

Foes Of Overton Route Let Fly Ecology, Engineering Barrages

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

Opponents of the proposed Overton Park expressway increased their momentum in federal court yesterday, battling Interstate 40 from both ecological and engineering standpoints.

Dr. Arlo I. Smith, a biology professor at Southwestern, claimed an interstate highway through the park would disturb the relationship between park animals and their environment.

And, Robert Conradt, an independent highway planning and traffic engineering consultant from San Raphael, Calif., presented three new alternate route plans.

Dr. Smith testified that many of the more hardy animal species are able to adapt to changes in their surroundings. "Mockingbirds, sparrows and starlings adapt quite well," he said.

But he also said that some of the less hardy species like the bluebird have already abandoned Overton Park because of noise and air pollution from existing traffic near the park.

"If you keep concentrating traffic in the park area," he claimed, "eventually you aren't going to have much more than the pigeons in Court Square."

Under cross-examination by United States Atty. Thomas F. Turley Jr., Dr. Smith argued that Interstate 40 would cause an over-all increase in traffic near and through the park.

Mr. Turley contended traffic volume near the park would be substantially the same if the expressway were built since the vehicles that would use the expressway are the vehicles that now use existing streets. "Since vehicles normally use North Parkway and Poplar, wouldn't there still be just as much traffic?" he asked.

Dr. Smith argued, however, that trucks are not allowed to use North Parkway, which runs along the northern edge of Overton Park, although they would use the expressway.

"I understand 6,000 to 8,000

people per hour will be using that expressway," Dr. Smith continued. "I think you'll agree with me that there's going to be a heck of a lot of traffic on there."

He said the heavy expressway traffic would concentrate exhaust pollution within the park and create more pollution in general.

"Any scientist knows that gas (exhaust pollution) moves by diffusion from areas of greater concentration to areas of lesser concentration."

"So, the pollution would spread from the expressway itself, throughout the park and into the city." For example, he said, "Pine woods 60 miles east of Los Angeles are dying off due to the smog there."

Dr. Smith said he has been a professor for 25 years, and "I've been going into Overton Park every year for 25 years. I know as much about the park as anyone else can know from a scientific standpoint. The park offers an unusual opportunity for students to get a close look at the relationship between plants and animals."

"A definite structural relationship exists between the animals and their physical surroundings," he continued. "The ecological system works in its entirety. If we delete a part, we upset the whole system."

He also attacked contentions that it would not be feasible to house the expressway in a tunnel beneath Overton Park. The state and federal governments have claimed a tunnel would have to be built at least 20 feet below ground level to keep from disturbing the roots of trees in the park.

The government claims it would be too expensive to build a tunnel 20 feet below ground level.

Mr. Conradt, who has a degree in engineering from the California Institute of Technology, said he has helped design highway systems in Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Sydney, Australia, and Auckland, New Zealand.

The three alternative routes which he designed vary by degrees, but substantially, they veer northwest from Holmes about 1.5 miles east of the park, follow Cypress Creek to the L&N Railroad right-of-way north of the park, then cross over North Parkway near Claybrook and connect with the midtown interchange (the point at which I-40 must bisect the north-south I-255 expressway).

Each route would miss Overton Park, the campus of Southwestern and all other prominent landmarks in the area. Using a series of gently sloping S-curves, the routes would snake between the Sears, Roebuck and Co. department store on North Watkins and the high-rise Woodmont Towers

Apartments on North Parkway.

Mr. Conradt said the curves in his proposed routes are "flatter" than those in the proposed park route and would, therefore, allow traffic to move about 10 miles an hour faster.

"And, the alternates would be safer and tend to increase the capacity (of traffic volume) slightly."

The hearing will resume at 9:30 this morning, the seventh day of testimony. Attorneys for the plaintiffs indicated yesterday they may rest their case against the park route either Monday or Tuesday.

The hearing will break up at 12:30 p.m. tomorrow, Judge Brown said, so that he can hear arguments in the county school desegregation case. He has not yet decided whether to continue the park case on Monday, since that is Columbus Day, a federal holiday.

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