

ONE to ONE

An Update on the Efforts of the LA 1 Coalition

Summer 1998

Thanks for the TEA

-by Executive Director Roy Francis

"Great news!" "Better than we expected!" "Spectacular!" These are just some of the words you may have heard coming from fellow Coalition members this summer after Congress delivered to the President a TEA bill that was much sweeter than anticipated. As part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), Senators and Representatives approved nearly \$6 million to support improvement efforts for LA 1 from Grand Isle to U.S. 90.

Part of our success is due to the efforts of Congressman Billy Tauzin.

The local congressman sponsored LA 1 projects in the House version of the transportation bill, calling for \$750,000 in study funds to identify the impact of this highway system in relation to energy, strategic oil reserves, the environment and hurricane evacuation. In addition, the Leeville Bridge was identified as the weakest link in the LA 1 system and Congressman Tauzin sponsored \$1.5 million in funding for the bridge. Getting final congressional approval for project funding, however, took a little more work and the support of Senators John Breaux and Mary Landrieu.

In the Senate's original version of the ISTEA bill, no highway projects categorized as high priority (a category that included LA 1) were listed to receive funding. And, when senators and congressmen met in conference committee to iron out differences in the proposed legislation, the House demonstration projects (the House category that included LA 1) were cut by 25 percent across the board. In other words, our total request was cut from \$2.25 million down to \$1.68 million. This could have been a disappointing end to our story. Instead,

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Funding Secured for Toll Road Study



After visiting Port Fourchon in February, DED Secretary Kevin Reilly agreed to help fund a study to determine the feasibility of a toll road in lower Lafourche. Pictured here are Ted Falgout, Roy Francis, Secretary Reilly, Vic Lafont and DED's Harold Price.

For years, drivers have paid a dollar for the convenience of crossing Mississippi River bridges in New Orleans and Donaldsonville. In the future, south Louisiana motorists may choose to pay for the convenience of traveling on an elevated highway from Golden Meadow to Port Fourchon. The feasibility of such a toll road is the subject of a study recently commissioned by the Greater Lafourche Port Commission.

According to executive committee member Loulan Pitre, the Department of Economic Development will supply \$75,000 to match the port commission's \$25,000 contribution for the study aimed at determining traffic and revenue forecasts. Now being conducted by Wilber Smith and Associates, the research effort will estimate the amount of revenue a toll would contribute to construction costs of the new road,

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Tauzin Visit Spotlights Highway Needs



Congressman Billy Tauzin got a first-hand look at the growing oil and gas activity in south Louisiana this spring. Shown here are Roy Francis, Ted Falgout, Congressman Tauzin and Loulan Pitre.

Surveying the increased oil and gas activity taking place at Port Fourchon during a recent visit to South Lafourche, U.S. Congressman Billy Tauzin saw first-hand the impact of the growing industry on the economy and local infrastructure. He had no trouble sharing his impression of the current situation with a group of business leaders and representatives of the LA 1 Coalition and the Greater Lafourche Port Commission.

"We have a case to take to the nation," Tauzin said during an April 20 breakfast meeting at the Cajun Sportsman Restaurant. "Port Fourchon is indeed where the heart of the oil and gas activity is. But we need the arteries to supply the transportation—the lifeblood—to and from the port."

While on a tour of the area, coalition members briefed the congressman on the status of local and national efforts to obtain funds for road improvements to

LA 1. Tauzin also updated the group on the federal highway bill which was, at the time, being considered by congress, and gave his support to the idea of bringing more equity into the process by which revenues generated from oil and gas production in the Outer Continental Shelf are distributed to individual states.

"Having the backing of Congressman Tauzin and the rest of the Louisiana delegation is essential in helping us achieve our goals. We would love to have every U.S. senator and representative down here to see for themselves how important south Louisiana is to the oil and gas industry and the condition of the only road leading to the region's busiest port. But since that's not possible, our best communicators are our own elected officials," remarked LA 1 Coalition Executive Director Roy Francis.

Toll Road Study

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as well as survey current LA 1 drivers to learn how another road in the area would affect traffic patterns.

"Just from talking with representatives of companies who move a lot of people and products on this stretch of LA 1 to Port Fourchon, we have an idea that commercial support for a toll road is there. We just need to research it further

to determine if toll collection would generate enough money to pay for a substantial portion of the project," explained Pitre.

The design and construction of a 14-mile elevated highway from Port Fourchon to the Golden Meadow flood-gates is one of the priority goals of this coalition, and there are several benefits of making it a toll road. To begin with, the state is able to use toll collections as

Thanks for TEA

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this is where the relationships we have developed with our senators really paid off.

Once funding for the House projects was reduced, Senators Breaux and Landrieu successfully worked to convince their peers to redirect this 25 percent reduction as a funding increase for LA 1 projects, resulting in an additional \$2.3 million for the Leeville Bridge and \$2 million for other LA 1 studies. All told, our projects were listed four times in the bill for a total of \$5.98 million in federal funding.

The final version of the highway legislation is called the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and was signed by the president on June 9th. Total funding for the state of Louisiana increased from \$264 million per year to \$416.2 million, and the southern states are finally receiving more for every dollar of gasoline tax paid.

On the same day that President Clinton signed the bill into law, Coalition Chairman Ted Falgout and I met with the Secretary of the Louisiana DOTD, Frank Denton. We asked Secretary Denton to conduct the proposed highway studies during this first year of funding, and allow the LA 1 Coalition to play a role in the study process. He agreed to help us with our request, and said he would do whatever necessary to expedite the approved studies.

