

# State Sees Danger In Continued 'Do-Nothing' Stance On I-40

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NASHVILLE — Even if Interstate 40 is completed in Memphis — whether through Overton Park or otherwise — the year 2000 will see a “complete breakdown of traffic movement” on the southern half of I-240 from I-55 counterclockwise to I-40 on the east.

And if I-40 is not finished by 1980 other major highways will be clogged with congestion and need massive improvements and the traffic increases will make the I-40 project area less desirable to live in.

Further, a “do-nothing” approach on I-40’s completion is the worst alternative.

That glum picture is contained in a two-inch-thick draft environmental impact statement prepared by the Tennessee Transportation Department to justify the long-stalled routing along the park.

“Peak-hour traffic demands are expect-

ed for a large portion of the southern half of I-240,” the study says, “to be very close to or exceed twice the maximum level ‘E’ service volume which the freeway can carry.”

“E” service volume is described as “a very poor service,” subject to traffic backups caused by minor accidents or broken-down vehicles.

The northern half of I-240 would need an additional lane and, on some segments, two lanes of capacity to handle a “do-nothing” situation — that is, not completing the 3.7 miles of roadway that has been held up by environmentalists for 20 years.

“By the year 2000 Union Avenue, all the way from the downtown area eastward to Poplar, is expected to experience regular breakdowns of peak-hour traffic flows,” the statement asserts. “The peak-hour flows are expected to exceed level ‘E’ maximum service volumes by 10 per cent to 33 per cent.

“Under these conditions traffic will

first seek alternative routes and finally long-term adjustments of activity patterns will be made to avoid the problem. To meet the problem with physical improve-

ment of Union Avenue would require traffic-carrying capacity improvements equivalent to roughly two additional traffic lanes for a surface street with uncon-

trolled access. Building of I-40 would divert enough traffic from Union Avenue to make future widening unnecessary.”

The report said several other major highway sections will experience severe congestion by 2000. Among them is Poplar east of its intersection with Walnut Grove Road, though some relief could be provided by completing I-40.

Barring significant improvements to other streets, according to the report, major congestion would occur by 1980 unless I-40 is finished.

These are estimates of additional lanes or equivalent capacity improvements that would be necessary, presuming that I-40 remains stalled:

Chelsea, two lanes from Thomas to I-240; Jackson, one lane from Chelsea to I-240; Summer, two lanes from East Parkway to Highland; Poplar, one lane from McLean to Walnut Grove Road; Poplar,

The Tennessee Transportation Department says if I-240 is not complete, Memphis traffic by 1980 would be chaotic. To keep traffic moving, Memphis would need to make the following improvements:

- Chelsea — two lanes from Thomas to I-240.
- Jackson — one new lane from Chelsea to I-240.
- Summer — two lanes from East Parkway to Highland.
- Poplar — one new lane from McLean to Walnut Grove.
- Poplar — one new lane from near Colonial to I-240.
- Macon — one new lane from Jackson to Highland.
- Park — one new lane from Airways to Getwell.
- Chelsea — one new lane from Second to Thomas.

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# Report Predicts Need To Overhaul Major City Streets By Year 2000

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one lane from near Colonial to I-240. Macon Road, one lane from Jackson to Highland; Park, one lane from Airways to Getwell Road, and Chelsea, one lane from Second to Thomas.

"Community disruption and expenditures to provide (such) laneage or capacity improvement equivalents would be of great magnitude," the study says.

"If such improvements were undertaken they would only provide for a minimum level of traffic service in the anticipated first year of operation of a completed I-40 facility."

North Parkway, the study says, would be a major beneficiary of traffic diversion on a completed I-40.

"Under the 'do-nothing' condition, peak-hour traffic demands by the year 2000 would exceed the maximum level 'E' service volume by 25 to 35 per cent. Traffic flow would be bottlenecked resulting in diversion onto other streets. Some drivers might seek access through the street system in Overton Park. To rectify the traffic situation at least two additional traffic lanes would be needed on North Parkway.

"Traffic diversion to I-40 would bring peak-hour traffic volumes on North Parkway well within the amounts which could be accommodated with efficient movement of vehicles."

**The recitation of congestion on major arteries and the diversion of traffic to other, currently lesser used streets goes on page after page in the report.**

However, the statement noted the "do-nothing" option would have some beneficial effects on north-south traffic. If I-40 is completed many north-south streets bisecting the expressway would either be interchanged with the freeway or separated over or under, causing traffic tie-ups.

