

day Morning, June 11, 1975

Federal Official Says Future Is In Doubt For Park Tunnel

From The Commercial Appeal
Nashville Bureau

NASHVILLE, June 10. — A top federal highway official indicated Wednesday that the depressed-level interstate link which Tennessee officials want to build through Overton Park will never be approved by federal courts.

And if the state does not begin to look at more expensive solutions, such as the tunnel methods the Federal Highway Administration wants to explore, suggested W. J. Wilkes, the alternative likely will be to build no route through the park.

Wilkes, director of the office of engineering for the Highway Administration, noted that the park route has been designated the only feasible route for the long-delayed Interstate 40 link, and that the design of the link must do "minimum harm" to the park.

The state's proposal for a depressed, but open route through the park, he suggested, does not meet that criteria. Wilkes also ruled out the possibility — held out as a hope by some state officials — that the federal government might pay for more than 90 per cent of any project.

State officials have contended that they cannot afford the 10 per cent share of the cost of the tunnel proposals — which some have said could run as high as \$160 million.

If the state cannot fund the more costly projects and comply with the court order, Wilkes said, the alternative may have to be no connecting link, because "all proposals must be initiated by the state."

Wilkes' remarks followed a meeting between state and federal highway representatives during which the federal officials urged a beginning of a feasibility study of existing park route proposals.

Although state and federal spokesmen did not discuss their differences in their respective approaches to building the park route, Tennessee Deputy Highway Commissioner Bill Goodwin repeatedly mentioned the open route and insisted that it be included in any feasibility study.

The study, which Wilkes said probably would cost more than \$200,000 and could be paid for with 90 per cent federal money, would determine the problems and cost of building and maintaining the depressed-section route the state wants, a conventional cut-and-cover tunnel which has been discussed as an alternative and a tunnel built through an innovative "slurry wall" process suggested by U.S. Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman.

The slurry method allows the building of tunnel and other underground walls by digging a trench, lining it with bentonite mud and then pouring concrete in the trench.

The method has the advantage of doing minimal harm to areas around the construction site and has been popular in areas with dense populations.

State and federal officials agreed to forego study of the possibility of a bored tunnel under the park because of the expense involved. If a study of the other methods is undertaken, Goodwin said, it should be finished by next April at the earliest.

"You just can't do it any quicker," he said.

Coleman acted earlier this year to declare, in compliance with a federal

court order, that the park is the only feasible route for the expressway link, and ordered restrictions in the building of a link to ensure protection of the park.

In addition to suggesting the slurry method, he suggested that east and west lanes be stacked in the tunnel, that the total width be from 60 to 80 feet and that ground disturbed for building a tunnel be restored within a year.

Wilkes told the 13 highway officials in the meeting that one reason the feasibility study should be begun is that he does not think all of the Coleman restrictions are based on good engineering principles, and new data could probably get some of them eased.

For instance, he noted that Coleman said he might allow up to a 120-foot-wide tunnel project if he is con-

vinced that other plans are too costly.

"The door is just barely open" and new study is needed before returning to Coleman for relief, Wilkes said.

Lloyd J. Money, federal transportation official, told other officials that "the secretary (Coleman) has a very high-level personal interest in this and we're under constant pressure.

"When he sees this schedule (for the proposed feasibility study) he's going to go through the ceiling."

Goodwin reiterated the position of Shaw and Gov. Ray Blanton that the state cannot afford some suggested plans.

"It may get to the point where the state is financially unable to participate," Goodwin said. Shaw, he said, "will make the decision as to the next step."