

Downtown —

Interstate Bridge ^{Sec 11,} Reroutes Traffic _{p. 6,}

By JEFFERSON RIKER

In the 26 months since it was formally dedicated, the Hernando DeSoto Bridge, on which Interstate 40 spans the Mississippi River, has had a significant impact on Memphis traffic patterns, particularly in the downtown area.



Jefferson Riker

It could have even more impact.

Nathan L. Ficklin, deputy city engineer for transportation and traffic, produced figures last week from the Tennessee Department of Transportation which show that the bridge will be used by more than 8.5 million vehicles this year.

Traffic counts on the \$50-million bridge are taken periodically and adjusted to show conditions on an average or typical day, Ficklin said.

The figure thus fair for 1975 is 23,350 vehicles a day, an increase from 20,400 a day in 1974. The 1974 figure, however, represented a decrease of about 24 per cent from the 1973 numbers.

That was an apparent reflection of the fuel crisis and the novelty of driving across the new bridge in its early months.

Traffic counts just east of the bridge at I-40 and North Third showed a decline of 11 per cent in I-40 traffic in 1974, but an increase of 12 per cent so far this year.

The Memphis-Arkansas Bridge had more vehicles in 1974 than the DeSoto Bridge, but fewer so far this year. Counts on the old bridge showed 23,920 vehicles a day in 1974, but only 21,710 a day in 1975 to date.

Ficklin was asked what would be the impact of completion of I-40 through Memphis, whatever the final route and construction method.

"No one to my knowledge," he replied, "has projected the impact of completion of I-40 through Memphis."

But Ficklin has some definite opinions on what would happen.

He laid the groundwork for his opinion with some more traffic figures, made on I-240 and I-55 near the Brooks Road interchange. I-240 between Airways and I-55 has 81,520 vehicles a day, far in excess of its design capacity. On I-55 west of I-240 there are 49,240 vehicles each day; on I-240 north of I-55 there are 70,560; I-55 south of I-240 averages 66,639.

That means, Ficklin said, nearly 134,000 vehicles a day cross the I-240 - I-55 intersection. The figure is derived by dividing the total of the four traffic counts by two.

"In my opinion, if that link of I-40 (the uncompleted stretch in midtown) were finished, you'd have 50,000 or 60,000 cars a day on that highway. And you'd probably take 25,000 off of I-240."

The economies in fuel, time and money of driving straight across the city instead of around it are obvious, not to mention relieving congestion on I-240 and I-55.

And the DeSoto Bridge would then lead someplace besides the dog track.

BID OPENING: The U. S. Engineers, as advertised, opened bids last week on the first earthwork and dredging of the marina for Volunteer Park on Mud Island. The apparent low bidder was Maharrey-Houston Construction Co. of Memphis at \$835,850. There were six bids, which have not yet been analyzed. The second low bid was \$840,450 by Chancellor & Son, Inc., also of Memphis. The high bid was \$1,854,450. The earthwork will begin next month.

NO.