

The Battles of New Orleans - Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway (I-310)

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by
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The First Battle of New Orleans

The first Battle of New Orleans took place, unbeknownst to the participants, after the end of the War of 1812. On January 8, 1815, Major General Andrew Jackson, commander of the Seventh Military District, and 5,000 volunteers, including sharpshooters from Kentucky and Tennessee, free Negroes, Choctaw Indians, and pirates, repulsed an attack by 8,000 to 9,000 British veterans under Major General Sir Edward Pakenham. Pakenham was killed during the action.

The Battle of New Orleans had no effect on the war, which had ended on December 24, 1814, with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. However, transportation was such that even this momentous news was weeks away by ocean voyage and difficult overland travel. General Jackson led his troops back to Tennessee via the Natchez Trace-in triumph. The victory, plus other claims to fame, would propel General Jackson into the White House (1829-1837).

New Orleans was about 100 years old when the Battle took place. It was founded by the French in 1718 at a crescent bend in the Mississippi River. A broad square of public buildings became known as the Vieux Carré or French Quarter. After two major fires (1788 and 1794) and two transfers of the Louisiana Territory (from the French to the Spanish and back to the French in 1801), the area had been rebuilt in time for its final transfer as part of President Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803. (The Purchase covered all the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains and from the Gulf of Mexico to British North America. It encompassed the area that became Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota west of the Mississippi River, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, nearly all of Kansas, the portions of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado east of the Rocky Mountains, and Louisiana west of the Mississippi River plus the city of New Orleans.)

The Second Battle of New Orleans

The battle has made its way into our culture. It provided the basis for Jimmie Driftwood's oft-recorded song, "The Battle of New Orleans" (a number one hit for Johnny Horton in 1959) which begins:

In 1814 we took a little trip,
Along with Colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississip.
We took a little bacon and we took a little beans,
And we fought the bloody British in the town of New Orleans.

In addition, the phrase "Battle of New Orleans" has become a metaphor for any major struggle in the city, each of which is called the "Second Battle of New Orleans." Liva Baker used the phrase as the title of a book about the 100-year battle to integrate the city's schools. Mayor de Lesseps "Chep" Morrison found the metaphor helpful in 1954 when he described the Second Battle as the construction of Union Passengers Terminal and the restructuring of the city's transportation system. Even the fight against an exotic insect that infested New Orleans, the Coptotermes Formosanus (Formosan Subterranean Termite), was described as the Second Battle in 1998.

The term Second Battle of New Orleans has also been used to describe the controversy in the 1960's over the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway (then I-310). In fact, Richard O. Baumbach, Jr., and William E. Borah described the expressway fight-in which they were active project opponents-in their book, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (The University of Alabama Press, 1981).

The idea of an elevated freeway along the riverfront pre-dated the Interstate System. It was suggested by Robert Moses, the prolific New York builder, in 1946 as part of an arterial plan for New Orleans. Baumbach and Borah explained that the idea touched a raw nerve:

The preservationists had been fighting for years to protect the character of the Vieux Carré. They believed that the proposed Moses expressway was an alien twentieth-century intrusion that would irreparably harm the fragile beauty of the old city.

Supporters of the expressway believed that, on the contrary, the expressway would help preserve the Vieux Carré by taking traffic off the narrow streets of the French Quarter. The authors' comments about these divergent viewpoints could apply to urban controversies in many other cities:

Thus, the Second Battle of New Orleans became more than just a conflict between environmentalists and downtown developers over a freeway; it was a clash of values, a clash in attitudes, a difference in priorities and perspectives about the character and personality of the city.

Despite the differing views, the elevated expressway survived on the drawing boards with support from the Louisiana Highway Department (LHD) and the New Orleans City Council.

Most of the Second Battle of New Orleans took place before enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which President Richard M. Nixon signed on January 1, 1970. As with other highway battles around the country, project supporters and opponents had to invent the means of battle even as the Federal Government was establishing laws and policies that would provide a framework for addressing future controversies.

The Battle Begins

The Vieux Carré Expressway was not part of the Interstate System until 1964. Under the original designations, central New Orleans was served by two Interstates. East-west I-10 departed from a straight path south of Lake Pontchartrain to run in a loop through the Central Business District (CBD). The linking segment connecting I-10 south of the lake was designated I-610. However, the possibility of Interstate status was being considered as early as 1960, when the Riverside Expressway Engineers, a joint venture consultant firm, prepared a report for the New Orleans Central Area Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. On May 22, 1961, G. M. Williams, Deputy Commissioner for Engineering and Operations of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), sent a memo to Chief Engineer Frank Turner on the subject. The memo addressed two questions:

1. Is the Riverside Expressway important enough to be considered for possible Interstate System designation?
2. If so, how could adjustment be made to include it in the Interstate System?

The LDH was conducting an origin-and-destination survey that the engineers' report said "might indicate insufficient traffic based on State needs to justify the Expressway." The report contemplated that the project would be eligible for Federal-aid urban system funding at a 50-50 matching ratio. Urban freeway design criteria, Williams explained, were contemplated:

The report shows doubts as to both the possibility and the desirability of Interstate System designation for the Riverside Expressway. It states (page 74) that "Criteria for spacing of ramps, limitation on pedestrian service for mass transit among other considerations for the Interstate System, as compared to the Urban system, can seriously affect the objectives desired by the Central Area Committee."

On question 1, therefore, Williams deferred judgment. As to question 2, he said:

In regard to Question 2 concerning possible adjustments of the Interstate System [within the statutory mileage limitation] to include the Riverside Expressway if found to be merited, the simplest way to accomplish this would be to shift the North Claiborne Avenue leg (southeastern leg) of the present location of Interstate Route 10 over to the Riverside location and extend the southwestern leg of Route 10 to connect with the Riverside route at the approach to the Mississippi River Bridge. Any part of the Riverside route south of the interchange at the bridge approach would, of course, have to be financed with other than Interstate funds. Substantial Interstate funds have been obligated on the southwest leg of Route 10. Only Stage 1 projects [preliminary engineering or right-of-way acquisition] have been programmed on the southeast leg.

The Florida Avenue cross connection (Interstate Route 610) provides a direct through route for traffic not desiring to enter the CBD. It is very doubtful if the Baton Rouge-Slidell Route (Interstate Route 12) passing north of Lake Pontchartrain will decrease the importance of Route 610 so that consideration should be given to deletion of Route 610 in any adjustment of the system in this part of Louisiana. Only Stage 1 projects have been programmed on Route 610. [Emphasis in original]

The LDH revived the idea in 1964. On June 3, 1964, BPR's Louisiana Division Engineer, Lyman G. Youngs, explained the proposal to Regional Engineer A. C. Taylor. Youngs had identified a way of accomplishing the designation without shifting I-10 or eliminating I-610:

The proposed route . . . extends from a junction of I-10 at Elysian Fields along Elysian Fields to the river thence parallel to the river to Lafayette Street, a point between Canal Street and approaches to the former Mississippi River Toll Bridge (now free). It was my belief that this section should be substituted for the Monroe Bypass I-420.

He offered several reasons for his recommendation:

1. The New Orleans route would serve an estimated 1975 ADT [Average Daily Traffic] of 24,000 to 34,000 compared to the Monroe Bypass of I-420 of 2500 to 3000 ADT, 1975. This in itself seems to weigh greatly in favor of the substitution.
2. The River Front project is approximately 2.6 miles in length as compared to 10.2 miles for I-420. This would release about 7.6 miles. The length estimated above extends from Lafayette Street to Junction I-10. If the route were extended to a junction with the Pontchartrain Expressway, the length would be increased to about 3.3 miles. Until recently, due to the proximity of the toll bridge, no consideration was given to connecting to the Expressway, although the advantages of so doing are obvious. Now that the bridge is toll free, the connection would provide a very desirable inner loop around the central business district.
3. I-420 around Monroe (a two-lane facility only) is estimated to cost about \$24,000,000. This figure is expected to increase materially in the 1965 estimate. The River Front Expressway between Lafayette Street and I-10 is estimated to cost \$18,912,000. This would be increased to \$29,439,000 if connected to the Pontchartrain Expressway.
4. The proposed River Front Expressway is planned to pass under Canal Street which currently is undergoing a rehabilitation. The long range plans for the foot of Canal Street provide for an International Center Complex. This complex consists of a proposed 33-story Trade Mart-Office Building, an International Exhibition Facility, and a seven level parking garage building Consequently, it is important that the depressed roadway through this area be constructed jointly with International Exhibition Facility. In this respect it is believed that the River Front Expressway would contribute considerably more to the economy and benefit of Louisiana than the two-lane bypass around Monroe carrying but 250 to 300 DHV (1975). [DHV is Design Hourly Volume-the volume highways are designed to handle.]
5. At present a considerable amount of traffic, particularly truck traffic, is required to traverse the narrow, though one way, streets of the Vieux Carre. Much of this would be removed by the construction of the River Front Expressway. In addition it is known that there is a greater demand on the access points of I-10 along Claiborne Avenue than the system can accommodate. The construction of the River Front Expressway will, to a certain extent, relieve this pressure.

