

PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE GREATER NEW ORLEANS EXPRESSWAY COMMISSION HELD ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2012, AT 10:00 A.M., IN THE GNOEC CONFERENCE ROOM, VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA BUILDING, 3939 NORTH CAUSEWAY BOULEVARD, SUITE 400, METAIRIE, LA

PRESENT: Lawrence K. Katz, Chairman; Lawrence M. Rase, Vice Chairman; Stephen G. Romig, Treasurer; Peter F. Egan, Secretary

OTHERS: Carlton Dufrechou; Debbie Lopreore; Chief Nick Congemi; Cheryl H. Lambert; Melissa M. Phillipott; Georgie Bagnetto; Eileen Barthe'; Red Thompson; Robert Graham; Stacie Heffker; Lt. Carl Lemoine; Ofc. Michael Bernard; Phil Meyers, Cary Bourgeois, Gavin Gillen & Shelby LaSalle, Jr., GEC, Inc.; Bill Becknell, The Becknell Law Firm; Burgess McCranie, McCranie, Campbell, Sistrunk, Anzelmo, Hardy, McDaniel & Welch; Denis Milliner, Bank of New York; Bennett Powell, Kathy Gambino & James Lynch, Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management; John Lopez, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation; Rene Chopin, Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc.; Rene Poche, Corps of Engineers; Fred Robertson; Bob Warren, The Times-Picayune

ABSENT: Michael R. Lorino, Jr., Assistant Secretary Treasurer

The Chairman called the meeting to order.

On motion by Romig, seconded by Rase, the minutes of the regular meeting held on January 11, 2012 were accepted as written. Mr. Katz, Mr. Rase, Mr. Romig and Mr. Egan voted in favor of the motion.

On behalf of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, Dr. Lopez reported for January, of the fifty water quality samples taken, forty-four samples met primary contact recreation standards. Two samples exceeded on the South Shore and four on the North Shore. Dr. Lopez stated the lake has recovered from the Bonnet Carre' Spillway opening several months ago.

On behalf of the Causeway Police Charitable Foundation, Mr. Gillen stated the Foundation is considering an event within the next few months.

Mr. Dufrechou reported twelve vessel openings, one brake incident, six drive fault incidents and two test openings at the drawbridge for January. Mr. Dufrechou reported three days of fog operations,

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January 6, 22, and February 2. He stated police and MAP personnel responded to 226 breakdowns on the Causeway Bridge and 19 breakdowns on the Huey P. Long Bridge.

Mr. Dufrechou stated the biggest challenge is getting the commuters off the sound end of the bridge every morning since there is no third stacking lane. He reminded everyone that December 5 was when the Corps of Engineers reduced the traffic to two lanes off the bridge. Mr. Dufrechou stated the Causeway has been actively working the 6th Street signal light since mid-December. He introduced Causeway Police Officer Mike Bernard, stating that Officer Bernard was injured a few months ago when he was rear-ended by a motorist exiting the south end of the bridge in the construction area. Mr. Dufrechou stated Officer Bernard took over operations of the 6th Street light every morning from 6:00 a.m. sometimes until 10:00 a.m. Mr. Dufrechou stated Officer Bernard has a tough position in trying to get all the several thousands of commuters off the bridge and at the same time get the northbound traffic into the Lakeway buildings. Mr. Dufrechou stated he has had several meetings with Jefferson Parish Department of Public Works and the Administration, adding Jefferson is aware and several of the council people are empathetic of the Causeway's situation. He stated the best they are able to do right now is allow the Causeway to stack northbound traffic to West Esplanade and have made it clear the Causeway cannot allow West Esplanade to be blocked. Mr. Dufrechou stated presently Officer Bernard is giving more than four minutes of green time to southbound traffic and is watching the traffic at West Esplanade to make sure the intersection is not blocked. Mr. Dufrechou stated this will continue for at least another month; a portion of the third lane should be complete the week of March 2 - 9, which should reduce the delays on the bridge by about five minutes. Mr. Dufrechou showed a power point of the traffic buildup and backup on the bridge, stating the worst has been in mid-January. In response to Mr. Dufrechou's inquiry, Officer

