

Parish of West Baton Rouge



Office of the Parish President

Riley L. Berthelot, Jr.
Parish President

Mr. George Hill
1323 N. River Road
Port Allen, LA 70767

April 8, 2019

Re: Bridges over Intracoastal Canal

Mr. Hill,

Thank you for your letter expressing your concern over the existing bridges over the Intracoastal Waterway. While the existing bridges are part of the state highway system and La. Hwy 1 is under the oversight and control of LA DOTD; I share in your assessment of the critical need for another crossing over the Intra-coastal Waterway. I, and many others, have certainly recognized this need for quite some time. The process of securing funds for construction of the project, however, remains a daunting task; a task that has received much attention from West Baton Rouge Parish Officials for many years.

In the spring of 2001, the West Baton Rouge Parish Council launched an initiative to relieve traffic on La. Hwy 1 and provide additional capacity over the Intracoastal Waterway by constructing a connector route between LA 1 and Interstate 10 in West Baton Rouge Parish. In the years that followed, as a former member of the parish council and during my tenure as parish president, appeals for funds have been made to federal and state leaders and requests have been made annually for Capital Outlay funds. An informational booklet and a video have been made as a visual aid in gaining consideration for funding through the DOTD Mega Project Program. These visual aids have also been used in an attempt to adequately express the critical need for another crossing over the Intra-coastal Waterway to just about anyone who would listen from the Louisiana State Capital to Washington DC.

As President of the WBRP Transportation Authority, Chairman of the Baton Rouge MPO, Chairman of the Capital Region Planning Commission, Member of the Transportation Policy Committee and a recent appointee to the Capital Area Road and Bridge I continuously work to bring the transportation needs of West Baton Rouge Parish to the forefront.

While West Baton Rouge Parish residents are some of the most inconvenienced, this is not just a parish issue. The annual average daily traffic count on the existing bridge over the Intracoastal

Waterway is approximately 50,800. Recent population estimates place WBR Parish at 26,000. The average daily traffic count there is nearly twice the total population of this parish. It's a regional issue!

Any disruption to the existing bridges, such as the need for emergency repairs we have recently experienced, only exasperates our daily traffic issues. Unfortunately these incidents happen much too often. As a former member of the Parish Council and as Parish President, I have had numerous conversations with private investment firms, financial consulting firms, State and Federal Representatives and others only to hear that tolls alone would not be sufficient to support the construction of this \$145 million proposed project. It has repeatedly been said that our State and Federal Government does not have funds for infrastructure. Nevertheless, we continue to push this project to the final plan/shovel ready stage by accomplishing a number of required pre-construction activities in hopes of somehow securing funding for construction. Details on some of those activities can be found on the WBR Parish Website at <http://wbrCouncil.org/LA1LA415Connector>

Presently, under the administration of DOTD, Local, State and Federal funds are being used to advance the proposed project to its current status with the final design expected to begin in 2019, West Baton Rouge Parish has aggressively fought to secure state and federal funds and has also used local dollars for the required 20% match for completion of final plans. We remain actively engaged in moving this project forward. While the constant reminder of a lack of funds for infrastructure remains extremely frustrating, it has only fueled my resolve to find a way to make it happen. Hopefully, with the support of not only our local legislators but the support of concerned legislators from across the state, it will.

Help may be on the way, as representatives across the state will introduce House Bill No. 578 during the upcoming legislative session. This bill would dedicate funding of \$25 million per year from 2020-2026 from the Deep Water Horizon Litigation proceeds to fund the construction of the La. 1/ La. 415 Connector. I will continue to work with our local legislative delegation and the Governor to gain support for this Legislation. Senator Rick Ward will be carrying this bill on the Senate floor. A copy of the proposed bill is enclosed. For the first time, a viable funding source may have been identified and we will be prepared to take the fight to the State Capital. You can help by contacting your legislators to voice your support of the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Riley L. Berthelot, Jr.

Riley L. Berthelot, Jr.

West Baton Rouge Parish President

cc: Westside Journal

Riverside Reader

Honorable Rick Ward, Senator