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OPE-24-25

Aug. 14, 1975

Firm Will Study Feasibility Of I-40 Slurry Wall Plan

The federal government yesterday awarded a \$50,000 contract to a New York City firm to study the feasibility of building a slurry-wall, cut-and-cover tunnel to complete Interstate 40 through Overton Park.

The engineering firm of Singstad, Kehart, November and Hurka has until Oct. 21 to complete the study, said Department of Transportation spokesman Bill Bishop.

Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman Jr. recommended April 21 that the expressway be built as a cut-and-cover tunnel no more than 80 feet wide through the park, possibly using the slurry method.

"This alternative treats the various and somewhat conflicting claims of environmental, economic and transportation concerns in a fair manner while insuring that the City of Memphis retains use and possession of one of its most treasured resources," Coleman's spokesman said.

The two-level tunnel, about 5,000 feet long, would complete the 3.7-mile gap in through Memphis. DOT sources estimated in April it would cost between \$100 million and \$160 million.

Howard E. Wegener, who handled the contract negotiations for the Singstad firm, was not available for comment yesterday afternoon.

Mayor Wyeth Chandler said, "I think anything that gets the expressway built is fine. That's been my goal since the thing was brought up when I was on the City Council.

He said that he assumed the federal government "is continuing in their effort to build a tunnel through the park."

The proposed tunnel likely will run into opposition, Chandler said, but the objections probably will be mitigated by the cut-and-cover method.

Henry Evans, the city's chief administrative officer, said he has not been contacted by DOT officials about the contract.

But, Evans said, "I'm gratified that something is happening, even if it's only a feasibility study."

The expressway segment through the park has been blocked by environmentalists for nearly 20 years and has sparked several court battles. Opponents said in April they would continue to fight the route through the park.

A proposal late in July to build a double-decked, elevated expressway link along North Parkway also drew heated opposition.

Mrs. Sarah J. Hines, one of the most adamant local opponents of a route through the park, said the Department of Transportation is "overlooking the fact that the law forbids use of parkland when there's a feasible and prudent alternative. And there are many in this case."

Mrs. Hines, a member of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park and other ecology-oriented groups, said the "only alternative to going through the park is to complete the northern leg of I-240."