

Expressway Bids Exceed Estimate

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

Cost overruns on first-phase construction of the city's northern circumferential expressway could delay the project indefinitely, a spokesman for the state Transportation Department said yesterday.

Only two bids were submitted for preliminary grading and drainage work on the western half of the two-part project. The low bid was about \$4.5 million more than the state had expected to pay for the job, said Robert Odle, development engineer for the state agency.

Odle said the contract could be awarded "sometime next week at best," though the state has 30 days in which to analyze the bids. "We'll have to consult with the Federal Highway Administration to see if we can justify the overrun." The highway project already is the most expensive in Tennessee's history.

He said state and federal highway engineers will consider the possibility of "re-advertising for bids and of redesigning the project to reduce costs." Either could cause indefinite delays, he said.

The apparent low bid of \$33.4 million was submitted by B. Potashnick, a Cape Girardeau, Mo., contractor. The other bid, by T. L. James and Co. of Ruston, La., was \$42.9 million. The state had estimated the project would cost about \$28.9 million.

The project would be in two phases. The first would be grading and drainage work on a 3.36-mile section of Interstate 240 from just north of Levee Road to the Illinois Central Railroad, plus grading and drainage of crossing streets, drainage of the proposed roadways and adjustment of sewer lines. The second phase involves grading and drainage of a .768-mile roadway to connect U. S. 51 with I-240.

Transportation Department spokesmen say no Tennessee firms are equipped to handle the massive project.

The state already had run into delays in preliminary construction of the eastern half of the northern I-240 route. Potashnick, the Missouri contractor,

had been awarded a \$14.94-million contract for that job, but canceled the bid early this month due to a shortage of landfill material along the route.

The state now is considering whether to redesign that segment, or to substitute surface silt for sand and gravel as landfill along the 5.74-mile segment. The landfill material is necessary to elevate the roadway through the Wolf River floodplain.

Friday's bid opening involved 43 projects in 38 counties, and, primarily because of the expense of the Shelby County highway project, was the biggest in state history — \$51.6 million.

Other Shelby County work in the opening, and the apparent low bidders:

Grading, drainage, base and paving, plus construction of curbs, gutters, sidewalks and related work on an interchange at State 57 and Sweetbriar Road. G & R Construction Co. of Memphis, \$944,101.

Resurfacing of a 3.6-mile section of State 15, beginning at Interstate 40. Standard Construction Co. of Germantown, \$174,768.

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April 27, 1974

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