

OPE-25-27

FINAL THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL FINAL

137th Year

No. 191

Memphis, Tenn., Friday Morning, July 9, 1976

42 Pages

Price 15 Cents

Hearings Are Set On I-40's Future

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

The state yesterday scheduled public hearings here next month on the Overton Park segment of Interstate 40 and indicated it will support a depressed, partially covered roadway design highlighted by tree and shrub-covered plazas.

State Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw said at a press conference the hearings will be held Aug. 11 and 12, beginning at 9 each morning.

His announcement coincided with the Transportation Department's release of a 440-page draft environmental impact statement criticizing alternatives to the park route as too costly in terms of displacement of homes and businesses in the midtown area.

Shaw said the state will make no recommendations on the design until the August hearings have been concluded in City Council chambers here.

But he said the state favors the so-called "plaza design" in which the one-mile roadway through the park would be depressed and covered at intervals by greenery-covered plazas.

The plazas could double as picnic areas, walkways or bicycle trails, the transportation commissioner said.

Shaw said the design was presented to U. S. Transportation Secretary William Coleman in February. "He liked it."

The design is a compromise between the state's originally proposed uncovered roadway and more recent tunnel designs which Coleman felt deserved further consideration.

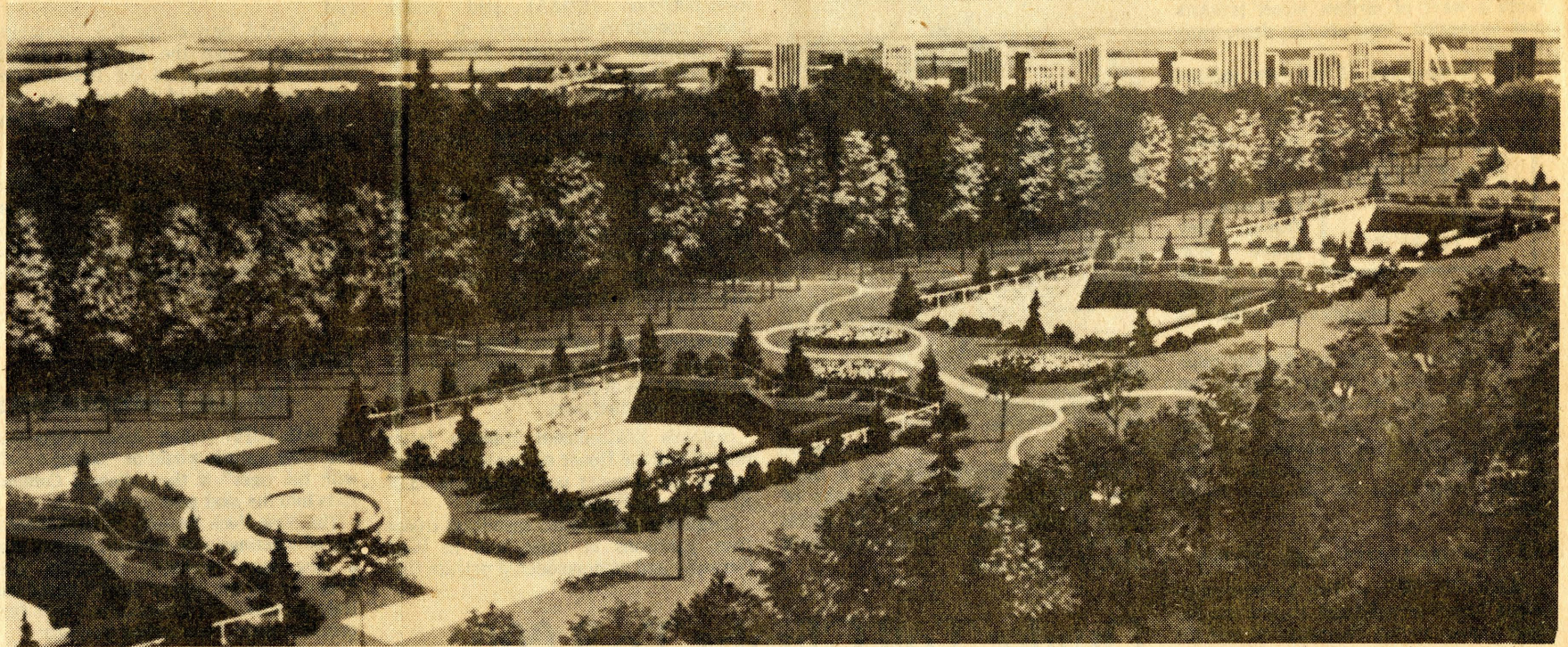
Shaw said the plaza alternative would cost an initial \$30 million to build and about \$100,000 a year for maintenance. The state would pay 10 per cent of the initial cost and the government 90 per cent, while the state would pay the annual maintenance bills.

A tunnel design would cost between \$140 and \$180 million initially and about \$1 million a year in maintenance, Shaw said. "And we will adamantly oppose any effort to build a tunnel through the park."

The earliest possible completion date of the plaza-design roadway is 1980, including the total 3.74 miles of uncompleted interstate in the midtown area.

State Transportation Department attorney J. Alan Hanover said, "I believe it's an excellent compromise between the original design and a tunnel design."

But Charles F. Newman, attorney for the Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, said, "It looks as if the state is serving up basically the same proposal that has been rejected so many times. Based on the information that has been made available



Artist's Rendition Of 'Plaza Design' For Depressed I-40 Segment Through Overton Park

to us, it sounds like they're talking about a partially covered trench. This just won't pass muster under existing law, in our opinion."

Mrs. Sunshine K. Snyder, an original plaintiff in the federal lawsuit which has stalled the park segment of the highway, said, "No matter how big the politician or

how big he thinks he is he can't circumvent federal law. And the law says they can't encroach on that park."

Shaw said the state sees little chance for completion of the roadway by 1980. "We realize we'll be back in court again as soon as the route is approved — if at all."

City Council Chairman Oscar Edmonds, who attended the press conference, told Shaw, "I think you'll have the full support of the mayor and the City Council for the plaza design."

Councilman Robert James, criticizing the failure to complete the park segment of the highway, said, "I think the blame

lies in Congress for passing an environmental law that prohibited it in the first place."

State Sen. and City Councilman John Ford said those against the park route number "about 10, compared to about 4 million people who need and want it. It's utterly ridiculous."