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Bernard stated the peak of backup is between 7:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Mr. Dufrechou stated it takes about an hour for the traffic to dissipate - about 9:30 a.m. Officer Bernard stated the traffic backups are about four to five miles. Mr. Dufrechou stated there has been an increase in southbound accidents since the Corps' project started. Officer Bernard stated this morning there were two car and three car accidents, and a breakdown during this time. Mr. Dufrechou stated he is very proud of Officer Bernard, all police and MAP folks and dispatchers. Mr. Dufrechou pointed out the Huey P. Long police and MAP are in a similar situation, if not worse, because of the work on the Huey P. Long and mentioned the turning lane changes in the traffic circles made by LA DOTD causing tremendous backups. He added the changes have put them in a very thankless position that will continue for a few more months before the eastbound flyover is complete. With respect to Officer Bernard operating the 6th Street signal light, Mr. Katz stated the motorists do not understand what it would be like if he were not at the site. Mr. Katz stated on behalf of the Commission and the motoring public he would like to thank Officer Bernard for what he is doing, adding it is a tremendous service. Mr. Rase stated it seems like the most common complaint on the North Shore about the backup is at the four-mile hump, when someone goes across not knowing the traffic backup is there. Mr. Rase asked Chief Congemi if they can see the traffic building up to that spot, is there any way they can put a unit with lights by the four-mile site to alert motorists. Chief Congemi stated actually there are a lot of officers out there during that time period; they are all monitoring it; they all know what is taking place; and also they put up on the signs that there is slow traffic ahead and they have to slow down but the motorists just do not do it. Chief Congemi stated it is a very peculiar mind-set on that bridge where there are people that just bump into the side of the bridge for no apparent reason; they run into the back of people; it is very peculiar. Mr.

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Rase stated he and Mr. Dufrechou had a lady in front of the Council who asked why the Causeway put the light up at 6th Street during construction; she did not know it was there. Mr. Dufrechou stated he and Mr. Rase spoke with the St. Tammany Parish Council last Thursday night about the traffic backup and the Council did pass a resolution that is requesting the Jefferson Parish Council to try to redirect northbound morning traffic more toward Severn Avenue to give more green signal time coming off the bridge southbound.

Mr. Dufrechou stated they also had meetings with Mayor Villere week before last on realigning the bike path on the West Causeway Approach. He stated the Causeway maintenance forces have done some repair work on the West Approach at Fountainbleau and are doing a culvert on the East Approach tomorrow. He added the grounds will be in good shape for Mardi Gras.

Mr. Dufrechou stated on January 27 there was an incident in which a truck hit the side of the bridge. He stated the engineers have inspected the site and the crack is through the concrete, which is beyond the ability of the in-house forces to repair. Mr. Dufrechou stated Mr. Bourgeois is trying to work up an estimate and will report next month. In response to Mr. Katz's inquiry, Mrs. Lambert stated the information will be sent to the Third Party Claims adjuster to try to recover the costs.

On the Bridge Modifications at the south end project, Mr. Dufrechou stated to date about \$2 million of expenses have been fronted by the Causeway for the federal government. He stated as recommended by the Corps and the State, the reimbursement category submitted is being revised from business reestablishment to utilities. Mr. Bourgeois and Mr. McCranie will continue to followup on this.

On the North Channel Bascule Trunnion Bearing Maintenance project, Mr. Dufrechou stated completion is anticipated in April 2012.

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On the 5th lane at the North Toll Plaza, TEA-21 project, Mr. Dufrechou stated the bids will be submitted the end of this month and work should be underway this summer.

Mr. Dufrechou stated the Discretionary Bridge Program, which consists of the South Channel Fender Repair, the Bascule Control System Replacement, and the Piling Encapsulation for utility vaults, is anticipated to be bid by LA DOTD in the summer.

