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Cost Cutting In Park I-40

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WASHINGTON — A professional study has shown the cost-cutting slurry wall method is feasible in building a cut-and-cover tunnel to carry Interstate 40 under Overton Park in Memphis, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported Tuesday.

The study is still being evaluated but indications put the estimated cost of the project well below \$100 million.

Dr. Lloyd Money, assistant director of DOT's office of systems engineering, said the final estimate probably will be between \$80 million and \$100 million.

"The work (study) has been completed," Dr. Money said, "but the report will not be out for several weeks. We are getting interim reports from the consultant."

The study, made for DOT by a private consulting firm, was aimed at determining whether the short-cut slurry wall method of building walls in trenches could be adapted to the soils, drainage, climate and other conditions in Overton Park. The answers were affirmative.

The indicated economy of the slurry wall method would ease the state's problem of producing its 10 per cent share of the cost of the big, long-delayed interstate project.

Gov. Ray Blanton and other state officials have been pessimistic about the state's chances of coming up with its 10 per cent. DOT officials say the state's reaction should await final cost estimates.

The completed study may also shed some light on the cost of maintaining the two proposed mile-long, three-lane tubes, another matter of concern to the state. Elaborate exhaust, drainage and lighting systems are expected to be included in the plans.

DOT Secretary William Coleman Jr., in proposing a cut-and-cover tunnel for the project last April 21, recommended a study of the slurry wall technique not only to trim costs but to minimize disturbance within the park.

He urged that the tunnel be held to 80 feet in width — by 60 feet if possible — but said he will consider a width of as much as 120 feet if the lesser widths prove unfeasible.

The state has said that a 60-foot width, with northbound and southbound tubes stacked one atop the other, would allow for three lanes each way but with shoulders of substandard width.

It will be up to the state to take the initiative and prepare final architectural and engineering plans if it wishes to go forward with a slurry wall tunnel once the study has been completed. These plans then would be submitted to Coleman for his approval.