

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

I-40 Needs Answers

CA, Jan. 19, 1980

THE CITY OF MEMPHIS doesn't have to build costly and pretentious extensions of Interstate 40 to improve east-west routes through Midtown. Neither does it have to do so to qualify for federal grant funds that would compensate Memphis for the loss of I-40 through Overton Park.

To the extent that Public Works Director Maynard Stiles was trying to tell those citizens at Snowden School that they had to accept massive new construction in the old expressway corridor or forfeit the federal aid, he was being equivocal, at best.

We trust that, instead, Stiles was only over-reacting to the heavy opposition he had encountered to the newest version of the city's I-40 alternative.

Either way, it should be made clear to everybody that the proposed system of elevated roadways, overpasses, underpasses and interchanges is only one of a considerable number of potential options which could clear Memphis for new federal transportation grants from the money set aside for the completion of I-40.

Memphis would not be ineligible if it does nothing between the stubs of I-40, so long as it does something somewhere else. As Stiles himself said, "We have an opportunity here to get \$220 million that could be used for any transportation needs — rapid rail, new buses, new roads . . . What you're telling me is that you want to forget the \$220 million."

THAT'S DOUBTFUL. It sounded more like Stiles was telling the audience to forget the money if he wasn't going to get his way.

Other City Hall spokesmen tell us they find nothing in the federal rules that bind Memphis to any basic plan. They require only that substitute interstate funds be earmarked for the improvement of transportation.

These sources say there is a three step process: (1) The mayor must notify the governor that the city wants the unfinished portion of I-40 deleted from the interstate system, (2) the governor must notify the U.S. secretary of transportation and forward an alternative plan and (3) the secre-

try must then approve the requests and seek White House approval for congressional action to appropriate the money.

There is a deadline. All this must be done and new plans must be under contract by 1983. Given the normal pace of government at all levels, that's just around the corner.

Stiles seemed upset that neighborhood groups continue to fight the city's plan, or concept. That's because the city has never really changed it. "We have been trying for 20 years to get the interstate built through the heart of the city," he declared. And, in effect, they still are, despite 20 years of losing legal battles, changing life styles and economic conditions and the sentiments of the citizens most affected.

IF THE CITY would simplify its treatment of the gap between the expressway stubs and offer innovative forward-looking solutions to Memphis' larger transportation needs in a coming new era, officials might catch up with public opinion — and support.

Instead, their attention remains riveted on building more expensive pieces of an expressway that is never to be an expressway.

Why not, as some planners at City Hall suggest, make some improvements at the eastern stub of I-40 to get traffic over the railroad crossings and to the parkways, synchronize the traffic lights during rush hours on Poplar and Parkway and leave the western stub as is? Wouldn't that improve traffic flow, make better use of the facilities we have and meet the objections of Midtown residents?

Why not use all of the federal money we can to build new streets, buy more buses and develop the city's first rapid-rail transit system? Wouldn't that meet the greater needs of all Memphians with gasoline headed for \$2 a gallon?

Until the city answers these and other questions — with facts and patience — it isn't going to settle this issue, meet the deadline or have any extra money to do anything.

O-P. CA, Feb. 8, 1980 It's 1980; The Fight's Over

IF SOME MEMBERS of the City Council have their way Memphis will run from the future and hide in the past. How else to figure the arguments of Councilmen J. O. Patterson Jr., Glenn Raines and Oscar Edmonds that this city should replay the battle of Overton Park.

Mayor Wyeth Chandler is moving progressively now to cure the Interstate-40 paralysis which has gripped Memphis for the better part of two decades.

He indicated to a meeting of neighborhood groups this week that he will respond to their wishes and scale down the early and unnecessarily elaborate plan to connect the stubs of I-40 with existing city streets. And the mayor won their support for an immediate official deletion of the east-west expressway from the federal interstate system — an important first step toward claiming up to \$220 million in federal highway funds for other transportation and street uses here.

Chandler duly introduced a resolution to "de-designate" the controversial portions of I-40 at Tuesday's council meeting. He wanted unanimous support, if possible, lest any state or federal official doubt the city's will to solve this problem once and for all. He was armed with the fresh and enthusiastic consent of the citizens most affected by the pressure of a federal deadline to qualify for the alternate-use funds, the realities of new transportation needs in a new age and the impeccable logic of giving up on a fight lost long ago.

Patterson, Raines and Edmonds. They preferred to stand for the park route until doomsday. They must have slept through it. It's been here and gone.

It is hard to believe that in this city, in this day and time, any elected officials would cling to a position so forlorn. But believe it we must because the full council delayed action on the resolution until the mayor can win the full measure of support this proposition deserves.

Or until Patterson, Raines and Edmonds realize what city they're in and what year it is.

In the meantime, City Traffic Engineer Nathan Ficklin has entered the fray with a warning that the administration plan won't work unless Poplar and North Parkway are widened. Chandler and Public Works Director Maynard Stiles quickly disavowed Ficklin's position, saying it was based on seven-year-old data which doesn't take into account the opening of the northern leg of I-240, subsequent extensions of other major streets, swelling gasoline prices, shrinking automobile sizes, the pressure for better mass transit and all the other things few considered possible in the early 70s.

FICKLIN NOTED in a letter to The Commercial Appeal Jan. 21 that he had "not been involved in the details of developing" the alternate-I-40 plan, a curious position for the traffic engineer of any city to find himself in. That he has surfaced now in the corner of council members fighting for an expressway overtaken by history may explain how he got left out.

Beautiful!