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Page 4

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Section 6

New Impetus For I-40

THE LONG-AWAITED presentation of a fresh proposal for the completion of Interstate Highway 40 through Memphis to the national transportation chief renews hope that after some 18 years the job will be done.

Optimism must be cautious. The foes of this project, who have kept it tangled in the federal courts for years, threaten years more of litigation.

But there is a highly encouraging note. Rarely, in all the years of this controversy about putting the I-40 link through Overton Park, have we heard a federal official so ready to act. When the proponents of the expressway plan placed their 50-page application in his hands in Washington on Thursday, Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar said, "We will begin this afternoon to determine if it is a thorough, complete and legal application."

BRINEGAR, WE HOPE, was impressed by the solid political representation of the people of Memphis and Tennessee that marked the delegation that brought him the application. There were the governor of Tennessee, the mayor of Memphis, the state's senior senator, and the House member in whose district the unfinished road route lies.

Moreover, there was significance in the fact that Brinegar came to the office of Sen. Howard Baker to accept the application. Also, the presentation had been prepared with the help and cooperation of the Federal Highway Administration.

The study is new. It firmly

backs the decision that has been the logical one all along — a route through the park, where the right-of-way was purchased from the City of Memphis years ago.

THIS TIME THE transportation secretary is given some clear options: The favored depressed roadway, a cut-and-cover design, or outright abandonment of the pavement to connect the two waiting points where I-40 now dribbles out into city traffic. While the latter is possible, it also is silly.

It is tragic that it now would cost \$17.7 million for the depressed road that two years ago could have been built for \$10 million. And tragic to have to spend \$178.5 million for a cut-and-cover highway that could have been done for about \$60 million two years ago. But it is a well-publicized fact that federal highway building costs were 38 per cent higher in the second quarter of this year than in the same period in 1973. Cement, bituminous surfacing, steel, engineering, excavation, and all labor — everything is caught in the inflation spiral.

Waiting is going to mean still higher cost.

Let us hope that Brinegar already has familiarized himself with the new application, and already is formulating his decision.

Memphis has waited quite long enough. And no matter how long the unfortunate delay goes on, no one has found or proposed a feasible alternative to the park route. The object is to minimize its effect on the surrounding environment, but to get that short stretch completed.

OPE 22-29

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Oct. 6 1974