

Officials Begin Study of Results of X-way Hearing

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Tennessee transportation officials returned to Nashville today to begin the arduous task of transcribing the opinions of 154 persons who spoke for or against completion of Interstate 40 through Overton Park during two days of public hearings.

The hearings, which ended yesterday in the City Council chambers, were the latest in a series of controversial events concerning completion of the interstate. The Overton Park expressway route has been the focus of a 20-year battle between transportation officials and environmentalists.

According to a poll kept by *The Press-Scimitar* and the Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce, 94 persons spoke in favor of completing the 3.7-mile interstate segment through Overton Park, while 60 persons spoke against it during the hearings.

Although 305 persons had signed up to be heard on the issue before registration was closed at noon yesterday, just less than half that number actually voiced an opinion.

Many of the 77 persons who registered to be heard yesterday, had signed the speakers list Wednesday but were not present in the City Council Chamber when their names first were called. Others who had signed the list failed to take the podium.

Sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), the hearings were ordered by U.S. Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman to be included in a state-drafted environmental impact study detailing the pros and cons of nine proposed alternatives for the expressway's construction.

W. A. Goodwin, deputy TDOT commissioner, said state officials will begin transcribing the hearings immediately although the environmental impact study will not be ready for Coleman's review for another six months.

Coleman has been ordered by U.S. Dist. Judge Bailey Brown to make a final decision that there is no alternative route for the interstate's completion other than the park route. Coleman is expected to use the environmental impact study to help reach that position.

Among the last persons to speak during

the hearings was Howard H. Vogel, a professor at the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences, who called the 440-page environmental impact study "one of the best efforts yet in exploring the alternatives."

However, he said he still sees no reason to build the expressway through Overton Park and urged completion of the northern leg of Interstate 240 around the city.

"There's a question whether the city even will need the east-west leg (through the park) once the northern perimeter is finished," Vogel said.

Sunshine K. Snyder, a longtime outspoken critic of the interstate's parkland route, argued that environmentalists are not responsible for the rising costs in road construction that state officials must contend with.

Responsible, she said, "are those who failed to search seriously in the past 20 years for an alternative route."

Leon M. Giglio, who favored completion of I-40 through the park, said most of the people he had talked to "not only want it completed through the park but want it at ground level."

Paul Quick, 15, a Central High School

sophomore, said: "As a member of future generations of Memphians, I ask you: When America is without fuel who will be stuck with your monstrous highways? I will. Me. My generation and our children."

James L. Fri, president of River Oil Co., said the missing I-40 link has "compounded the problem in the downtown area."

He said without the Overton Park route, it is "too much trouble for people to get downtown to shop, dine or whatever.

"... the public pays dearly every day we delay this," Fri said.

The nine construction proposals to end the battle between interstate supporters and environmentalists range from a "no-build" alternative to a \$186-million bored tunnel beneath Overton Park.

State transportation officials, however, support a depressed, partially covered roadway design highlighted by tree and shrub-covered plazas.

The proposed design could be built at an initial cost of \$30-million with an annual maintenance expense to the state of \$100,000. The federal government would pay 90 per cent of the original building cost and the state would pay 10 per cent.

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