

The Overton Park Issue Again

An attempt is being made to revive an old issue that seemed to have been finally settled after years of controversy — the question of whether the east-west expressway should go through Overton Park.

This attempt became known yesterday when Rep. Dan Kuykendall announced that Lowell Bridwell, federal highway administrator, was coming to Memphis to investigate the situation.

Kuykendall is taking a stand for re-examination of the route.

He revealed that he had written Governor Buford Ellington and Tennessee Highway Commissioner Charles W. Speight, saying the highway department "may want to reconsider the route, or at the very least suspend right-of-way acquisition until a restudy is made as requested by the citizens group." (He refers to a number of Memphians who have never given up fighting the park route). Kuykendall also said: "If the highway officials can come up with a case that any other feasible route would be just economic suicide, then I can't be for changing the route."

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We regret to see this argument start all over again, now that work is so far along on the approved route. Much of the right of way has been acquired and clearing of the property is proceeding. Millions of dollars of federal and state money have been committed to the route settled on — both east and west of Overton Park.

Reopening of the argument can only result in further delay of the vital project, which is not only a link between downtown Memphis and the city's outskirts, but also a leg of Interstate Highway 40, to carry it across the new Mississippi River bridge.

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The present route, which will use only some 26 to 29 acres of Overton Park's 342 acres, was settled on by the Tennessee Highway Department, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, the U.S. Corps of Engineers and city and county governmental bodies.

We, like all concerned, regret that

some of the park's vegetation must give — but the loss is nothing like as bad as it has been painted. Some large trees will be felled, but mostly the areas to be used for the expressway bear scrubby trees and bushes.

And actually the park and the Zoo will have gains to offset what is lost. For the expressway will make them far more readily accessible to visitors, not only local residents but Mid-South people and tourists.

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The new Mississippi River bridge is under construction. Its site is where river and shore conditions dictate it must be. Hence the expressway must go there.

The expressway route runs as laid out between the bridge and White Station and partly through Overton Park, because extensive traffic studies showed that's where it had to be to serve the public best. The studies included interviews with thousands of motorists, stopped in many areas, who answered "origin and destination" questions.

Adjustments were made to prevent vibrations of expressway traffic from interfering with delicate research equipment at St. Jude's Hospital, and to hold the encroachment on Overton Park to a minimum. In steering the route, the planners had also to keep from duplicating existing highways. To have swung around the park north or south, also would have required costly, time-consuming and hazardous curves.

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The final location represents most careful and conscientious work by the planners and engineers.

Now comes the attempt to get all this work thrown out and start the argument all over again. It's pretty late, considering the time and money already spent.

Instead of rising at this late hour in support of die-hard opposition to the project, Kuykendall should be exerting his efforts toward speeding completion of the expressway as planned and approved.

Stupid reasoning

Yes!

Joborg!
(X→)

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