

Capital Area Road and Bridge District Meeting Minutes

Time/Date: 2:00 p.m., September 30, 2024

Location: Louisiana State Capital
Senate Committee Room "F"

Members Present: Chairman, Mr. J. H. Campbell, Jr., Governor's Appointee
Mr. Daniel Helms (representing Parish President Clint Cointment),
Ascension Parish
Parish President Jason Manola, West Baton Rouge Parish
Mr. Wally Avara (representing Parish President Randy Delatte), Livingston
Parish
Secretary Joe Donahue, DOTD
Parish President Chris Daigle, Iberville Parish
Mr. Fred Raiford (representing Parish President Broome), EBR Parish

Member Absent: None

❖ Chairman Campbell called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Minutes:

Minutes from the June 24, 2024, were approved, on motion made by Sec. Donahue and seconded by President Daigle.

Next on the Agenda, there was an update on the progress being made by DOTD and Atlas Technical Consultants, LLC., since the last meeting, on the Bridge Project, and its identified tasks and timelines.

- A. Introduction of Representative(s) of Atlas Technical Consultants, LLC.
- B. Comments from Representative(s) of Atlas Technical Consultants, LLC.
- C. Other Bridge Project updates from attending representatives of DOTD.
- D. Comparison of Timelines and Tasks to actual performance by Atlas.
- E. Further updates on the three remaining alternatives for potential Bridge locations.
- F. Report on amount of funds expended/disbursed by DOTD to Atlas.
- G. Status of Phase II.
- H. Updated timelines for site location decision and other required environmental reports or assessments.

Reports available at www.mrbssouth.com

A Slide Presentation was made by Mr. Paul Vaught and Ms. Kara Moree including updates from the project team. Mr. Vaught indicated that he was being reassigned to another role within DOTD, and introduced **Kristina Brignac** of DOTD as the new MRB (Mississippi River Bridge) Project Manager

Mr. Campbell inquired about the project delays and asked if the project was about one year behind schedule. Mr. Vaught agreed the project was running behind and indicated slower contract negotiations and changes with FHWA processes had contributed to the delay. Mr. Campbell then inquired about catching up on the timeline and Mr. Vaught indicated there was no chance to truly catch up given the federal process requirements.

Sec. Donahue inquired about the NEPA process and whether there was only 12 months to finish NEPA. Mr. Vaught indicated there is still some uncertainty about the process and the Spring 2025 timeline for completing NEPA.

Mr. Campbell then inquired about how cultural resources would be weighed in the final decision. Mr. Vaught highlighted how NEPA requires taking all factors into consideration to make a final decision.

President Manola inquired about the necessity of doing all of the non-NEPA required items and the potential to make unnecessary efforts. Mr. Vaught indicated some of the non-NEPA required items are important to understand the overall viability of any one location. Sec. Donahue emphasized the importance of spending more time studying the project now to make sure that nothing is potentially missed before construction.

Mr. Vaught highlighted that a final decision on an EIS (Environmental Impact Study) or an EA (Environmental Assessment) had not been made, but an EA is the likely course of action. President Daigle inquired about the date of the selection of the preferred alternative and Mr. Vaught indicated that the preliminary preferred alternative should be selected in Q2 of 2025.

Mr. Raiford then praised the project team for gathering additional information before starting NEPA.

Mr. Campbell then inquired about the process for the public meetings. Mr. Vaught indicated that all of the data would be presented to the public for their review and comment. President Manola inquired about additional hurdles during the NEPA process that could cause delays and Mr. Vaught indicated the biggest delay would be if an Environmental Impact Statement was required or if a major cultural resource was discovered.

Sec. Donahue then recognized Kristina Brignac who would be taking over the project as Mr. Vaught is being promoted within DOTD.

Deputy Sec. Barry Keeling of DOTD gave a presentation on the funding for the bridge project. \$31.7 million from the vehicle sales tax was deposited to the project fund for the current fiscal year. This contribution was in addition to the \$300 million in a prior direct legislative state appropriation.

President Daigle inquired about the lack of interest being earned on the \$300 million and Keeling indicated DOTD was looking at a better investing arrangement for the \$300 million.

President Daigle inquired about bonding out the expected annual amount of vehicle sales taxes (\$40 million) and Keeling indicated a bonding decision had not been made, and even if approved, such a decision, under current financial conditions, would only render approximately \$550 million for the project, much less than needed to complete the project.

Sec. Donahue indicated that he felt saving money for a bridge was the best way to pay for bridge but there was still a risk that the legislature may not allow all of the money to be saved and may try to redirect said funds.

Under New Business:

Chairman Campbell sought ratification of the decision to transfer ownership of the District's website domain from Sparkhound to Franklin Associates (FA) so that FA can easily send out meeting notifications via email to stakeholders and perform other such required maintenance and communications. Sparkhound agreed to the transfer to FA. The future yearly fee of \$100 or so would be paid by the District to FA as incurred.

A motion to move the website domain to Franklin Associates was made by President Manola, second by Sec. Donahue and the motion passed without objection.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Chairman Campbell called for public comments. He reminded all in attendance that the **Capital Area Road and Bridge District (CARB-D)** does not make any decision about the actual location of the site where the Bridge would make its crossing. He reminded all in attendance that the CARB-D was created as a Taxing District, and the entities involved in the site selection process were the DOTD, and their Contract Consultant, Atlas Technical.

Campbell asked if there was any opposition to any of the proposed crossings other than **Location E-11-(IV)**.

There was one opposition to crossing F-14 made by Michael Cauble.

After that comment, all other Public Comments were received only on **Location E-11-(IV)**, as follows:

Not Speaking in Opposition to Location E-11-(IV) were:

Mildred Bailey; Greg Beckstrom; Marsha Beckstrom; David Callender, Jr.; Helen Causey; Robert Causey; Charles Carpenter; Clecie Carpenter; Catherine Dorgant; Michael LeBlanc; and Philip LeBlanc.

Speaking in **Opposition** to **Location E-11-(IV)** were:

Clifford Comeau; Laura Comeau; Bert Dorgant; Lydia Haydel; Pennie Landry; Rachael Schexnayder; Kathy Ellison Smith and Kathryn Whiteside

Opposition views covered such areas as the impact on drainage and the Cypress Forest and its 300–400-year-old trees being removed or damaged. One concern was about saving Plaquemine Point, and the location of the bridge greatly affecting the decision to build a new personal residence in the area.

Questions were asked about input being included in the Environmental Documents. Also, questions were asked about public involvement in the NEPA process, and the scope of the engagement and investigation by the Public. Another question involved the FHWA meetings, and the level of public “input” permitted at the public meetings and the format of the public meetings.

All residents expressed concerns about certain questions not being answered, and they wanted the filed documents modified to include info provided by several people expressing opposition to this site location. All landowners wanted to receive notice of any and all meetings of the public. Again, it was noted that such Cypress trees are allegedly protected by state laws.

ADJOURNMENT: Chairman Campbell called for a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn was offered by President Daigle.

Without objection, the meeting was deemed adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

Secretary of CARB-D

President Chris Daigle, Iberville Parish

Attest:

J.H. Campbell, Jr. Chairman of CARB-D