

Alternates Disruptive, Freeway Backers Say

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

State and federal government attorneys fought to support the Overton Park expressway yesterday by attempting to prove that the plaintiffs' latest alternate route proposals would create widespread community disruption.

Government attorneys outlined a list in federal court, detailing churches, schools, parks and communities which would likely be in the path of three alternative routes proposed by Robert Conradt, an independent highway planning and traffic engineering consultant from San Rafael, Calif.

Under questioning by United States Atty. Thomas F. Turley Jr., representing the federal defendants, and J. Alan Hanover, special counsel for the state Highway Department, Mr. Conradt confirmed the "victims" of his proposed routes.

They include 10 neighborhood parks, each incorporating city water wells, along the L&N Railroad right-of-way north of the park; a path through the predominantly black Springdale community; the Shelby County Growers' Assn.; McLean Baptist Church; the Church of the Good Shepherd (Episcopal); a path through the innovative Vollintine-Evergreen integrated inner-city community; St. Teresa (Little Flower) Church and Little Flower School; the Cross-town Theater and several blocks of residential area north of Overton Park from Watkins on the west to Holmes on the east.

Mr. Conradt outlined the alternate routes during Wednesday's proceedings in federal court. The routes essentially veer northwest from the present route at Holmes about 1.5 miles east of the park, follow Cypress Creek to the L&N right-of-way, then cross North Parkway near Claybrook and connect with the Midtown interchange (the point at which Interstate 40 must bisect the north-south I-255 expressway).

Each route would completely bypass Overton Park and the campus of Southwestern, and, using a series of gently sloping S-curves, snake between the high-rise Woodmont Towers Apartments on North Parkway and the Sears, Roebuck and Co. department store on North Watkins.

Mr. Conradt testified Wednesday the curves in his proposed routes are flatter than those in the park route and would, therefore, allow traffic to move about 10 mph faster. He also said the routes would be safer and tend to increase the capacity of traffic volume slightly.

Mr. Hanover said the 10 neighborhood parks along the L&N right-of-way include between six and eight acres of land and are used as recreation areas by children.

He asked Mr. Conradt about the city wells inside the parks.

Q — All right now, you knew about those wells, didn't you, Mr. Conradt?

A — Yes.

Q — "Do you know where the water goes that is pumped out of those well houses, Mr. Conradt?"

A — No, I don't.

Mr. Hanover said the wells are the main water supply for that North Memphis area.

Questioned, by Mr. Turley, admitted his proposed routes would cut a wide swath through the Vollintine-Evergreen community.

"Did you know," Mr. Turley asked, "that community is one of the pivotal areas in this nation in which they are trying to make integration work in the inner city?"

"Yes," Mr. Conradt said.

John W. Vardaman, attorney for Citizens to Preserve

Overton Park and other plaintiffs, noted in his redirect examination of Mr. Conradt that preliminary engineering studies would have to be made on any proposed route. Those studies, he said, would include sociological surveys concerning community disruption. The final boundaries of the expressway route could be altered in some cases, he indicated, to bypass valuable institutions.

A brief argument erupted near the end of Mr. Conradt's testimony when Mr. Vardaman asked him about the Riverfront Expressway in New Orleans.

Mr. Hanover objected to introduction of the testimony since it "has nothing to do with this suit." But Mr. Vardaman told United States Dist. Judge Bailey Brown that in the New Orleans case Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe rejected location of an expressway on the basis of arguments by himself and Mr. Conradt. "That was two years ago," Mr. Vardaman said, "and Secretary Volpe took that highway off the map."

Mr. Hanover deflated the claim, however: "That is a two-headed sword. It only shows that Secretary Volpe will not approve what he knows is wrong, but that he will approve what he knows is right."

Mr. Volpe gave final approval of the Overton Park route on Nov. 5, 1969.

Fred H. Larson, a retired civil engineer who was assistant manager of the Memphis office of Buchart-Horn engineers until 1968, testified briefly, nothing that Buchart-Horn (a Pennsylvania-based firm) had altered the alignment of Interstate 40 east of the park from the original plan by the state Highway Department.

He said the firm was hired to study the Overton Park situation in 1964. Michael Lackner, an attorney for the plaintiffs, asked him: "Was the park route fixed at that time?"

"I don't remember," Mr. Larson said. "But, there was a clause in our contract that we were to study all reasonable alternatives (to the park route)."

Mr. Larson will be the first witness when court resumes at 9:30 this morning.

Judge Brown will halt proceedings at 12:30 p.m. to listen to arguments in the county school desegregation case.

OPB
18-06

CA
Oct 8, 1971