Youngs summarized his views:

In other words, the addition of this spur or completed controlled access loop will contribute greatly to the operation of the system and make workable the proposed net in New Orleans. The construction of the Bypass I-420 would contribute little to any operation of the system through Monroe and neither would it detract or decrease the operation of I-20 through that area. Therefore, it is my suggestion that serious consideration be given to the elimination of I-420 in Monroe and the addition of a new route, spur or loop, in New Orleans.

On October 12, 1964, U.S. Representative Hale Boggs announced that the BPR had agreed to withdraw I-420, the proposed Monroe bypass, from the Interstate System and use some of the mileage for the 3.5-mile Vieux Carré Expressway. Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges, in a statement, explained that the new Interstate route extended "along Elysian Fields Avenue and the proposed Riverfront Expressway to the Pontchartrain Expressway." Because the Pontchartrain Expressway was not part of the Interstate System, the route would be a spur connected to I-10 only on one end. The new Interstate was designated I-310 (the odd-prefix indicating it was a spur). Secretary Hodges explained:

The approved route will provide the missing link in a belt of freeways around the Central Business District of New Orleans. It will serve the Central Wharf area of the nation's number two port city and provide access to a proposed International Center Complex involving a \$13 million trade mart building and a \$10 million International Exhibition Facility.

With this designation, the \$29-million Vieux Carré Expressway was eligible for 90-10 funding on a cost-to-complete basis (i.e., whatever the cost turned out to be, the BPR would reimburse the LDH for 90 percent of eligible costs). The designation became official on October 13, 1964.

The decision to include the expressway in the Interstate System was denounced by preservationists, as might be expected. To illustrate the criticism, Baumbach and Borah quoted Lewis Mumford, a nationally recognized urban-design commentator and an early critic of the Interstate Highway Program:

All over the country the Highway Departments are using our extravagant Federal subsidies to forward their obsolete highway plans and destroy the cities they supposedly serve. These plans for elevated expressways within cities produce worse congestion than they seek to alleviate.

Although the resulting battle began-and ended-before NEPA, public hearings were required and they revealed the depth of opposition to the expressway. Following a March 1965 hearing, the BPR asked the LHD to study the feasibility of placing the expressway in a tunnel as a way of mitigating the impacts of the project.

On July 7, 1965, Mayor Victor H. Schiro and other city officials met with Federal Highway Administrator Rex Whitton in Washington to discuss the new expressway. The Mayor came away from the meeting convinced that BPR officials "are sincere in wanting the best for our city" and would consider all possibilities, including a below-ground option.

A few days later, on July 14, expressway opponents met with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, whose Department administered the Historic Sites Act of 1935. Under the 1935 law, the Department's National Park Service had established the National Historic Landmark Program in October 1960. Udall, as expected, denounced the expressway. He was "appalled at the idea" of running an expressway through the historic district, which he suggested be designated a National Historic Landmark. Following developing of needed documentation, he followed through on December 21, 1965, declaring that the French Quarter had national historic significance. Baumbach and Borah said:

This made the Vieux Carré eligible for National Historic Landmark status and inclusion in the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. If the city of New Orleans wanted the Vieux Carré to become a National Historic Landmark, and would agree to preserve to the best of its ability the historical integrity of the site, Secretary Udall indicated he would provide a certificate and bronze plaque to commemorate landmark status.

The New Orleans City Council decided not to pursue National Historic Landmark status.

In view of the concerns, State and local officials considered a range of expressway options. On August 4, 1965, the LDH had rejected the tunnel option because it would jeopardize the city's main flood protection. A double-decker plan-with three lanes at ground level and three lanes placed 23-feet below the surface-proved impractical. Mayor Schiro suggested putting a 900-foot segment of the expressway at grade level in front of Jackson Square and reducing it to a four-lane segment within a six-lane highway. Railroad tracks through the area complicated any ground-level or below-ground solution.

On January 24, 1966, the BPR authorized approved the elevated freeway as proposed by the LHD. Baumbach and Borah cited an article in the *Vieux Carré Courier* claiming that Congressman Boggs had appealed to President Lyndon B. Johnson who had ordered Whitton to approve the proposal. Boggs denied intervening, pointing out that congressional "comity" prevented him from trying to influence a project that was not in his congressional district.

The approval prompted calls from opponents for a 6-month delay for further study. However, when the city rejected calls for a new study, opponents took their case to Washington. They met with Whitton and Chief Engineer Turner, who rejected calls for an independent study of the tunnel option. Administrator Whitton indicated that while a delay would not jeopardize funding, he thought it would be "wasteful of both time and resources."

Amid growing national attention, most of it unfavorable, Whitton's successor, Lowell Bridwell, went to New Orleans on June 19, 1967, to hold a public meeting at City Hall with State and local officials. "We did not come here with an alternative plan," he told the public, "but to see if alternatives can be developed." The result was a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) proposal to consider a ground level freeway alternative. (When the U.S. Department of Transportation was established on April 1, 1967, the Federal highway agency was renamed the FHWA, with the BPR reduced to a bureau within the FHWA.) "A tunnel or depressed section just doesn't look to be in the ball park."

Bridwell also wanted to use the continuing, comprehensive, coordinated transportation planning process, required by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, to integrate the roadway into the urban environment. His theory was that the conflict indicated the city had not really "thrashed out what it wants to be."

By January 1969, the LDH had abandoned the idea of an elevated expressway in favor of a six-lane surface expressway proposal, with a portion elevated in the vicinity of the Vieux Carré. To accommodate the rail lines through the area, the plan included widening of the corridor, plus additional structures to protect against flooding. On January 9, at the urging of the LDH, the City Council approved the idea.

Just 3 days before leaving office with the Johnson Administration, Bridwell approved the project on January 17, meaning it was one key step away from construction. That same day, he also approved a controversial freeway network for Baltimore, Maryland. A press release announcing his two decisions said he had resolved "disputes which have been smoldering for more than 20 years." He was quoted as saying:

These represent disputes which have been raging in the two communities for more than 20 years. The fact that they have finally been agreed upon demonstrates the effectiveness of the Federal-State partnership which has evolved in this country over the past 50 years. Men of good will and purpose, working together, have shown here that urban freeway problems can be resolved in a manner which will bring great dividends to their cities.

Regarding the New Orleans decision, the press release explained:

The elevated freeway plan aroused citizens of New Orleans' Vieux Carre area who maintained the structure would mar the famous French Quarter in the Jackson Square area. A series of studies, authorized by the State and the Federal Highway Administration, established the feasibility of building a surface road which would be hidden by an existing seawall. This will require relocation and consolidation of railroad tracks in the area and some revamping of a levee along the Mississippi River.

This concept finally has won the approval of the New Orleans City Council, the City Planning Commission, the Board of Port Commissioners, the Orleans Levee Board, and the Public Belt Railroad. Since the Vieux Carre area is listed in the National Register, a national trust for historic preservation established by Congress in 1966, the Riverfront Expressway project must be submitted to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for comment before final approval can be given.

Administrator Bridwell said the surface-level concept not only avoids interference with the aesthetic quality of the area, "but will, in fact, bring new development possibilities-especially in the realm of joint-use or air rights."

The press release estimated that the surface-level version of the Riverfront Expressway, at nine-tenths of a mile, would cost approximately \$31.2 million. This amount was \$12.4 million more than the estimated cost of the elevated structure.

(The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 formalized the designation process and established the coordination process among Federal, State, and local officials and historic preservation interests to "foster conditions under which our modern society and our prehistoric and historic resources can exist in

productive harmony." The legislation established the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a forum for public consideration of historic preservation issues.)

The question remained: would the incoming Nixon Administration overturn Bridwell's decision?

A New Administration Takes Charge

Federal approval was overturned later that month. Baumbach and Borah explained the decision:

Then, on January 28, 1969, the *Times-Picayune* reported that federal approval of the riverfront expressway had been withdrawn. Bridwell, no longer a transportation department official, explained that the authorization had been retracted because the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation had not had an opportunity to fulfill the federal requirement that it comment on the project.

Baumbach and Borah also indicated that a court case brought by preservationists was a factor in the withdrawal. They explained that on November 6, 1967, the FHWA had entered into a stipulation that the agency would not approve the expressway while the litigation was pending. After the plaintiffs sought a Motion for a Protective Order in the U.S. District Court, the agency withdrew the approval.

The Advisory Council, after reviewing the proposal, released its report on March 2, 1969. It favored the depressed alternative but recommended that the Secretary of Transportation establish conclusively that no feasible and prudent alternative existed for the use of the historic land. The idea of "no feasible and prudent alternative" was from a requirement, known as Section 4(f) from its location in the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, the legislation that authorized the new Department. Under Section 4(f), the Secretary could approve a program or project requiring the use of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance, or land of an historic site of national, State, or local significance only if "there is no prudent and feasible alternative to using that land" and all possible planning had been undertaken to minimize harm to the land.

The new Secretary was John A. Volpe, a former highway contractor, president of The Associated General Contractors of America, State highway chief in Massachusetts, Federal Highway Administrator (1956-57), and Governor of Massachusetts (1961-1963 and 1965-1969). The Federal Highway Administrator was Frank Turner.

