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Political Leaders Build Pressure For Park Route

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From The Commercial Appeal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, May 9.—A large segment of Tennessee's political leadership huddled here Wednesday in a session designed to convince Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar that Memphis' public opinion stands firmly behind speeding Interstate 40 through Overton Park.

"The legal approach hasn't worked," said Representative Dan Kuykendall, "so we decided to try something else."

The strategy session drew Gov. Winfield Dunn, Tennessee Sens. Howard Baker and William Brock, Kuykendall, state Atty. Gen. David Pack, state Highway Commissioner Robert Smith and J. Alan Hanover, Memphis attorney representing the state in Overton Park litigation.

Baker, a significant addition to the public officials who are working for a through-the-park route, said the group would begin collecting copies of all resolutions and other materials reflecting public support for immediate construction and, by a collection of political muscle and public opinion, try to force action in the lengthy impasse.

The group apparently will not recommend a precise engineering design on the route, either partially depressed, cut-and-fill or tunneling.

"I am flexible on how it is done," said Baker. "But I am not flexible on whether it is done. It is time to build the road. Too much time has gone by already."



Sen. Howard Baker

Baker, who has not been among those in the past who actively favored a park route, left no doubt Wednesday that he now supports that route and that he feels Memphis' sympathies also lie strongly in that direction.

He said one alternative, calling for bypassing the park and building the I-40 segment through a predominantly black neighborhood, is strongly opposed by black citizens. And he said a second possible route, bypassing the park on the south side, has little support.

Dunn stopped over here briefly on the way to a meeting in New York City. Pack, Smith and Hanover came especially for the strategy session and returned to Tennessee after the meeting.

Kuykendall said it was agreed to stress with federal officials the strong support that prevails in Memphis for a through-the-park route.

Copies of resolutions and other materials reflecting support will be collected for submission to Brinegar and his aides.

The objective will be to convince Brinegar of the overwhelming local backing for the park route—something they say they feel Brinegar's predecessor, John A. Volpe, never fully considered.

Last Jan. 18, in one of his last acts before retiring as transportation secretary, Volpe rejected plans for a partially depressed route through the park, holding that it would be inconsistent with environmental protection laws. He did not specify a feasible alternative for the highway.

Baker said a meeting will be sought with Brinegar as soon as the resolutions and other material supporting a park route have been collected. Kuykendall said the material is to be sent here by Monday.

Brinegar has not publicly expressed an opinion on where or how to build the I-40 segment.

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