

63 CA, Fri. Nov. 19, 1976

Ford Staff Passes Problem Of Park Route To Democrats

From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Ford administration formally agreed Thursday to pass along the nagging Overton Park Expressway project to the Carter administration.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation formally was advised that a hearing scheduled in Memphis next Tuesday has been canceled and that no further action is contemplated in a telegram from Norbert T. Tiemann, federal highway administrator, to W. A. Goodwin, deputy commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

The state had asked the Ford administration to bow out, obviously believing the Carter administration will be more cooperative in finding a way to close the 3.7-mile gap in Interstate 40.

Goodwin sent telegrams Tuesday to Tiemann and Tiemann's boss, William T. Coleman Jr., secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation advising them the state wished to withdraw "temporarily" its proposal for a partially depressed design to carry I-40 through the park and an accompanying environmental impact statement.

Federal law requires that before a federal aid highway may be built through a public park the U.S. secretary of transportation must determine there is no prudent and feasible alternative and that the highway is designed to minimize the environmental impact.

Coleman had delegated authority to make the required determination to Deputy Transportation Secretary John W. Barnum, and Barnum had arranged the hearing in Memphis.

Barnum has acquired a reputation in Tennessee during his eight years in the department — earlier, as general counsel — as a hard-line environmentalist who is unlikely to approve an infringement upon a public park. He has participated in litigation as well as a number of high-level conferences about the I-40 problem in Memphis.

Coleman's delegation of authority to Barnum evidently persuaded Tennessee officials to disengage and hope in the Carter administration.