schamerhorn, Walters and Wiley voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Ryan Bourriaque
House Committee on Transportation, Highways and Public Works

Date adopted: