

# ACADIANA BUSINESS

NEWS & ANALYSIS on COMMERCE in SOUTH LOUISIANA



# Acadiana's Top 100

*Acadiana Business'* inaugural list of the biggest companies in the six-parish region.

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**RYAN PÉCOT**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

# The Missing Link

*Ambassador Caffery's southward extension isn't getting the attention it deserves, but its day is coming.*

If the Ambassador Caffery Parkway South extension progresses at its current pace, life as we know it in Lafayette will change before the end of the year. Despite that we may be driving on it in the next six months, we're not hearing a whole lot about this vital infrastructure project from local officials, the media or even on the streets — which continues to baffle me — but this single roadway expansion has the potential to alter Lafayette's landscape like nothing before it.

Maybe the residents of Lafayette put a moratorium on talking about road projects after the long drawn-out Camellia bridge debacle. Or it's possible that after the South City Parkway's (formerly Duhon Road) year plus delay in connecting with Robley Drive the public lost faith in new road projects as a whole. The list could certainly be expanded, but those two specific projects are complete, and we are all reaping the benefits of the hard work that was put in by the city and state officials to get those infrastructure projects planned, funded and built.

In hindsight, it just seems that there was a more substantial amount of chatter about the Camellia bridge project than there has been about the Ambassador extension.

Granted, that project did cut right through the middle of town almost invoking taking of property through eminent domain, but it was only a 2.25-mile stretch between Johnston Street and Kaliste Saloom Road, as compared to the 6.5-mile Ambassador project. As predicted, Camellia Boulevard has been a huge asset in keeping Lafayette's traffic flowing, and somewhat keeping the road-rage under control, as the new connection picked up more than 30,000 vehicles per day almost overnight. It was also successful in pulling everyday commuting traffic off Ambassador Caffery, although the current traffic counts are inching ever closer to the pre-Camellia numbers. That's likely a combination of growth in our community and more people commuting to

Lafayette to work and or shop each day. A study of the traffic counts on various streets and intersections throughout the city reveals that a large number of people travel in and out of the city each day for business, pleasure and necessity. There just aren't nearly enough Lafayette Parish residents to keep these traffic counts so high.

This phenomenon is the exact reason the city needs better connectivity to the outer edges of the parish allowing for an

will drive even more dollars into the parish, increasing our tax base and subsequent ability to fund additional infrastructure improvements. This new corridor will also provide a more efficient way out of town to those who get stuck in the Kaliste Saloom and Verot School Road bottlenecks on a daily basis trying to get to work along the Highway 90 corridor.

One prediction I am comfortable in making in regards to the Ambassador

out is very different than the majority of other cities throughout the country. Our mall, shopping centers, and major retailers are not directly accessed from the interstate. Nor is there a controlled-access loop to get to them. Furthermore, the closest road we have that resembles a "typical" retail corridor to these national reps is Ambassador Caffery, which dead-ended into a big field. That won't be what they see the next time they come calling.

Candidly put, most retailers are sheepish and would rather make no decision than risk what may turn out to be a bad decision. Most retailers spent the time to do their homework and made an informed, correct decision to locate in our city, as is evidenced by the level of success many enjoy here. Once Ambassador South is complete, don't be surprised if you see a slightly more accelerated entrance into our market by some of the national retailers that had opted not to open stores here in the past. This will simply be because they see connectivity. Connectivity between I-10 and what will hopefully be I-49 in my lifetime. It certainly isn't the loop that other cities enjoy, but it is a start and something that retailers will understand and embrace.

As Lafayette's road infrastructure slowly continues to improve, so does the quality of life for all of us. We can all travel throughout the city more efficiently to get to and from work, shopping, eating, socializing. The fast-paced life we are all forced to deal with might just be able to slow down a bit when it doesn't take quite as long to get where we're going — and you might even be able to shop at a new store or eat at a new restaurant along the way.

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Photo by Robin May

**THE AMBASSADOR EXTENSION WILL PAVE THE WAY TO FUTURE RETAIL AND OTHER COMMERCIAL GROWTH.**

increased traffic flow at a much more efficient level. The \$45 million-plus construction cost of the Ambassador South extension from Verot School Road to Highway 90 (future I-49) will do exactly that and much, much more. The ease of getting from point 'A' to 'B' that this roadway will provide (over the only current option of snaking through back roads that were never intend to handle this level of traffic) will be incredible. The people residing in Youngsville, Broussard, St. Martinville, New Iberia, and all of the outlying areas to the south will enjoy much quicker access to the heart of Lafayette's retail, dining and entertainment sector. Hopefully this

South extension is how it will affect our retail landscape. More times than I care to count, national representatives for big-box retail stores interested in bringing their concepts to Lafayette have come and gone. There are a vast number of variables that are factored in when a new market is being considered for expansion, and all are important, but one of the largest is traffic flow and infrastructure. Because we drive the streets of Lafayette every day it makes sense to us, but rest assured our retail lay-

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