

Expressway Is Threat To City's Oasis, Stability

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THE long-standing debate about completion of the expressway link through Overton Park is important to the future of Memphis. Overton Park, with its pleasant green landscape and quiet atmosphere, is a cultural oasis for the heart of Memphis. The I-40 debate is between those who want to preserve and those who would sacrifice this rich landscape heritage to the expedient savings of a few minutes travel for outlying residents who may have business downtown.

The interstate linkage which connects traffic from west of Memphis to East Tennessee has a diversion just at the foot of the park interrupting the expressway flow. As a result, most interstate traffic is routed around the southern circumference of the city. Local east-west traffic must follow local thoroughfares.

Since there has been a constant out-migration of Memphis residents from the center city, there is the immediate concern of rapid transport for contacts downtown.

AS MORE AND more of middle- and

upper-class money has fled the city to the suburbs, those left in the central area have had to strengthen their resolve. They have had to struggle to keep it an interesting and vibrant area to live in.

It is a tough job because many of those moving from the center city are the people with great influence and control over what happens. Self-interests take precedence. Better shops and more conveniences are designated for outlying areas.

There is natural and real wealth in downtown Memphis. Government and finance services are located downtown and the riverbluff and past development history of the area insure its ongoing survival. Many of those who leave can't abandon it altogether.

Many of those who have stayed around the city are idealists. These are people who believe in Memphis and strive for a resurrection of its rich heritage. They of course realize that unlike the past, the future of Memphis carries a partnership between the races.

Memphis between the Parkways is

among the most scenic and magnificent cities anywhere in the country. Overton Park is a calming influence. It is one of the last remaining areas of grace not sacrificed to helter-skelter, suburban-oriented development.

It is not a great inconvenience to get from East Memphis to downtown. It is argued that more than 90 per cent of the users of a completed expressway through the park would be local residents. Even so, the estimated number of local citizens who would daily use the expressway route is low.

Too many of those who have left the center city have abandoned hope for the area. A major interstate through the primary city park does not give them much cause for bother.

But those who live in the center city, of both races and of different income groups, have most at stake in this controversy. It is the value of their neighborhoods and the future of their communities and family lives which would suffer the greatest physical and social shock waves of an expressway carved across the park.

THIS VALUABLE park land is irreplaceable. It should not be sacrificed to shallow vision and temporary advantages of cheaper construction costs.

U.S. Transportation Secretary William Coleman is now studying several proposals for resolving the expressway problem. It will not do to approve expressway completion across the surface of the park. Nor will it do to divert a surface-completed freeway around the park in such a way as to shatter the well-integrated and stable neighborhood north of the park.

The other proposals deserve serious consideration. Among them are an underground completion of the I-40 linkage, an east-west parkway or completing the northern leg of the expressway.

We should seek a reasonably priced alternative. But almost any alternative is preferable to a city divided by a six-lane concrete interstate roaring through the treasured neighborhoods of hard-working and dedicated Memphis citizens.