Mr. Dufrechou stated Chief Congemi will give a presentation and summary of the 2011 police statistics. Chief Congemi stated Lt. Lemoine drew up some interesting statistics, and he is very good at that. Chief Congemi stated Lt. Lemoine showed one to him and Mr. Dufrechou yesterday where he explained that on February 6, 2012 there were 19,000 southbound travelers for the entire day and of that 19,000, 31% of those people went through between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., and by 9:00 a.m., 42% of the people of that 19,000 daily vehicles had traveled southbound. Chief Congemi stated the tremendous amount of traffic traveling on any type of two-lane roadway is challenging and makes the job more interesting for them to try to figure out ways to do these things to make it a little more convenient for everyone; obviously they know it is a very unusual bridge. Chief Congemi stated Lt. Lemoine worked for the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office for a number of years until in 1983 when he went to the Kenner Police Department where he quickly rose up through the ranks and was head of the detective bureau for a long time. He stated Lt. Lemoine subsequently retired and then went back to Kenner and took on the chore of crime analysis, which he is very good at. Chief Congemi stated then the agency coaxed Lt. Lemoine to come to the Causeway Police Department because he had that very special skill of crime analysis, traffic analysis and any other kind of analysis one can think of. Chief Congemi stated the Causeway is very fortunate to have Lt. Lemoine, adding that ordinarily they can all get out there like some agencies

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do and guess about what has taken place and what has to be done without any support or statistics, and Lt. Lemoine has done an excellent job on compiling statistics for the Causeway and breaking them down into a simple format where he explains it to the officers and ranking officers to better guide them in where they need to apply their resources and what they need to do in order to combat the problem that they have on the bridge, much the same as one would do with typical crime analysis. Chief Congemi stated Lt. Lemoine has compiled this analysis for today to give an idea of what has taken place.

Lt. Lemoine stated there is good news for 2011. Lt. Lemoine stated in 2009 when he first started to compile the number of crashes, there were 155 reported crashes for the year; in 2010 they dropped to 142; and last year they dropped to 133 reported crashes, so they have had significant improvement over the last couple years. Lt. Lemoine stated of the crashes in last year, 24%, one-quarter, were one-vehicle crashes. Lt. Lemoine stated as Chief Congemi said sometimes people unexplainedly will lose control of their vehicles - sometimes due to blowouts or vehicles actually strike debris in the road. Lt. Lemoine referred to the truck that hit the bridge side mentioned earlier, stating the driver fell asleep; the driver fell asleep and woke up as he was hitting the left-hand rail, over corrected and went into the right-hand rail - those types of things happen. Lt. Lemoine stated one of the surprising things he has found throughout the last three years is that most of the crashes occur on a dry roadway; in 2011, 88% of the crashes were on dry roadway. He stated they tend to think it is when the worse conditions are, when it rains and the roadway is slippery, that has not been the case; most of them are on perfectly beautiful days. Lt. Lemoine stated there was one crash during a fog convoy, but was not related to low visibility; somebody was too close behind the vehicle in front of them, there was congestion and one car ran into the back

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of the other. Lt. Lemoine stated the fog convoys have been very successful and they are not getting accidents during those, and the few that they do get there have been very low speed accidents. Lt. Lemoine reported the primary causes of the crashes are written up as Careless Operation - 55 of the 133; another 20 were attributed to Following too Close. He stated on the Careless Operation, very few people will tell they were following too close; they will say they were distracted; so they are normally written as Careless Operation but in all probability people are just not allowing enough distance between themselves and the other vehicle. Lt. Lemoine stated Improper Lane Usage tends to be when someone switches lanes without paying attention to who is on the side. He stated 14 crashes were cases in which a disabled vehicle was struck. Lt. Lemoine stated the police joke that their motto is push, pull or drag - if someone breaks down in the roadway or has a flat tire the police will get them to a crossover as quickly as possible. Lt. Lemoine stated the worst case scenario is to have a stalled vehicle on the bridge and in 14 cases the vehicles were hit before the police could get to them. Lt. Lemoine reported 7 DWI crashes; 3 crashes were attributed to debris in the roadway; 2 were related to medical - someone suffered a heart attack or seizure; there were 2 attributed to failure to yield - those are people coming out of the crossovers into the roadway; and there were 12 miscellaneous crashes. With regard to the initial point of impact, Lt. Lemoine reported that in 78 of the 133, it was simply a rear-end collision; in 31 either the curb or another fixed object was hit - occasionally something like a sign but most are someone running into the rail; side impacts/lane changes were 20; and 3 were debris in the road; the attenuators were hit 3 times but as far as he can tell, in all 3 occasions it was a vehicle exiting the crossover. He stated there was one recently where the initial impact occurred in the rear and the vehicle was pushed into the attenuator. He stated normally the attenuators are hit by big trucks trying to pull out of a