On July 1, Representative Boggs announced that Secretary Volpe had decided to turn down the expressway. According to Baumbach and Borah:

In a banner headline the next morning, the *Times-Picayune* announced the cancellation of the riverfront expressway. Secretary of Transportation Volpe had advised New Orleans Congressman Hale Boggs of the cancellation on July 1. The *Picayune* reported that while Volpe had refused to fund the French Quarter freeway, he had reallocated the Interstate mileage from the cancelled highway to the proposed Dixie Freeway (I-410), a beltway south of New Orleans

Under a provision of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968 that allowed for expansion of the Interstate System by 1,500 miles, the Department had designated 30 miles of the Dixie Freeway on December 13, 1968. The shift of Riverfront Expressway mileage meant that 46 miles of the Dixie Freeway would be eligible for Interstate Construction funds. Baumbach and Borah described the new route:

With this increased mileage, the Dixie Freeway would tie into Interstate 10 on the east bank of the Mississippi via a new bridge over the river in the vicinity of Chalmette. It would then run south and roughly parallel to the west bank expressway in suburban Jefferson Parish, continuing upstream until it recrossed the Mississippi River near Luling, where it once again would tie into Interstate 10. Boggs said that this Interstate beltway, including the two new bridges over the Mississippi River, obviously would involve an outlay of millions of dollars. Moreover, he said, I-410 would open vast new areas for development in metropolitan New Orleans.

On July 9, 1969, Secretary Volpe made it official. A press release explained why he canceled the Vieux Carré Expressway:

Volpe said a depressed route alternative is not acceptable either because of its disruptive effects, excessive costs and construction hazards which might cause damage to the levee protecting the entire city . . . "A careful review of the highway proposal and the positions of various interests," Volpe said, "convinced me that the public benefits from the proposed highway would not be enough to warrant damaging the treasured French Quarter . . . The Riverfront Expressway would have separated the French Quarter from its Mississippi River levee and waterfront."

Reporter William M. Blair, writing in *The New York Times* on July 13, 1969, suggested that Secretary Volpe's actions were a way of thanking Boggs, a Democrat, for his help in securing passage of President Nixon's extension of the 10-percent surcharge. (A 10-percent income tax surcharge had been imposed by the Revenue and Expenditure Control Act of 1968, signed by President Johnson as part of his initiative to curb inflation.) The bill to extend the tax was seen by observers as the first major test of Republican President Nixon's ability to work with a Congress that was controlled by the Democrats. Many House Democrats and some Republicans who favored major tax reform were afraid that extending the surcharge would relieve pressure for larger tax reform.

Secretary Volpe's action, Blair wrote, "indicates once again that in politics nice things can happen to people who help out." Boggs, the second ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, directed the debate on the floor; he and Chairman Wilbur Mills of Arkansas helped secure enough votes for a 210-205 vote in favor of the bill on June 30.

As Blair saw it, the mileage and funds for the expressway would be taken out of Representative Edward F. Hebert's district and shifted to the district of Representative Boggs, who had lobbied the Department to secure Interstate designation for the Dixie Freeway:

Representative Boggs had sought to stay out of the fight over the road that was proposed to run behind the levee at the French Quarter. Thirty miles of the beltway has been approved for Federal funds. But there was no tie-in north or south of the city to complete the semicircle around the city. Mr. Boggs won 18 miles in addition that will complete the beltway and include two needed bridges.

Secretary Volpe told Mr. Boggs that he had recently sent Assistant Secretary James D. Braman to New Orleans to survey the French Quarter situation and to attempt to resolve the difference between preservationists and business interests over the controversial interstate highway segment. The Secretary reported to Mr. Boggs that Mr. Braman found the conflict "irreconcilable" and that pending lawsuits would hold up the proposed riverfront expressway indefinitely.

Mr. Boggs said that Mr. Volpe then "said that the pressures were so great from other areas that he was impelled to cancel the interstate allocation for the riverfront expressway and reallocate the mileage and the funds to some other project in the United States where the demand is overwhelming."

The Louisianan also said that Mr. Volpe reported that President Nixon was being "deluged" with letters against the French Quarter expressway.

Whereupon Mr. Boggs proposed that the French Quarter mileage be allocated to the beltway and that funds for constructing the French Quarter segment, approximately \$35 million, be made available immediately for the beginning of the two bridges and for the construction of the outer beltway.

In the June 30 edition of *The New York Times*, reporter Eileen Shanahan had described Boggs' help in securing the favorable vote:

For the Democrats, the House debate on the surtax bill was led by Representative Hale Boggs of Louisiana, the second-ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee. He served as the floor leader because the committee's chairman, Representative Wilbur D. Mills of Arkansas, is still ill with an intestinal ailment. Mr. Mills was present in the House throughout the debate, however-against the doctor's orders, Mr. Boggs said.

