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The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Saturday, November 19, 1977 ***** 3

Blanton Won't Propose I-40 Tunnel

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From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Gov. Ray Blanton said here Friday a tunnel to carry I-40 under Overton Park in Memphis would be "outrageously expensive" and he will not propose one.

Blanton's reaffirmed opposition to a tunnel, coupled with U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' refusal to consider any crossing of the park except by tunnel, created a new stalemate in the 22-year history of an uncompleted 3.7-mile I-40 segment in Memphis.

Unless one side or the other yields, the result will be to save the park from any I-40 intrusion and give environmentalists a victory for which they have been fighting for two decades.

The present situation was forecast by Federal Highway Administrator William Cox when he interpreted Adams' Sept. 30 rejection of a state plan for a surface crossing of the park as meaning an end to efforts to take I-40 over or under the park.

Cost estimates of the cut-and-cover tunnel Adams' aides have said is the only type crossing he will consider range up to \$180 million, with the state's 10 per cent amounting to \$18 million.

Blanton said another consideration is maintenance costs, which the state would have to pay, and which have been estimated at running as high as \$2 million a year.

The governor said maintenance costs of a tunnel would be "unrealistic" because of the special drainage problems presented by the site, as well as ventilation and other expenses.

Blanton said he will consider proposing

a tunnel only if the federal government agrees to pay 100 per cent of the cost, a prospect that is quite unlikely.

"It puts the burden on us to come up with alternatives and we will explore alter-

natives, because people are being killed and maimed there."

While Blanton did not elaborate, the only readily obvious alternatives are to route I-40 around the park or to give up and leave the 3.7-mile segment incomplete.

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Nov. 19 1977