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CA

Editorial

THE COMM

Expressway Sequel

It is beginning to sound as though the battle against still more expressways as the answer to moving city people to and from work would be fought out in the District of Columbia.

In one way this struggle has come to a climax in California, where the Los Angeles expressways have taken over a huge part of the downtown land and San Francisco has turned to a new and faster rail service rather than accepting the expressway answer. But those are essentially local reactions of the people of those two cities.

The District of Columbia contest is different. The people who live there have limited powers subject to management by a committee of Congress. Therefore the expressway opposition is appealing to the whole country for pressure on all members of Congress. They speak through the Metropolitan Citizens Council for Rapid Transit, a federation of several organizations "united to support rapid transit for the metropolitan area and protect the nation's capital from destruction by freeways."

The approach is along the line that Washington is the most beautiful capital in the world, largely because of uncluttered open spaces. But more than 60 per cent of the downtown area, including the Capitol, White House, Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, has already been paved. Expressways are now planned for 662 more acres of District space including a six-lane thoroughfare that would head directly for the Lincoln Memorial and then dive under it.

They want citizens all over the country to enlist their congressmen in voting against more debt for the District of Columbia Department of Highways, and for H.R. 4822, which is a proposal for a rail rapid transit system to serve the Washington metropolitan area.

Aside from these direct considerations, there is a general situation in which the crosswinds of public opinion tend to meet in turbulence over the Potomac. This public opinion includes a strong surge toward expressways which came to full flower in 1956 when the interstate highway system was set up. It had support from a vast array of organizations representing highway engineers, automobile makers, gasoline dealer-truck lines and others, including motorists.

The current Washington uproar is probably part of a disillusionment. The interstate system is half built and the half that is built is largely in the cities. Some cities started with local and state money before the interstate method was available. They have their expressway systems.

But the rush-hour motorist is jammed on overcrowded expressways, as he was on older thoroughfares, and may be immobilized at entrances, waiting to get on the new pavement.

Having put his gasoline taxes and his hope for convenience into the expressways, doubt is beginning to appear as to whether more of the same thing will be any better.

We all may be hearing more about possibilities of suburban service by rail than we have in recent years.

But in Memphis we will be spectators only. We are still hobbling toward the backbone expressways, years away from choosing between rails and more motor routes for supplements.