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Footdragging In Overton Park

IF STATE HIGHWAY officials are really serious about building I-40 through Overton Park, they should pick up the pace with a specific plan that falls within the construction guidelines set forth recently by U.S. Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman.

Instead, Deputy Highway Commissioner Bill Goodwin and his colleagues seem to be reading from an old road map in the 20-year-old interstate highway controversy.

Goodwin is pushing a low-cost, depressed level design that appears to have little chance of gaining either the approval of Coleman or the federal courts. And the deputy commissioner was told as much by a federal highway engineer at a meeting Tuesday in Nashville.

Yet a more promising design is one that Coleman suggested himself — a cut-and-cover link built with “slurry walls” to minimize the area of park land needed for construction.

NO ONE is saying that Coleman's option is cheap. Estimates

range as high as \$160 million with the state providing as much as 10 per cent of the total figure.

But the cut-and-cover proposal carries with it a greater likelihood of winning what is sure to be another round of litigation in federal court.

WHILE STRESSING the dollars and cents of Overton Park, Goodwin is predicting that a feasibility study of the design alternatives will take, ironically, until next April at the earliest. That's an extravagant deadline in a day of spiraling construction costs.

All this seems to amount to more footdragging through Overton Park and new excuses for additional delay.

To speed up their assessment of the I-40 puzzle, perhaps state highway officials should forget about the long shots and concentrate their energies on a plan that has a realistic chance of succeeding.

Coleman has dropped a broad hint.