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## Coleman OK's Tunnel; Blanton Voices Doubt

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM  
The Commercial Appeal  
Light Bureau

WASHINGTON — U.S. Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman Jr. gave a green light Tuesday to tentative plans for a \$99-million cut-and-cover tunnel to Interstate 40 under Overton Park in Memphis, but Tennessee Gov. Ray Blanton questioned the practicality of the

plans, to be presented to Tennessee Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw and other state officials in Nashville Tuesday morning, call for slurry wall construction and two three-lane roadways stacked one on top of the other in a 5,100-foot tunnel and two fully-equipped ven-

tilation buildings, one at each end of the tunnel, would cost about \$89.6 million, the approaches to the tunnel about \$25 million, and full cloverleaf interchanges at each end about \$4 million, or a total of \$119 million.

The figures were supplied by Russell McFarland, a systems engineer in Coleman's office, and were confirmed by Erwin Toperoff of the New York engineering firm, Singstad, Kehhart, November and Hurka, which made the \$132,500 study that produced the tentative plans.

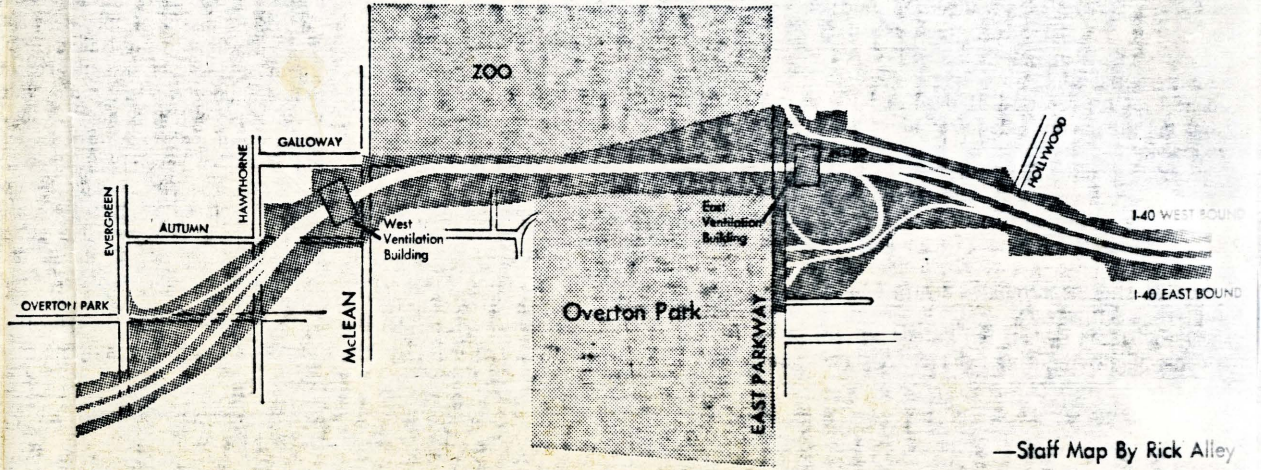
Blanton, here for the annual Democratic Governors Conference, strongly questioned the projected \$450,000 annual maintenance cost of the completed project —

which would be a state expense — and also whether the project can be kept adequately drained.

The governor said that after Wednesday's meeting in Nashville the state will make a counter proposal for a park traverse with eastbound and westbound roadways side-by-side, rather than stacked, and with a lesser penetration of the soil.

"Stacking these lanes," the governor said, "means a penetration of 70 feet. That is 45 to 50 feet below the water table. I wouldn't say it would flood out of the ground, but I would say it would be the world's longest swimming pool.

"It couldn't be drained by gravity. It would have to be with a pumping station.



—Staff Map By Rick Alley

### Engineers' Design For Overton Park Tunnel And Approaches

You'd have to have a pumping system, and pipes to pump the water through. "I know Memphis. I know the water tables, and I know the soil conditions. I know something about construction work.

I don't feel it is feasible, and I don't think \$450,000 a year will cover the cost of maintenance." "I want to complete this link in Inter-

state 40," he said, but added, "I just can't imagine this approach being feasible, and I think it will cost more than they say. They'll have to give me some new route." (Continued On Page 3)

# Governor Say State To Offer Alternative

nale and detail to make me believe we can afford to maintain it and that it is even practical. Maintenance could run more than \$1 million a year" under state estimates.

Blanton's reaction is critical because construction of federal aid highway projects is left to the initiative of the states. The Federal Highway Administration, an agency of the U.S. Transportation Department, approves the state's plans and reimburses the federal share of the cost — 90 per cent in the case of interstate projects.

The federal government is involved to an unusual degree in the Overton Park project because federal environmental laws require a finding by the U.S. secretary of transportation that there is no "prudent and feasible" alternative before a federal aid highway may be built through a public park.

Coleman called for the slurry wall, cut-and-cover tunnel study last April 21 at the same time he ruled that, "It is my judgment that there is no 'prudent and feasible' alternative to a route under the park."

McFarland said Coleman had been advised of the results of the study, that he had been told it showed the slurry wall construction method to be feasible in Overton Park, that the cut could be held to 80 feet in width, and that, "We can be in and out of the park in one year."

Coleman's response, McFarland said, was, "go out and build it."

Blanton said the state's counter proposal, while not yet fully defined, will call for a penetration of only about 20 feet which he said would be above the water table and would minimize drainage problems and expense.

He was uncertain whether the state's proposal will call for open or covered roadways — if the latter, the project would be a tunnel but would be closer to the surface than the pending proposal. "We want something we can maintain," the governor said.

Blanton said the state also will explore the idea of the federal government's paying for the whole project, rather than only 90 per cent of it. "They might be able to pay for it under their research and development program," he said.

McFarland agreed the Federal Highway Administration has authority to pay all of the costs in the implementation of new technology.

The slurry wall construction method, common in Europe but used less frequently in the United States, might well qualify

as new technology, he indicated, though this would be a decision for the Federal Highway Administration. The method entails the construction of deep trenches which are filled with steel and concrete and become the outside walls of the tunnel.