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Michael H. Wainwright: Evaluate impact on potential routing of Highway 3132 extension

One of my first stops as Mayor (Keith) Hightower's lobbyist for Shreveport was to the transportation secretary to push funding for the extension of state Highway 3132 from Bert Kouns Industrial Loop to Flournoy-Lucas Road to relieve traffic on Bert Kouns.

Secretary Kamm remarked that I had one of the hardest jobs in Baton Rouge. He said, "Shreveport is the envy of the state with its roadways." He said other cities are way behind and it's going to be hard for you to compete with their needs. Fortunately, funding did eventually come and that phase of 3132 is now complete.

It was in anticipation of that phase that the fifth lane was added to the current upgrade of Flournoy-Lucas. Everyone involved knew there was going to be a period of time when port-bound traffic would be using this route. Funding for the continuation of 3132 to the Port of Shreveport-Bossier, especially with the demands for Interstate 49 completion, presented a real challenge.

During my recently ended 13 years as a port commissioner, the eventual extension of 3132 all the way

to the port was always a high priority. By the same token, we acknowledged that funding for I-49 to Arkansas occupied an even more important goal for the port's long-term future.

Likewise, since the planners first conceived of 3132 connecting to the port, the prospect of Interstate 69 crossing Red River has emerged. That project offers the ultimate achievement of a route of I-49 to I-69 to the port that avoids business, hospital and residential areas altogether. As always, pinpointing an accurate timetable is a challenge; but its eventual completion will be a major milestone for the port.

In the interim, routing from the current terminus of 3132 to the port remains of paramount importance. I shared your shock when it was disclosed that expensive residential development had been allowed to encroach on what had been understood to be the right-of-way for the extension of 3132. At no time prior to that happening was anyone associated with the port made aware of the encroachment, nor were they asked for input.

Once confronted with the reality that the presumed routing would require the expropriation of more than 75 new, upper-end homes, it was unavoidably concluded that the additional expense, and reaction of those homeowners, doomed that route. It is my understanding that only then the Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments group unanimously voted to study alternative routing or solutions.

How and why the Metropolitan Planning Commission approved the expansion of the bordering subdivisions certainly merits inquiry. Likewise, I would hope that any other MPC action without full consideration of its impact on possible alternative routing would be halted. Similarly, I would suggest that any additional access to Flournoy-Lucas be evaluated for its impact on potential routing of the 3132 extension.

While I share Mr. (James K.) Elrod's frustration and anger at this latest obstacle, I must take exception to his attribution of blame to the port, in general, and (Caddo-Bossier Port Commission President) Jimmy Hall, in particular. I personally know how dedicated Mr. Hall and his fellow commissioners have been to the port's best interest. Anyone doubting their commitment need only take inventory of the incredible growth of our port.

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