

CA, July 26, 1976

Traffic's Social Impact

GRIM FORECASTS of chaotic Memphis traffic in 24 years, whether or not the Overton Park portion of I-40 is completed, show the need to think more about social impact, remembering all the while the complete environment.

We've heard all about the environment from objectors to the Overton Park expressway, but it's a fact of life that automobiles will continue to be used as long as there is fuel and that streets and highways must be provided for their use.

Predicting pandemonium on the streets of Memphis by the year 2000, the Tennessee Transportation Department has issued an environmental statement for use at next month's hearings on the latest plan for completing I-40 through the park. If traffic is to move efficiently without the expressway being joined, it says, additional lanes would have to be built on portions of major streets, north and south, including Chelsea, Jackson, Summer, Poplar, Macon and Park.

And there we have the social impact, the disruption of community balance. Those extra lanes would in some cases cut through some of the most stable neighborhoods in the city, where blacks and whites have learned to live side by side with equanimity. The Evergreen-Vollintine section is a prime example.

Widening streets through those commercial and residential areas would take parking areas, front yards and even

homes in some cases, which could cause migration to other parts of Memphis into diverse neighborhoods which might not be so receptive to the new residents. It could easily bring on another racial division. How does that compare to cutting down some trees?

We don't know the answer. Completion of I-40 through Overton Park would help, but it won't solve the traffic problems which are certain in the future. Another obvious aid, of course, would be the development of an effective mass transit system which would take people where they want to go when they want to go. But that brings up another problem: How do you convince a driver that his car is only a method of transportation instead of a soulmate?

These environmental-social impact factors should enjoy as much debate at the hearings as possible damage to the park. But they shouldn't go on for another 20 years.