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crossover. Lt. Lemoine showed a chart showing the number of accidents per month. He stated Mr. Dufrechou questioned him about March and August as to why there were so many. Lt. Lemoine stated he does not know and cannot really tell him, adding there was nothing significant about those months - not a lot of rain, not anything, just a spike. He pointed out in May, June and July they had good months, probably a little less traffic - no school traffic crossing the bridge - just months that they have good fortune and months that they do not have very good fortune. Lt. Lemoine referred to a chart showing locations of crashes and where they tend to occur. He stated the last mile of the southbound span includes the construction area with a significant number of crashes there within that mile. Lt. Lemoine stated even though the overall crashes went down for the year, in the area between the last Crossover 7000 and the south toll plaza, the numbers went up significantly for the year. He stated that area is where there is congestion, vehicles are slowing and people are just not maintaining control of their vehicle; there is no particular reason at the construction other than circumstances caused by the construction, which is the congestion, otherwise people are just running into the back of other people. Lt. Lemoine stated during 2010 there were 11 crashes between Crossover 7 and the South Toll Plaza on the southbound span; during 2011 there were 28 in that same area - a significant increase even though overall accidents are down. He stated the vast majority of those were rear-end crashes, 23 of 28, were rear-end collisions. Lt. Lemoine showed a graph and stated they have started tracking the average time to clear all lanes. He stated normally when there is a crash, the officers and MAP personnel will respond very quickly to try to get at least one lane open but sometimes it takes a little longer to get all lanes cleared; he believes the average is about 20.4 minutes to clear all lanes. He stated the previous year it was about 18.5 minutes. He pointed out a spike in May, stating the primary cause

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for that was an accident on May 1 where someone went into the lake. Lt. Lemoine explained there was a disabled vehicle, and a young man driving a truck did not see it until the last second, took a hard evasive maneuver, hit the left lane, swerved, went back and went over the right side rail. He stated the bridge was closed for over three hours for that; it was a Sunday, which is the lowest volume traffic day, and they made the decision to keep the bridge closed to pull the vehicle up from the lake, which took over three hours and accounted for most of it. Lt. Lemoine stated June and July had a high amount of time involved but those are months with very few accidents so if there was one bad accident it would cause the average time to go up quite a bit. Lt. Lemoine stated overall it took about twenty minutes to clear all lanes of accidents for the year, which is not bad. Lt. Lemoine stated in summary - 11,026 total citations last year; 5,840 were speeding citations, which is down about 2% from the previous year; there were 342 DWI arrests, which is an increase of about 20% from the previous year. He pointed out that even though they went down a little bit in total citations and speeding citations, they still managed to reduce crashes. Lt. Lemoine stated they attribute that to the fact that since Chief Congemi has been here, he has emphasized consistent enforcement so the officers are not going out just occasionally and selectively enforcing anything; they are trying to be as consistent as possible in enforcing the traffic regulations, and he thinks overall it has led to a much safer environment for driving on the bridge. Mr. Romig referred to the increase in DWI arrests and asked if it is because of increased surveillance and enforcement. Lt. Lemoine stated part of the problem he thinks they have had in the last couple years is that the number of officers had been reduced in 2008 in that they lost several officers; the overall size of the department had shrunk significantly and they were understaffed. He stated they made great efforts to bring in new people, good people, and are at