Mr. Mills repeatedly joined in the debate. Initially, he confined himself to such things as flashing hand signals to Mr. Boggs when the latter made mistakes-such as giving a wrong figure on the number of poor persons who would be taken completely off the tax rolls by the special low-income allowance contained in today's bill. Mr. Boggs said that the number was three million, but when Mr. Mills waved at him an open hand with all five fingers extended, Mr. Boggs corrected himself and said five million.

Later on, Mr. Mills jumped into the debate when Mr. Boggs gave some incorrect answers about the applicability of the 8 per cent tax credit given to businesses on the cost of their investment in machinery and equipment.

Finally, unable to contain himself, Chairman Mills rose to give a speech. He assured the Members who wanted broader tax reform that a bill would be forthcoming, "make no mistake about it." Shanahan said, "Members on both sides of the aisle applauded."

The BPR, on July 7, informed LDH Director A. B. Ratcliff, Jr., that the shift would require a request from the LDH to withdraw I-310 from the Interstate System. The LDH was not happy about the decision. Ratcliff replied on July 14:

We wish to point out that such action will not reduce traffic congestion in downtown New Orleans and the loop will not serve the same purpose as I-310. However, there appears to be no alternative and we reluctantly request deletion of I-310 from the Interstate System and the addition of the belt loop known locally as the "Dixie Freeway."

On August 19, 1969, the FHWA's Acting Director of Public Affairs, Donald W. Stull, put out a notice on cancellation of the Riverfront Expressway for distribution within the agency:

The recent disapproval of New Orleans' Riverfront Expressway is being misinterpreted in some circles as a decision based solely on the issue of historic preservation. This was not entirely the case. There are a number of other major facts and considerations involved in the final decision.

To illustrate these other facts and considerations, Stull attached information prepared for a press conference Secretary Volpe would be holding:

- Q. After your recent decision against building the Riverfront Expressway in New Orleans French Quarter, editorial writers around the Nation hailed this as an historic decision, indicating a new trend in thinking about highways in urban areas. Does this in fact indicate a new direction or trend?
- A. Not necessarily. This case was not decided solely on the basis of the impact the freeway would have on the historic Vieux Carre area. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation opposed the surface-level route. We concurred in that decision. But this was a very singular case - as are most of the dozen or so urban disputes around the Nation. They don't follow any kind of pattern which could produce the trend you inquire about. They have to be settled case by case, on the merits, and by State and local officials - not by the Federal Government. Our role is to approve or disapprove the plan and design that the States submit to us. In the New Orleans case, my principal reasons for disapproval involved questions of excessive cost, safety of the levee itself which protects the city, and the delays in which the project would incur by lawsuits even were I to have approved it. Meantime, we will use the funds in other urgently needed projects.

Stull also attached a July 29 letter from Paul Cherington, Assistant Secretary for Policy and International Affairs, to Henry Z. Carter, President of the Chamber of Commerce of the New Orleans Area. Cherington explained:

The recommended treatment as proposed by the Advisory Commission on Preservation of Historic Sites [sic] is far too costly in our opinion for the questionable amount of relief it would provide to the environmental qualities of the Vieux Carre. Furthermore, there are serious questions about the hazard to the City which would occur should the levee be breached during construction, or subsequently. As you perhaps know, the authorities responsible for the levee also have disapproved this proposed solution on grounds of damage to the stability of the levee. There is also a pending lawsuit which would undoubtedly tie up the project indefinitely even were it authorized to proceed, and thus, badly needed funds and staff resources would be forced into idleness, or wasted efforts, while badly needed for other projects of benefit to the public. There likewise continues to be an unresolved difference of opinion as to the actual effect of the proposed facility on the aesthetic and historical qualities of the area.

The FHWA completed the action on August 22, 1969, with a letter to the LDT indicating that, effective August 22, I-310 was deleted from the Interstate System. The new description of I-410 read:

From a junction with Interstate Route 10, west of New Orleans southerly across the Mississippi River in the vicinity of Luling, thence southerly, easterly, and northerly across the Mississippi River in the vicinity of Chalmette to a junction with Interstate Route 10 in the eastern part of New Orleans.

(The even prefix indicated that the route was linked to an Interstate on both ends.)

Baumbach and Borah reported that during a March 1971 visit to New Orleans, Secretary Volpe said that his decision on the Riverfront Expressway had been his first important decision as Secretary and that it "marked the beginning of a new tradition in the Department of Transportation regarding the preservation of the nation's heritage." The authors added:

As a result of Volpe's determination, former highway proponents gave up advocating an elevated or partially elevated six-lane freeway, and the long conflict between environmentalists and downtown business interests over an elevated highway along the riverfront came to an end. The French Quarter freeway, originally conceived by Robert Moses in 1946, was dead and would not be revived. The Second Battle of New Orleans was over.

But "310" in Louisiana did not end there.

