

## House Committee on Appropriations

Minutes of Meeting  
2022 Regular Session  
March 22, 2022

### I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m. in Room 5, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

### II. ROLL CALL

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, chairman  
Representative Barbara W. Carpenter  
Representative R. Dewith Carrier  
Representative Raymond J. Crews  
Representative Daryl Andrew Deshotel  
Representative Mary DuBuisson  
Representative Aimee Adatto Freeman  
Representative Brett F. Geymann  
Representative John R. Illg, Jr.  
Representative Timothy P. Kerner  
Representative Rodney Lyons  
Representative Jack G. McFarland  
Representative Dustin Miller  
Representative Troy D. Romero  
Representative Francis C. Thompson, vice chairman  
Representative Christopher Turner  
Representative William "Bill" Wheat, Jr.

#### MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Tony Bacala  
Representative Rick Edmonds  
Representative Jason Hughes  
Representative C. Denise Marcelle  
Representative Blake Miguez  
Representative Debbie Villio

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Dazia Briscoe, committee administrative assistant  
David Lehman, budget analyst  
Stephanie Little, attorney  
Mark Mahaffey, division director  
Daniel Waguespack, deputy director

**ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:**

Faye Talbot, sergeant at arms

**III. BUSINESS**

*Vice Chairman Thompson in the chair.*

**Discussion of the FY 22-23 Budget for:****Dept. of Transportation and Development**

Mr. Daniel Waguespack, deputy director, House Fiscal Division (HFD), 900 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-7477, presented an overview and discussed the FY22-23 budget for the Dept. of Transportation and Development (DOTD).

Dr. Shawn Wilson, secretary, DOTD, 1201 Capital Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 379-1200, introduced himself to the committee and was available for members' questions.

Mr. Eric Kalivoda, deputy secretary, (no address provided) (225) 379-1200, was available for members' questions.

Mr. Barry Keeling, undersecretary, 1201 Capital Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA, (225) 379-1270, was available for members' questions.

Representative Thompson and Dr. Wilson discussed American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars and obligations to spend them by 2026 as well as the comprehensive need for passenger service from New Orleans to Baton Rouge to reduce some of the major traffic congestion as the section of I-10 from the bridge to the split is rebuilt.

Representative Thompson asked for specificity by parishes that have pre-qualified dollars from the federal bill. Dr. Wilson shared that conversations were ongoing with the rail project and that Amtrak will inform DOTD of the types of improvements that will need to be made.

Representative Crews and Dr. Wilson discussed salary increases, \$8.2 million added for classified and unclassified staff (Page 19 of the PowerPoint presentation).

Representative Crews and Dr. Wilson discussed the airports in the Shreveport area and that they were/are supported by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Representative Crews and Dr. Wilson discussed winter weather events where bridges and overpasses were closed by early afternoon, causing citizens to use alternative routes and cause traffic problems. Dr. Wilson shared the manpower distributed effectively manages the elevated structures in the region to receive pre-treatment of roads early in the day.

Representative Carpenter and Dr. Wilson discussed the framework in place for all future negotiations for the Comite River Diversion and Twin Oaks Bridge in Baker, under the Governor's Transportation Investment Proposal (Slide 32 of the PowerPoint presentation).

Representative DuBuisson and Dr. Wilson discussed her work with DOTD and the constituents in her area. Additionally, Slide 28 of the PowerPoint presentation showed the backlog and condition of the infrastructure as the rate of deterioration is faster than the value of the investment.

Representative DuBuisson and Dr. Wilson discussed Page 22 of the PowerPoint presentation, 4,200 positions and 177 vacancies, along with employee assessments. Dr. Wilson noted the vast majority of citizens are hardworking, blue-collar workers, and cited that it is not uncommon for him to sign retirement certificates for employees retiring after 30 to 40 years.

Representative McFarland and Dr. Wilson discussed Page 12 of the PowerPoint presentation, \$427 million in the Transportation Trust fund, the revenue generated by the state's gas tax, and, comparing it to Page 3 of the PowerPoint presentation, \$418 million in personnel services. Representative McFarland asked if it was safe to say it is consuming the entire gas tax. Dr. Wilson said that the gas tax was used to make the investment in the people because the federal government will not and that we use the federal funds on the capital side of our state budget. This formula makes sense in terms making this investment in our employees who do the work.

Representative Kerner and Dr. Wilson discussed the damage the area suffered from Hurricane Ida and the temporary bridge in Jean Lafitte on LA 302.

Representative Romero and Dr. Wilson discussed the Lake Charles Bridge and the Mississippi - Baton Rouge Bridge Projects in advanced planning, estimated at \$1 billion each, and to be public-private partnerships. Additionally, Representative Romero and Dr. Wilson discussed the possibility of tolling for the new Lake Charles Bridge.

Representative Zeringue and Dr. Wilson discussed tolling for both, the complexity involved with both bridges, and full sets of plans for the bridges.

