



Causeway work to begin later this year

A designer and contractor have been selected for the first phase of construction to make the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway bridge safer.

LANCE TRAWEEK

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Lake Pontchartrain Causeway officials say they're on track for safety upgrades on the bridge, raising \$8 million of the approximate \$100 million since tolls for southbound drivers increased nearly a year ago.

In May 2017, the toll rose from \$2 to \$3 for southbound drivers with toll tags and from \$3 to \$5 for customers who pay with cash. The northbound side of the bridge remains free of charge.

Larger vehicles pay more. Tolls rose from \$15 to \$23 for an 18-wheeler cash-paying customer. Toll-tag drivers of 18-wheelers now pay \$22.50 per trip.

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The \$8 million preliminarily raised so far is on target for what officials expected at this point. The money is paying for higher railings on the southbound bridge and new shoulders in both directions.

Carlton Dufrechou, general manager of the Greater New Orleans Expressway Commission, said a designer and contractor have been selected for the segmented shoulders. A designer is in place for the rails and a contractor is expected to be selected by summer.

He said the money raised has been escrowed

and will go toward paying down a bond that was approved for the upgrades. The bond would be amortized over a 30-year period.

Last summer, Causeway officials put out a request for qualifications for design and engineering of the segmented shoulders project. Four engineering firms submitted designs with proposals to produce emergency areas for vehicles and a plan to reduce the effect of construction on commuters.

In November 2017, Alabama-based Volkert Inc. was chosen for the design of the segmented shoulders.

Soon after that, Dufrechou sent a RFP for a contractor to build the shoulders. Within the last month, Boh Bros. of New Orleans won the construction bid.

"While it's premature to discuss some of the concepts, it looks very feasible to get possibly up to 1,000 linear feet of stopping area for each shoulder," he said. "Initially we were looking at about 670 feet, so it's significantly a good block longer within the same budget."

He's eyeing modular options, which would allow them to construct the shoulders offsite and bring the pieces in for installation. A prerequisite for the design proposals was that the Causeway could not be shut down for extended construction. He said there is a likelihood that one of the bridges could be shut down temporarily at night for maintenance, "but the bridges will never be completely closed."

By October, pre-construction services are expected to be completed. He said they plan to get the project underway by the end of 2018.

Plans and specifications for the new rails are complete. Texas A&M Transportation

Institute's design was selected to replace the current railings on the 24-mile bridge.

Construction bids for the railings are going out in mid-April. Dufrechou said he hopes to receive bids back by mid-June.

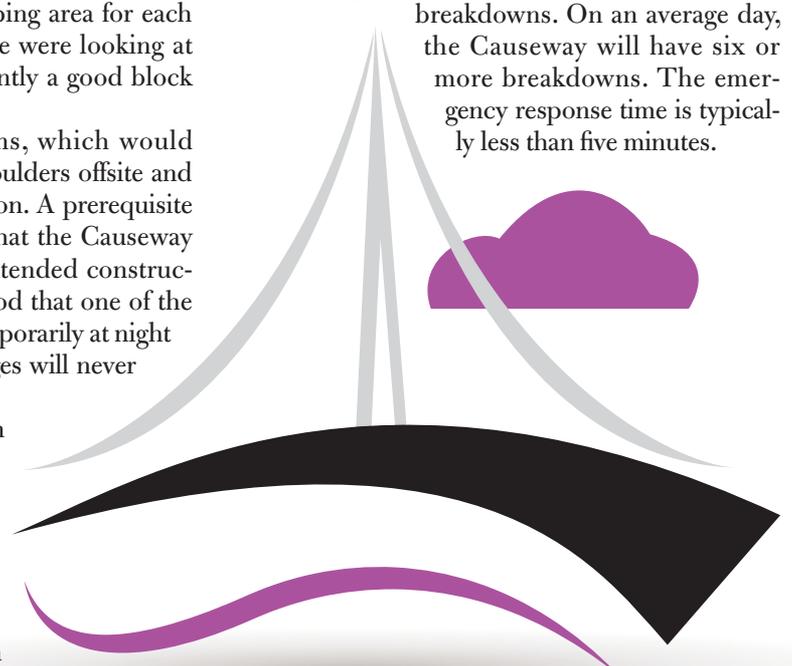
Dufrechou said the toll hike, which received pushback from some commuters, could be reduced as soon as the safety improvements are made.

But drivers shouldn't expect that to happen anytime soon.

"That's a couple decades out on the horizon right now," he said.

He said the project will be the most significant safety improvement the Causeway has seen since the second span was built in 1969. Traffic is reportedly six times heavier now than what it was then.

The biggest daily problem on the bridge is breakdowns. On an average day, the Causeway will have six or more breakdowns. The emergency response time is typically less than five minutes.



Northshore Harbor Center



Office market gets boost from new businesses

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Although the oil and gas industry continue to feel the effects of a three-year-old industry downturn, new businesses have kept North Shore office market relatively healthy.

That's according to a recent report from Corporate Realty that offers a snapshot of the current market and analyzes trends for the metro area. The report also takes a look at specific information about occupancy and rental rates of each office building that's at least 20,000 square feet.

Chevron and Hornbeck, two of the largest employers on the North Shore, continue to anchor the region's office market. But they aren't only component of its stability. St. Tammany Parish experienced a 40 percent increase in new business incorporations and a 28 percent surge in commercial building permits in 2017.

According to Corporate Realty, the Class A office market had a 94.2 percent occupancy rate last year with an average price per square foot of \$24. When taking into account the non-Class A space, the North Shore had an 87.8 percent occupancy rate with an average price per square foot of \$22.