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full staff now. Lt. Lemoine stated all officers are trained in the use of the intoxilyzer and field sobriety testing; everyone is capable of doing it and they ask that they all actively enforce the law, which has been emphasized and has worked out quite well. Lt. Lemoine stated to illustrate that point, he presented a compilation of DWI arrests since 2004 and where they were ranked in the state. He stated the information comes from the State of Louisiana. He stated since 2004 they have always been in the top 25 and explained what is significant about that is no other department the Causeway's size is anywhere close; there are nine State Police troops that are all ahead of the Causeway with their arrests being in the 1,500 to 2,000 range. He stated every other department ahead of the Causeway is a sheriff's office or a department from a major city; there is no department the Causeway's size that has DWI arrests in terms of these numbers. In response to Mr. Katz's inquiry, Lt. Lemoine stated the Causeway has ranked in the top 25 every year and in the past year arrests have increased from 255 to 342, so he anticipates the Causeway should be close to the top 20 again. Lt. Lemoine stated for a department the Causeway's size, he thinks they are doing very well. Mr. Dufrechou stated in the past few years the accident rate has come down almost 20%, which he thinks is phenomenal and a great tribute to the police and all Causeway folks, as well as the motorists who are becoming more conscious and appreciate traveling across the bridge. Mr. Dufrechou stated to thank them, many of the reports received about DWIs and people driving carelessly come from motorists looking out for each other. He pointed out motorists report things by calling *CP. Mr. Dufrechou expressed concern about the 14 disabled vehicles, adding while the average response time is less than five minutes that is the one thing they are always conscious of getting to motorists as soon as possible to prevent rear-end situations that could become catastrophic. Mr. Becknell stated several times he has passed cars that are stalled, with someone

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sitting in the car doing nothing, and asked if it is advisable to stop behind them or will that hurt.

Chief Congemi stated that will not help any; when dispatchers answer the calls they typically tell them to get out of the car and walk to the back of it. Chief Congemi stated he does not know of a real good analogy of it and it is to say that it is very dangerous out there; people get mesmerized, and he guesses it is like looking down a shotgun barrel where they set it on a speed and they lose their depth perception. Chief Congemi stated often there is somebody that is behind one of those cars and they cannot get over and then they pull over at the last minute and the second car piles into the back of them, so it is a difficult situation but with the Camera Department, the communications section - they all respond very quickly; there are MAP people out there and maintenance people out there; they could not have a more attentive group of professionals responding to these types of situations so when there is a breakdown no one can respond quicker than they do. Mr. Becknell agreed the response time is great, adding he thought it would help when he sees someone sitting in a broken down car. Chief Congemi stated sometimes he stops behind them and turns on his lights, but is looking in his rear-view mirror just cringing and gets out the car quickly because they will get so close to him.

Mr. Katz stated he knows the Police Department has a wall of awards and will be getting a new one. Mr. Katz read a letter from the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to Chief Congemi thanking him for his hard work and dedication to making Louisiana roadways safer for the traveling public. He stated the Causeway Police were selected to receive this year's award for the most DWI arrests per department and per officer, Officer Wallace Burchfield. Mr. Katz stated Chief Congemi is invited to bring guests to the award ceremony, which will take place on March 6. Mr. Katz stated the Causeway is proud of Chief Congemi and the work he does and asked that he pass on to Officer

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Burchfield their thanks and congratulations. Chief Congemi stated on behalf of all the officers he would like to thank the Commission and will pass it on. Chief Congemi stated the reason Officer Burchfield is out right now is that he got banged up in one of the accidents also. Chief Congemi stated everybody that steps onto the bridge, not only police officers but MAP people and maintenance people are very vulnerable on the bridge. Chief Congemi stated like he says - this is like a shotgun barrel; it is not like a typical roadway on the interstate where if somebody does something ahead of them, they can veer off to the right onto the shoulder or to the left; here there is no place to go. Chief Congemi thanked the Commission.

Mr. Dufrechou read a letter from a motorist whose car became disabled on the bridge but he made it to a crossover just before it overheated and steering was lost. He called dispatch when it first happened giving his location. The dispatcher let him know he was close to Crossover 6 and she had already notified an officer. The officer located the problem and another officer returned to make sure he was okay while waiting for a tow service to arrive. The motorist wrote the crew was professional. Mr. Dufrechou showed a photo of Mr. Katz receiving an award from the Humane Society of LA for being a terrific fund-raiser. Mr. Katz stated he raised and donated \$11,000 but the newspaper reported it as \$1,000.

Mr. Katz stated the regular meetings are back on a normal schedule with the next meeting on Wednesday, March 7, 2012 at 10:00 a.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.



PETER F. EGAN
SECRETARY



LAWRENCE K. KATZ
CHAIRMAN