

Coleman OK's Cut-Cover Route

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM

From The Commercial Appeal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, April 21. — Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman Jr. Monday proposed a \$160-million cut-and-cover tunnel to carry Interstate 40 under Overton Park in Memphis.

Environmentalists, successful for years in blocking the park route, vowed to continue their fight. State and local officials were cautiously optimistic but concerned about the cost of the project.

Coleman asked engineers to consider a slurry wall construction technique to minimize the width of the cut and the disturbance within the park.

He also urged that the tunnel be held to 80 feet in width — 60 feet if possible — but said if this proves unfeasible he will reconsider the possibility of allowing the tunnel to be as wide as 120 feet.

A Transportation Department spokesman said that at 60- or 80-foot widths, the east and west segments of I-40 would be stacked one on top of the other. There would be room for

as many as four 12-foot lanes at each level.

The proposed tunnel, about 5,000 feet in length and one of the longest of the Interstate system, would be the key to completing a long-stalled 3.7-mile gap in I-40 in Memphis. The proposal included \$100 million for road construction and \$60 million to restore the park.

"It is my judgment," Coleman said, "that there is no 'prudent and feasible' alternative to a route under the park, and the proposal as now limited will keep harm to the park to a minimum."

He stipulated that no ventilation shafts or other extensions protrude from the tunnel and mar the landscape, and that the surface of the park must be restored within one year from the start of construction, exclusive of replanting and landscaping.

"The tunnel must be so designed that cover and drainage are sufficient to permit planting of trees that will replace those removed during construction, as well as cover the then abandoned bus lane if the park and transit

authorities so desire," he said.

He noted that with buses able to use the tunnel, the bus lane can be abandoned and landscaped.

"The replanting of trees and landscaping must be completed to the satisfaction of the Memphis Park Commission within a reasonable time," he said, "but in no event later than one year after restoration of the surface of the park."

Coleman said his decision is subject to reconsideration on the basis of the contents of a required environmental impact statement, which he asked federal and state highway officials to start preparing.

Of his overall proposal, Coleman said:

"Meeting these requirements may require the use of innovative construction techniques, such as a slurry wall method. I am therefore directing the federal highway administrator and the acting assistant secretary for systems development and technology to undertake a feasibility study of a slurry wall tunnel in Overton Park. If it proves

feasible, Tennessee may be able to construct a tunnel as narrow as 60 feet.

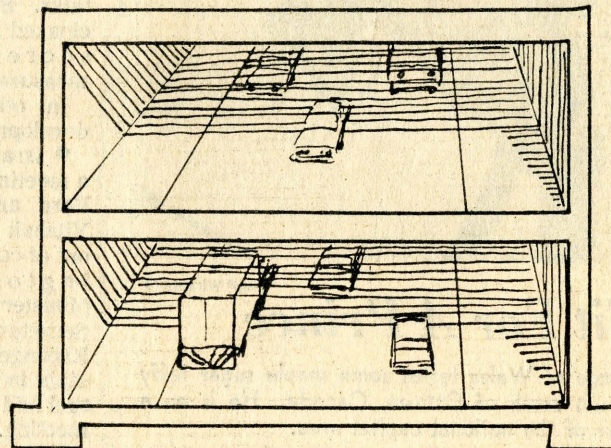
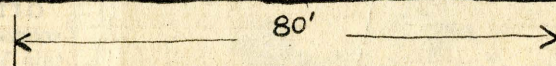
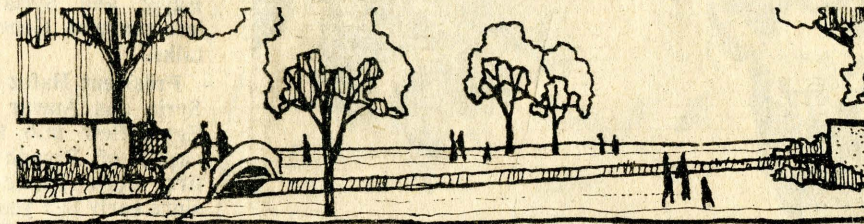
"If it (the slurry wall method) proves unfeasible or excessively costly I will reconsider this decision, and review the possibility of a 120-foot wide tunnel, which the Federal Highway Administration has assured me can be built under conventional techniques, though it will take somewhat longer."

Coleman also asked the Tennessee Highway Department to contract for a feasibility study of the slurry wall method.