Representative Geymann and Dr. Wilson discussed the bridges environmental process, which will be done in December 2022 or January 2023. The bid process depends upon the environmental process whereby DOTD is currently in the procurement process, similar to the Belle Chase model, and is dealing with technical and financial issues. Representative Geymann further inquired about the normal process, environmental, design, engineering, bid process, and tolls.

Representative Lyons and Dr. Wilson discussed Harvey Tunnel infrastructure, delays, and updated 50% increase of costs.

Representative Wheat and Dr. Wilson discussed reflecting on the state as a whole, a shift of population with the census results, parish highways and state roads experiencing the effects of more traffic, citing the Satsuma exit (I-12) to the widening of state line.

Representative Freeman and Dr. Wilson discussed the possible forced tolls on the people of Louisiana.

Representative Dustin Miller and Dr. Wilson discussed rural preservation and specifically identifying revenue sources and dedicate revenues as 33 years of not increasing revenue causes the work to become more expensive.

Representative Illg and Dr. Wilson discussed number of out-of-state companies building Louisiana's roadways and whether we have sufficient companies to handle the supply and demand of roadway projects with the anticipated increased costs. Dr. Wilson explained every state has received federal money and all states have transportation issues and supply and demand issues, based on conversations with economists.

### **Louisiana Workforce Commission**

Mr. David Lehman, budget analyst, HFD, (225) 342-9101, presented an overview and discussed the FY22-23 budget for the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

*Representative Thompson in the chair.*

Ms. Ava Cates, secretary, LWC, and Mr. Benny Soulier, undersecretary, LWC, 1001 North Twenty-Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-3001, were available to answer members' questions, and offered a handout, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records.

Representative Thompson and Ms. Cates discussed the trust fund guidelines in Title 23, taxable wage base.

Representative Kerner and Ms. Cates discussed hiring workforce following disasters while providing a service for communities and the Dislocated Worker program, designed to help workers get back to work as quickly as possible and overcome barriers to employment.

*Chairman Zeringue back in the chair.*

Representative Wheat and Ms. Cates discussed those unemployed completing their weekly certification, informing the LWC of three jobs that they applied to, while the LWC does follow up with those employers, (take a sample of those people). LWC works with the unemployed at local offices to work one-on-one with reemployment specialists and assess employment needs, job and supportive service referrals, and skills updates through workshops and training.

Representative DuBuisson and Ms. Cates discussed the department organization (Page 4 of the PowerPoint presentation) and the 47% turnover rate and morale in their department (Page 23 of the PowerPoint presentation). Representative DuBuisson asked Ms. Cates to consider asking for employees' suggestions and criticism.

Representative Illg and Ms. Cates discussed improper payments to state employees.

Representative Crews and Ms. Cates discussed OTS costs, including significant upgrades and software, while Mr. Solier elaborated on fraud detection services.

Ms. Freeman and Ms. Cates discussed Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG-LA), which provides an educational setting that promotes academics and skill attainment, civic responsibility, leadership development, and social awareness that is necessary to become a responsible citizen and productive worker.

### **Dept. of Economic Development**

Mr. David Lehman, budget analyst, HFD, (225) 342-9101, presented an overview and discussed the FY22-23 budget for the Dept. of Economic Development.

Mr. Don Pierson, secretary, DED, 617 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-5388, made opening comments to the committee and welcomed questions.

Ms. Ann Villa, undersecretary, DED, 617 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 342-5395, was available to answer members' questions.

Representative Kerner and Mr. Pierson discussed DED's plans to help the coastal restoration.

Representative Crews and Mr. Pierson discussed the State Small Business Initiative that was reauthorized by President Biden in March 2021. The new version provides a combined \$10 billion

to states, to empower small businesses to access the capital needed to invest in job-creating opportunities as the country emerges from the pandemic. Funds will also support recipient jurisdictions in promoting American entrepreneurship and democratizing access to startup capital across the country including under-served communities.

*Representative McFarland in the chair.*

Representative Deshotel and Mr. Pierson discussed internet access and bandwidth upgrades for DED.

Representative DuBuisson and Mr. Pierson discussed Slide 22 of the PowerPoint presentation where Mr. Pierson explained the \$1.76 million supports regional economic development organizations as they seek strategic marketing and business development.

Representative Freeman and Mr. Pierson discussed incentive programs for employers and the auditing process.

#### **IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

Representative Thompson offered a motion to adjourn. Without objection, the motion passed by a vote of 17 yeas and 0 nays. Representatives Zeringue, Carpenter, Carrier, Crews, Deshotel, DuBuisson, Freeman, Geymann, Illg, Kerner, Lyons, McFarland, Dustin Miller, Romero, Thompson, Turner, and Wheat voted yea.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Jerome "Zee" Zeringue  
House Committee on Appropriations