Yes, the TEA is much sweeter than we expected, and we have a lot of local and state officials, and Coalition members to thank for this latest round of legislative success. But, we're not through yet; our "road work" is still in progress.



a portion of the match for federal funds, and the revenue usually results in faster construction. In addition, by the very nature of a toll, those who use the new road would pay for it.

"Setting up a new highway as a toll road may make this a more economically feasible project, but we'll have to wait and see what the study reveals," Pitre said.

Chairman's Report

-by Ted Falgout, Executive Director,
Greater Lafourche Port Commission

As most of you are aware, when we decided to form the LA 1 Coalition, we knew it would be a tough job to get the highway improvements needed. Not only do we want a lot of money, but we also want it fast. We realized it would take an extraordinary effort. From the start, we established an aggressive timetable of just three years to secure funding for our goal of improving the highway from Grand Isle to U.S. 90.

We now sit 18 months later at the midpoint of our aggressive effort, and we certainly have some success stories to tell but also have a long way to go.

Eighteen months ago, I would have never envisioned that we could have accomplished as much as we have by midpoint in our effort.

We knew that before an effort of this nature could get off the ground, people had to understand it and its significance to them. I think Roy and the entire Coalition has done an exceptional job at

We must keep the "eye of the tiger" and remain hungry and focused on our objectives.

making people aware of our effort and pounding into their minds that this is a project of national significance. We have also made great strides within the Louisiana Department of Transportation in convincing them that this project should be a priority and that it cannot

proceed under the standard highway construction practices that take decades to complete.

This and past newsletters keep you up to speed on the effort, which in my opinion, has been extremely successful to date and well worth the investment. But, do not become complacent with success—the big dollars are yet ahead of us, and we must keep the "eye of the tiger" and remain hungry and focused on our objectives.

It is essential that major oil and gas interests step up to the plate with substantial monetary support. This support is not only needed to show commitment to the project, but essential in enabling necessary studies and engineering to be fast-tracked and not fall victim to the normally slow highway process.

Especially with our recent success in Washington, NOW is the time for major oil and gas to partner with this Coalition.

Legislature Renews Gas Tax, But TIME is Cut Short for LA 1

As the final days of the 1998 fiscal-only legislative session drew to a close, state lawmakers approved an extension of Louisiana's 4-cent gasoline sales tax and breathed new life into a struggling highway construction program. With this measure, backed by Governor Mike Foster, the state's gas tax will be extended through Jan 1, 2020, and the money it generates will continue to fund a slate of targeted highway projects designed to link all of Louisiana's major cities with four-lane highways, an effort known as the Transportation Infrastructure Model for Economic Development (TIMED) program.

All of this came as great news to supporters of 16 previously identified projects, but unfortunately the lineup did not include any new projects like LA 1. While members of a task force created by Gov. Foster to review TIMED recommended that the program be reauthorized and new projects like LA 1 improvements be included, the bill passed by the legislature allows tax collections to benefit only existing projects. It was the law and not politics, however, that came to play in this case.

"I believe the Coalition was successful in communicating the importance of

LA 1 to the economy of Louisiana and why funding for improvements is so important right now. But the issue was much bigger than our cause or our lobbying efforts. Constitutionally, the legislature couldn't make a change to the TIMED program without taking the entire tax issue to the voters," Executive Director Roy Francis explained.

Earlier this spring, Francis and Coalition Chairman Ted Falgout met with the 21-member task force and explained how continued economic growth in southeast Louisiana is dependent on the health of the two-lane highway, currently the only road linking Port Fourchon with coastal Louisiana. Economic impact is a major consideration for projects included in TIMED.

"While we didn't see TIMED as one major funding source, we did see the possible reauthorization and revision of the program as an opportunity to secure state dollars for the road improvements we have been pushing for. Although we weren't able to get on that list, I still believe our successful effort to inform lawmakers, policymakers and voters about our goals will serve us well in the months to come," Falgout said.

A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FROM THE STATE HOUSE



The LA 1 highway system had its day in the spotlight this summer as state senators and representatives approved a concurrent resolution requesting Congress to fund improvements to the ailing roadway.

According to House Concurrent Resolution 42, sponsored by Representatives Diez and Theriot and Senator Landry, since "this highway is the evacuation route for approximately 35,000 people including 6,000 offshore workers from across the United States; over 1,000 cargo trucks use this highway each day; and Louisiana Highway 1 is the access to this nation's two most productive estuaries—Barataria and Terrebonne," the state asks the federal government "who is generating over three billion dollars annually from royalties and lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico, to help fund the necessary infrastructure improvements to access the riches of the Gulf of Mexico."

LA 1 COALITION MEMBERS

As of June 30, 1998

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LA 1 COALITION

Board Meeting Review

The LA 1 Coalition's Board of Directors met July 14th at Danos & Curole to discuss the results of the federal and state legislative sessions and funding received for LA 1 projects.

"All in all, we are very pleased with our legislative efforts this year," Executive Roy Francis said. "The fact that we now have the federal government identifying our highway system as a priority, and increasing our funding from

\$2.5 million to \$5.98 million is great news."

Board members also learned of the state's commitment of dollars to match the federal funds, and reviewed the projects that have been targeted to receive funding.



For Your Information...

If you would like to receive additional copies of "One to One" or more information on the LA 1 Coalition, call Roy Francis, Executive Director, at (504) 448-4485 or write to us at P.O. Box 2048-NSU, Thibodaux, LA 70310. Our office is located on the campus of Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, LA, within the offices of the South Louisiana Economic Council. The LA 1 Coalition is a non-profit 501-c4 corporation.