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THE HEBREW WATCHMAN

Traffic, Transit And Overton Park

By Irma O. Sternberg

Editor's Note: Dr. Sternberg, author of a book about the Expressway Case, attended the entire 1971 hearing in Federal District Court and writes from first-hand knowledge of the I-40 litigation.)

Bewilderment and anger pervaded Memphis political circles when outgoing Transportation Secretary Volpe ruled out the Overton Park Expressway. But perhaps above the wails of anguish, Memphis now can hear the facts behind Volpe's twelfth-hour decision and begin to plan sensibly for the future.

Traffic problems are still with us and will worsen until we make concerted efforts to solve them. No longer does it serve any useful purpose to blame snarls and fatalities on the uncompleted I-40, to fondly believe that more asphalt will solve problems created by asphalt. No longer should Memphis accept the fable that we can continue to pour more cars into mid-city and still expect to comply with future clean air standards. The moment of truth has come!

Fewer cars on the streets of all large cities is the only solution to a variety of worsening problems. Already, EPA has mandated sharply revised traffic patterns for certain urban areas where air quality has deteriorated to the point of endangering both plant and human life. Why does Memphis think it can escape indefinitely the consequences of pouring more pollutants into its midcity area?

The energy crunch, too, requires a choice between fuel for cars and fuel for buildings. Car pools and mass transit may soon seem more attractive than unheated homes, schools, and hospitals.

Better use of existing streets would bring instant traffic relief. First, provide police manpower to enforce the law, including tow-

aways for illegal parkers. Periodic updating of signal controls and installation of more sophisticated computerized controls would help clear bottlenecks. But not until we subsidize our transit system can drivers of unsafe cars afford to abandon their only means of getting to work. Some cities have found that free transit is more economical than cut-rate transit fares or new roads. With an efficient transit system, drivers of cars enjoy more road and parking space, a lowered fatality rate, and lower insurance premiums.

Long overdue completion of the I-240 circumferential will furnish access to the new bridge, compensating out-of-town drivers for slightly higher mileage (than the proposed I-40) by decreasing driving time (since I-40 as presently planned would be a gigantic bottleneck from the moment it opened).

Volpe's decision may prove to be the biggest bonanza ever to hit Memphis. If it preserves the clean air of the inner city, speeds up the resuscitation of our dying transit system, and causes more efficient use of existing arteries, it could prove a blessing. Rescuing one of the nation's finest urban parks from the bulldozer may be no more than an unearned bonus for Memphis citizens.