In any case, the study points out, the widening of McLean, Hollywood and Tillman would probably be necessary even if I-40 were not built. This is because each is a part of a separate north-south corridor which is proposed to extend all the way from Southern to Wolf River and interchange with I-240 in the north.

"The already established need for more north-south street-carrying capacity would dictate that these streets be improved eventually. Building of I-40 would make the need even more imperative."

**With regard to safety, the study indicates traffic accidents, injuries and fatalities will be greater if I-40 is not completed.** It noted that six to seven times more mishaps and injuries occur on urban state highways and major streets than on urban interstate roads and three times as many people are killed.

The state transportation department has

scheduled public hearings on the Overton Park segment of I-40 for Aug. 18-19 in the City Council chamber at City Hall in Memphis.

This department has indicated it will press for a depressed, partially covered route through the park which would feature a series of plazas adorned with trees and other greenery.

The study concludes that both "build" and "do-nothing" options would have "some blighting influences upon the quality of social interactions in the study (I-40 project) area."

**Nonetheless, the study says, the impacts would be more widespread and severe with the "do-nothing" option because "the changes in mobility, safety and the nuisance effect of heavy traffic operations would be so widely dispersed to so many parts of the . . . three-mile band of street congestion."**

Among other things, the study shows, under "do-nothing" conditions traffic noise could be expected to grow worse on all major east-west streets, especially near intersections with north-south streets "in a band from Union Avenue to Chelsea Avenue."

The study concedes the "do-nothing" option would leave all parklands and historical sites undisturbed.

Overton Park would, however, be flanked on three sides by major traffic arteries which, in the future, are expected to experience travel demands far beyond their capacities to accommodate.

**"North Parkway, East Parkway and Poplar can all be expected to carry more traffic by the year 2000 than is considered environmentally acceptable for either residential or commercial environments along these streets."**

The study observes that decreased environmental acceptability of the living conditions on the streets just adjacent to Overton Park "will tend to reduce the park's importance as a recreational area for those residing in the local area. The importance of Overton Park as a regional recreational center would be diminished by hazard and difficulty of gaining access to the park."

The study considers the various merits and demerits of partially depressed, fully depressed, single-level cut and cover and stacked-lane cut and cover designs through the park, as well as at-grade and elevated designs.

Also considered in the impact statement is a North Parkway elevated design which would avoid taking Overton Park land, a cut-and-cover tunnel under North Parkway and a route along the Louisville and Nashville Railroad.

**Outside of Overton Park, the planners say, all alternatives have significant noise impacts to residences, schools and churches, with the North Parkway elevated design producing the greatest magnitude of impact.** However, it was noted, all noise abatement technology would be used in any case.

The study observes that the efficiencies in traffic operation gained through the completion of I-40 would result in income gains for commuters, medical service personnel and some businesses.

"These highway-user savings would result from decreased transportation costs and reduced personal property and injury losses. An indirect effect of these 'savings' would be increased commercial sales."

But it was also predicted that the most significant benefits from the completion of I-40, other than the function of supporting development and redevelopment plans of the city, "would be the benefits to the traveling public in Memphis derived from relief of traffic congestion and travel on a type of roadway which has a proven record of reducing accidents per million vehicle miles of travel."

**Preparers of the study granted that introduction of the freeway into a densely populated area would have some adverse effect on intracommunity communications, but they noted that close spacing of crossings should mean reductions in such communications would not occur to "a great degree."**

The study was particularly critical of the possible routing of I-40 along the L&N Railroad property.

"The community (there) is known as the Vollintine-Evergreen group, which has the general boundaries of North Parkway on up to the Vollintine Avenue area, and east of Watkins Avenue to as far as Springdale School near where Cypress Creek and Jackson Avenue intersect.

"The Evergreen-Vollintine group is one of the pivotal areas in Memphis since it is attempting to make integration work in the inner city . . . a highway alignment along the L&N Railroad would slash through this neighborhood, and the impact that this could have on the future development of this community would be disastrous."

Though the study discusses the various alternate park designs, it says the one which would have the least impact would be straight through the area, using the existing park bus lane and paralleling service road rights of way.

That design, the study notes, would not divide existing park-use areas and would utilize land that is not now available for recreation.