I-310-The Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge

When the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1968 authorized designation of an additional 1,500 miles for the Interstate System, the LDT proposed designation of the Dixie Freeway. While in New Orleans, Administrator Bridwell asked Division Engineer F. E. Hawley for information on the proposed route. Hawley's response on November 21, 1968, explained the origins of the route:

The Dixie Freeway is a 48.5-mile south belt route traversing terrain that is predominately undeveloped swampland. According to the State's September 27, Interstate submittal, the estimated construction cost would exceed \$250 million, including two bridges across the Mississippi River. The belt route concept is really a composite of five separate projects which have been carried forward by local toll authorities and parish officials over the past four years.

The Dixie Freeway name comes from the Jefferson Parish segment (Section 1) which was originally conceived as a controlled access relief route for the congested West Bank "Expressway." Preliminary engineering studies have been conducted by a New Orleans consultant for the parish who, in turn, obtained financing from HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] advance planning grants.

The St. Charles segments (Section 2) are essentially connectors between the Jefferson Parish project, the proposed Luling toll bridge and Interstate 10. Preliminary plans are being developed by the same consultant under a similar HUD grant.

The Luling Bridge (Section 3) is being developed by the St. Charles-St. John the Baptist Bridge and Ferry Authority which was set up about four years ago. Final construction plans have been completed by Palmer and Baker of Mobile, Alabama, under still another HUD grant Total HUD involvement to date on Section 1, 2 and 3 is \$1,067,600.

Section 4, the Chalmette Bridge and Approaches, comes under jurisdiction of the Mississippi River Bridge Authority. Up until recently, their planning had been directed to restoring tolls on the existing Greater New Orleans Bridge and developing two new toll bridges, one at Napoleon Avenue and one at Chalmette. Only very preliminary feasibility type studies have been conducted at these two bridges.

Section 5, Paris Road, would connect the Chalmette Bridge with Interstate 10 in Orleans Parish. This entire section is being planned for development to freeway standards by the Louisiana Department of Highways. A four-lane high level bridge over the Intercoastal [sic] Waterway was completed last year.

Hawley foresaw some difficulties in converting the completed work on Sections 1 through 3 to Interstate standards:

First, although the location seems generally satisfactory, no alternates were studied and there seems to have been more weight given to land development [than] might have been the case had it been planned as Interstate in the first instance; second, provision of frontage roads along the entire length of the road sections is questionable; third, proposed interchange designs are considered inadequate by our engineers; fourth, the proposed cross section of the Luling Bridge is not up to current safety standards and, perhaps, as to the number of lanes proposed. Assuming, however, that some of the HUD-sponsored work can be salvaged, there will be some additional problems as to consultants, fees, etc., when the State takes over the job.

On the credit side of the ledger, we find that no park, wildlife or public recreational facilities [facilities that would be covered under Section 4(f)] would be affected by the proposed location or any feasible modification therefore. Overall, the route does make good sense in terms of long range development of the affected rural areas.

The mileage of the Riverfront Expressway was transferred to the Dixie Freeway/I-410, but the new Interstate proved controversial as well. On January 8, 1976, the U.S. Department of Transportation and State Highway Director W. T. Taylor signed a consent decree and stipulation in *Ecology Center of Louisiana v. Coleman* to withdraw most of I-410, leaving behind Interstate spurs on both ends. An article by editorial writer Les Brumfield in the *New Orleans States-Item* on January 13 explained:

Not even the combined political clout of the governor, the state's congressional delegation and Jefferson parish political and industrial leaders, who descended in force on Washington officials in late September and early October of 1974, was able to save I-410. Ultimately, the state Highway Department's bureaucratic bungling, the proponents own overriding zeal to have the highway built at any cost, and the tenacity and thoroughness of a battery of young attorneys, who represented the environmentalists free of charge, doomed the major section of I-410 from Boutte to the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet.

Federal Highway Administrator Norbert T. Tiemann completed the action in a letter to Governor Edward W. Edwards on January 18, 1977. Tiemann approved the State's request to withdraw 34.1 miles of I-410 (between U.S. 90 near Boutte in St. Charles Parish and the north end of the existing Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Intracoastal Waterway Canal bridge in Orleans Parish).

Also at Governor Edwards' request, Tiemann approved substitution of the North-South Expressway from Opelousas to I-20 at Shreveport, with the understanding that the highway from Opelousas to I-10 would be improved to Interstate standards. Because the proposed route was 180 miles long, Tiemann released 145.9 miles from the Interstate mileage reserve for the project to supplement the 34.1 miles taken from I-410.

