The Port of Greater Baton Rouge has received the backing of the Ports Association of Louisiana in its quest to use past expenditures as "credits" to obtain state transportation trust fund grants for capital improvement projects.

Port Director Gary Pruitt told Baton Rouge port commissioners Monday that 10 PAL-membership ports approved a resolution supporting the credit system at a Jan. 10 meeting.

Five others not at the meeting voiced verbal approval, bringing the approval rating to at least 75 percent of the PAL membership, Pruitt said.

The state's deep-water ports compete annually for about $10 million in port priority program funding in the state's transportation trust fund. Another $5 million is set aside for shallow-water ports.

Interim guidelines for 1990-91 funding gave ports "credit" for projects that ports paid for themselves over a two-year period between July 1, 1988, and July 1, 1990. Those credits could be used toward a port's 25-percent match on port priority program funding.

However, credit allowances were eliminated recently in a new set of interim DOTD guidelines forwarded to ports two weeks after a Nov. 1 deadline to submit 1991-92 projects.

The credit allowances are particularly important to the Port of Greater Baton Rouge, which spent $8.9 million on a general cargo dock expansion during 1989-90.

That project and others reduced an $11 million cash reserve to less than $2 million, leaving the port with little cash for matching state grants.

Pruitt has said ending the credit allowances and the cash crunch are endangering 1991-92 funding for a proposed $1.2 million dock project at.

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In other action the port commission approved spending $11,402 on a $16,600 study that will profile the overall economic impact of public port and private docking facilities on the Baton Rouge economy.

The study will be conducted by the LSU Ports and Waterways Institute. LSU is funding $5,198 of the cost.

The LSU study was recommended by the commission's marketing/public relations and executive committees. The finance/planning committee had suggested seeking additional proposals, citing LSU's Department of Economics as an alternative.

Committee chairman Thomas Turner argued Monday that Economics Department Chairman Loren Scott is well recognized in the Legislature and his study might carry more weight in seeking state funding.

The commission sided with the waterways institute's maritime expertise on a motion by Commissioner Cyril Vetter. He said LSU's Ports and Waterways Institute is one of three national maritime institutes recognized by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

"It's just that the level of expertise is just a little bit different," Vetter said.