

# Crossed Pistols of Historic Calcasieu River Bridge Undergo Maintenance and Refurbishing Project



Those distinctive icons of Southwest Louisiana, the “crossed pistols” that line the handrails of the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge, are currently part of a bridge refurbishment project that will have some of the historic pistols, damaged over the years, replaced by brand-new exact likenesses.

It’s impossible not to notice the current construction on the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge. The Louisiana Department of Transportation (DOTD) began a \$5.7 million maintenance project on the bridge in late June, and it is expected to be complete in spring of 2012. The project is focused on maintaining and repairing elements of the bridge, including removing rust, replacing damaged rivets—and recasting and replacing damaged pistols on the handrails.

“The pistols are original decorative pieces from when the bridge was opened in 1952,” says Steve Jiles, district administrator of DOTD. “Fifty to 60 pairs out of the 5,286 pairs of pistols on the bridge will be replaced during this project. The pistols being replaced have mostly been damaged by impact from motor vehicle accidents over the years. In keeping with the bridge’s history, the new pistols are being cast in the exact likeness of the original pistols.”

The cast-iron pistols line the bridge’s handrails in crossed pairs, paying homage to Lake Charles’s pirate history and local legends of Jean Lafitte. The pistols are unique to the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge. (A similar style of handrail decoration was used on two other bridges built around the same time in Louisiana, one of which is the Columbia Street bridge in Bogalusa, whose iron railings feature pinecones—also indicative of that area’s history.)

During the early stages of planning the bridge in the 1940s and into 1950, N.E. Lant, the bridge designer, favored naming the bridge the “Lafitte Bridge.” Hand-drawn pictures of the pirate and images of crossed pistols can be found on early plans and drawings. Lant officially chose the crossed pistols design for the handrails in 1943 after he learned that a route from Lake Charles to New Iberia—then known as the Old Spanish Trail—was originally called the “Lafitte Cutoff.” In 1951 the Louisiana State legislature decided to name the bridge the “World War II Memorial Bridge,” but no official name was ever adopted and the bridge is now known as the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge.

The pistols originally adorned the handrails along walking lanes on either side of the bridge, but the bridge was closed to pedestrians once it was adopted as part of Interstate 10 in the early 1960s.

The replacement pistols are being recast in a foundry in Mobile, Alabama, and are being installed on new railing pieces in Reserve, Louisiana. The new handrails will be installed on the bridge during the current maintenance project.

Visit the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge Maintenance Project’s Facebook page: [facebook.com/pages/I-10-Calcasieu-River-Bridge-Maintenance-Project](https://www.facebook.com/pages/I-10-Calcasieu-River-Bridge-Maintenance-Project) for updates on the maintenance project and to learn more about the installment of the new pistols.