This technique, common in Europe, entails cutting deep, narrow trenches along boundaries of the area to be excavated. The trenches are filled with a slurry, or heavy liquid, to treat and stabilize the dirt walls to prevent cave-ins.

The slurry later is displaced by fluid concrete. Steel anchoring rods also are used. Once these outer, retaining walls are completed, excavation of the cut can proceed. The method avoids slop-

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—Staff Graphic

Two-Level Tunnel Proposed For Overton Park

Slurry Use Urged; Foes Vow To Fight

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ing walls and disturbance of a wider area of land.

However, some engineers have reservations about employing the method on such a large project. These reservations apparently account for the conditions set down by Coleman and his call for feasibility studies.

Preparation of these studies, along with the new environmental impact statement, will be the first steps in the plan he outlined.

In his directive, Coleman specifically rejected a North Parkway route and a "no-build" alternative and mentioned two other routes.

Putting a cut-and-cover tunnel under North Parkway, Coleman said, appears not to be a prudent alternative because it would cost at least \$37 million more than the Overton Park route, would "involve excessive community disruption during construction and high maintenance cost subsequent to construction," and would cause 147 families and 11 businesses to be displaced.

He said the "no-build" alternative, involving improvements to existing streets, "appears deficient as the unconstructed segment of I-40 is not merely an interruption in the Interstate highway system but a major gap in the metropolitan Memphis traffic system." He called local response to a mass transit alternative "too uncertain to be supported."

Coleman also noted that running the route along the Louisville and Nash-

do, we believe that they are in violation of the law."

Mrs. Sunshine Snyder, a named plaintiff in the federal lawsuit objecting to the park route, also vowed to oppose the plan.

"Federal law protects Overton Park from the politicians," she said, "and I am committed to the upholding of that law and I support the decisions of the court, which means that I am opposed to any incursion on the park by the expressway.

She accused local government leaders in Memphis of attempting to destroy Overton Park "for the assumed benefit of a dead—not decaying—downtown and the seeming benefit of real estate interests.

"It is the same backward self-defeating leadership that has spawned the grandiose scheme at taxpayers' expense of a Cook Convention Center, a convention center hotel, a mall and save-the-Peabody," she said.

U. S. Atty. Thomas F. Turley Jr., who argued the government's case in the Overton Park hearings before U.S. Dist. Judge Bailey Brown, said: "It appears that we will all have grandchildren big enough to go bear hunting with a buggy whip before this whole thing is finished."

One government source agreed with Newman, the environmentalists' attorney.

"The Citizens to Preserve Overton Park should be quite happy," the source said. "Secretary Coleman's decision leaves the state with virtually no defense, no leg to stand on in court.

cial papers from Washington, but voiced concern about financing. "If we have to come up with matching funds, we may have a problem," he said. "We don't have this kind of money in the budget—\$20 to \$40 million. We're hopeful if this is the route we must take it will be fully funded by the federal government."

Under the present Interstate highway funding formula, the federal government provides 90 per cent of the cost and the states furnish 10 per cent.

Shaw, asked about one estimate that the cost of cut-and-cover would be about \$160 million, said: "I see where we'd still have a problem with \$16 million in state funds."

In Memphis, Mayor Wyeth Chandler said he would have preferred "a less expensive route," but was "happy that it's going to be built." He said he was "glad it's not a bored tunnel," which would be more expensive.

"It had been our hope that those who had been in opposition would join us in pushing for construction in that it won't have any adverse effect on the landscape of the park. But that may be too much to ask."

City Council Chairman Bob Love said he hated "to see it be the cut-and-cover because of the price, but at the same time, it's long overdue."

Elsewhere, Sens. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) and Bill Brock (R-Tenn.) welcomed Coleman's decision.

"I commend Secretary Coleman for arriving at a decision on this difficult problem, which has been with us 15 years, and for which I suspect there is



William T. Coleman Jr.

Rep. Harold Ford (D-Memphis) said he hoped the solution "will prove acceptable to all parties as a reasonable compromise. Our environment is important. Our roadways are important. Under this plan, we can have both, and I think we are very fortunate."

Coleman made no mention of a partially depressed route, the most inexpensive method of carrying I-40 through the park, thus tacitly endorsing the views of his predecessors. Such a design was rejected by former Transportation Secretaries John A. Volpe and Charles Brinegar, although it long has been the first choice of Tennessee authorities because of its lesser cost.

Planners first chose the road route...