On February 2, 1977, Secretary George A. Fischer of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development requested numbering changes to accommodate the State's revised Interstate network. Acting Federal Highway Administrator L. P. Lamm replied on March 10. He approved the following numbers and descriptions:

49.	From a junction with U.S. Routes 190 and 167 near the east city limits of Opelousas via the vicinity of Alexandria to a junction with Interstate Route 20 in Shreveport.
310.	From a point on Interstate Route 10 west of Kenner thence in a general southerly direction crossing the Mississippi River in the vicinity of Luling-Destrehan to a junction with U.S. 90 in the vicinity of Boutte.
410.	Eliminated.
510.	From a junction with Interstate Route 10 at Paris Road in eastern New Orleans southerly to the north end of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Intracoastal Waterway Canal Bridge.

The number 410 was eliminated because neither stub connected with other Interstate routes on both ends. As a result, "310" was revived.

Lamm added that the changes were "subject to the concurrence of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials" (AASHTO). AASHTO's Route Numbering Committee approved the changes on July 6 during the organization's Summer Meeting in Lake of the Ozark, Missouri.

The I-310 spur included the Luling bridge across the Mississippi River, the first major cable-stayed bridge in the country. This \$135 million bridge opened in 1983, and received multiple honors for its design. The beauty of the bridge is in its simplicity. It is a classic example of form following function; as Dr. Walter Podolny, former Chief of the FHWA Bridge Review and Design Branch, put it, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out how this bridge functions. It's a classic, historic structure.

The bridge was named the Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge. Congressman Boggs served in the House of Representatives from 1941 to 1943 and continuously after 1947. He rose to House Majority Leader and was a Member of the House Ways and Means Committee. In October 1972, Boggs died when a plane in which he was a passenger went down in Alaska. His body was never found. His wife, Lindy Boggs, won the special election to fill the vacancy, becoming the first woman elected to the House from Louisiana. She represented the district until retiring after the 1990 session.

In naming the bridge for Hale Boggs, local officials honored a Congressman who had, for many years, supported projects to provide the infrastructure New Orleans needed to meet the demands of changing times. And, too, he had supported the Luling bridge project.

But more important from a national standpoint, he played a key role in 1956 in getting the Interstate Highway Program going. Planning for the Interstate System began in the late 1930's. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 authorized designation of the Interstate System (or at least, 40,000 miles of it), but without special funding. Little was accomplished. By the mid-1950's, with the strong support of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the push was on to find a way of paying for this vitally needed highway network.

The program enjoyed broad support-its potential contributions to our economy, to mobility, safety, and national defense were clearly understood. The problem was funding. Each interest group that supported the Interstate System wanted someone else to pay for it. Under a strong push from President Eisenhower, Congress took up the issue in 1955, but was unable to find a solution.

The logjam was solved in 1956, when Representative George Fallon of Maryland and Representative Boggs introduced a bill that provided many of the answers. Fallon was Chairman of the Roads Subcommittee of the Committee on Public Works, so in drafting the bill, he was responsible for program details. Boggs, representing the Ways and Means Committee, concentrated on the finances. The bill proposed a 1-cent hike

in the 2-cent gas tax and some additional highway user taxes, which were acceptable to all parties as compromises to avoid failure of the legislation. In addition, the bill proposed creation of a Highway Trust Fund to ensure that all highway user taxes would be dedicated to construction of the Interstate System and other Federal-aid highway projects. The bill passed by a wide margin in April 1956.

(Boggs didn't conceive the Highway Trust Fund. A similar idea had been proposed some years earlier in Congress, reflecting a growing interest in linkage between gas tax revenue and highway expenditures; many States had adopted trust funds years earlier. When Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey, during testimony before the Ways and Means Committee, suggested following the model of the Social Security Trust Fund, Boggs added the concept of a Highway Trust Fund to the Interstate Highway Program.)

In the Senate, Senator Albert Gore, Sr., of Tennessee was Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Roads (and father of future Vice President Al Gore). The Senate made some changes in the program details of the Fallon-Boggs bill by incorporated features from a bill drafted by Gore's subcommittee and approved by the Senate in 1955 without a financing mechanism, but retained the Highway Trust Fund.

An historian of the Interstate Highway Program, Mark Rose, summarized the achievement of the Fallon-Boggs bill by saying:

Boggs and Fallon had found the key to success Once the financing was arranged, congressmen were left with the relatively easier task of imposing professional standards on federal road projects and spreading revenues among competitors.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was approved in Congress on June 25. President Eisenhower signed the bill on June 29.

The Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge is a fitting tribute to a man who, before his untimely death, helped to create a lasting legacy for succeeding generations in the form of the Interstate Highway Program.

This article is based on Richard O. Baumbach, Jr., and William E. Borah's *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (The University of Alabama Press, 1981) and documents in the files of the Federal Highway Administration.

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