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Search For Overton Alternate May Add Years To Project

From The Commercial Appeal Nashville Bureau

NASHVILLE, Jan. 22. — State Transportation Commissioner Robert Smith said Monday a ny alternate to the rejected Overton Park Expressway routing might add six or seven years to the project.

Smith, his optimism thin, said he now has underway a series of staff discussions of the Interstate Highway 40 problem in Memphis.

Additionally, he expects to meet later this week with the department's special counsel, Memphis Attorney J. Alan Hanover, to explore new moves.

The state found itself up against an impressive barrier last week when outgoing Federal Transportation Secretary John Volpe dealt what apparently is the final blow to the Tennessee plan for a partially-depressed roadway through the park. He based his decision on ecological and other considerations.

After Volpe's announcement, State Atty. Gen. David Pack, who as a former highway commissioner is intimately familiar with the Overton Park situation and its pitfalls, said darkly there may be no workable alternative.

But Smith, who warned that shifting the I-40 link to a new site would lengthen the project by years because of such factors as planning, right of way acqui-

sition and required public hearings, wasn't quite so despairing.

"I'm not to that point yet," he said.

"I'm not one to quit and give up until I explore all the routes. I've still got some hope, but I'm not overly optimistic."

Meanwhile Monday, Smith and Gov. Winfield Dunn said construction on the Mississippi River bridge and two sections of Interstate 40 in Memphis are expected to be completed in July.

The two links of Interstate 40 that are nearing completion extend from the east bank of the Mississippi to Front Street and from Front to 270 feet east of Third.

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