Randy White, a sales and leasing associate with Corporate Realty, said the breadth and diversity of businesses in the region will buoy it during volatile times in the oil and gas industry. He said more private enterprises, law firms and insurance companies

have set up shop on the North Shore in recent years.

Chevron continued to have the largest office space in the area in 2017 with its 290,500 square-foot facility in Covington at Northpark, a Class A, master-planned office park. Other office buildings in the development, which also offers retail and residential components, are nearly 100 percent occupied.

"The smaller, 15,000 to 20,000-square-foot buildings really encapsulate the direction the area is headed in."

—Randy White, sales and leasing associate,
Corporate Realty

A 92-acre business park in Covington that Gulf States Real Estate Services dubbed the Versailles Business Park opened in 2017. White said Covington-based telecommunications firm GlobalStar will move into a newly-constructed building at 1313 Holiday Square Blvd. in the development by October.

The Corporate Realty report shows there are five Class A buildings on the North Shore. All are 100 percent occupied except the Offices at River Chase, located at 16564 East Brewster Rd. in Covington. The two-story, 42,600-square-foot building opened last year with one 6,000-square-foot tenant. The

building continued to house that one firm throughout 2017 and remain largely unoccupied at the time the report was compiled.

"I'm really surprised at the lack of tenants wanting to fill that building up," White said. "It's a new building, and it's not that expensive. It's only \$20 per square foot."

Looking towards future growth in the area, it doesn't appear that high-rise office space will be a trend. White pointed to five three-story office buildings along Sanctuary Boulevard in Mandeville. Ranging from 20,000 to 21,000 square feet each, the buildings are nearly 100 percent occupied.

"The smaller, 15,000 to 20,000-square-foot buildings really encapsulate the direction the area is headed in," he said.

Maria McClellan, an independent commercial broker who represents tenants, said the North Shore offers the best alternative for Class A office space growth in the New Orleans area. She said there is a compression of the Central Business District office market in downtown New Orleans due to the removal of Class C and B office buildings from the available inventory. Developers have been converting these high-rises into hotels, apartments and condominiums over the past decade.

McClellan said these office buildings are not being replaced, and she predicts more space is set to exit the market in the next two years.

"There's plenty of land on the North Shore for Class A office space growth," she said.



The Versailles Business Center is a 92-acre business park that opened on the North Shore in 2017.

Northshore Technical Community College has broken ground on a 19,000-square-foot technology center in Lacombe.

North
Shore
BUSINESS
REPORT

Work begins on \$4.2M Advanced Technology Center

RENDERINGS COURTESY NORTHSHORE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



“It’s a careful blend of curriculum that’s only going to further strengthen our commitment to our workforce training partnerships on the North Shore,” Wainwright said. “It’s going to provide them with relevant workforce training opportunities that exist in the region.”

According to recent data by the St. Tammany Parish Economic Development District, there will be an influx of STEM jobs in the next five to 10 years.

Dr. Monty Sullivan, president of the LCTCS System, said the

new facility will be placed directly behind the main building and will have a similar look and feel. NTCC opened its new \$10 million STEM campus over a year ago. Other locations are in Hammond, Bogalusa and Greensburg.

“The technology that is inside that building is the technology of today,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan said the biggest challenge facing the system is meeting workforce demands and ensuring that the programs being offered are aligned with business and industry.



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After being ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, Northshore Technical Community College is continuing to rebuild and expand as it prepares for present and future workforce needs.

In April, the college held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new \$4.2 million Advanced Technology Center in Lacombe.

Plans for the completion of the 19,000-square-foot center are set for summer 2019.

The building encompasses NTCC coursework such as heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), welding and health sciences programs, as well as student services, a testing center and a new library.

Serving the North Shore region, the testing center also provides residents with better access for ACT, Praxis and other proctored tests.

Dr. William Wainwright, chancellor of NTCC, said the project has been in the works for nearly 13 years since the storm. It’s the reimagined campus that once was the Slidell Technical College, which was destroyed in Katrina. He said the building is now located in an area that is less vulnerable to hurricanes, contributing to long-term sustainability.

The current combined enrollment is 1,245 students. Wainwright also said the facility’s location in Lacombe provides easy access for commuters on the east and west sides of St. Tammany Parish. He said that’s indicative of equal enrollment patterns that are already evident.

Truitt



Priciest home sales on the North Shore

The three highest-priced home sales in St. Tammany Parish in March ranged from \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million.

The priciest home was a 5-bedroom, 5.5-bath custom built "smart home" at 127 Tranquility Drive in The Sanctuary, a community in Mandeville. The 8,000-square-foot home sold for \$1.449 million. It was listed by Mary Lobos of Coldwell Banker and sold by Suzy Sims Marva of Latter & Blum.

A 4-bedroom, 4-bath home at 125 Mabel Drive in Madisonville fetched \$1.29 million. The



5,000-square-foot home was listed and sold by Debbie Alexander of Keller Williams.

At 136 Sanctuary Blvd. in Mandeville, a 5-bedroom, 5.2-bath Acadian in The Sanctuary went for \$1.235 million. The 7,000-square-foot house was listed by Jennifer Hayes of Real Living Southern Home Professionals and sold by Christine

Westenberger of Fine Southern Properties LLC.

CityBusiness staff reports. Information provided by Georgia Saucier, Manager/Realtor, Dorian Bennett Sotheby's International Realty

Donahue