

# U.S. Highway Chief Favors I-40 Park Plan, Shaw Says

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

State Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw said last night federal Highway Administrator William Cox has recommended approval of the state's proposed plaza design for the long-delayed Overton Park segment of Interstate 40.

Shaw, who met briefly with Cox at a national convention of the American Road-builders Society in Nashville, said Cox told him his urging to Transportation Secretary Brock Adams "parallels a discussion we had 45 days ago."

"At that time, he indicated he would recommend approval if we agreed to eliminate an interchange at Avalon and one ramp inside the park on the east end at Parkway. That would eliminate cutting several trees inside the park. We agreed at that time."

Shaw said his discussion with Cox yesterday was "only a general discussion" and that it shed no new light on Adams' inclinations in the bitter environmental dispute.

In its two-decade history the 3.7-mile park segment has been approved for construction by five federal highway administrators only to be rejected at the hands of a succession of transportation secretaries.

But, Shaw said Adams has indicated he will change the pattern. "I don't think there is any chance of his rejecting it."

Shaw said Cox accompanied Adams to Memphis Tuesday for an unannounced hike through Overton Park. "They actually did get an on-the-site view of Overton Park, and Mr. Cox gave me no indication that his thinking had changed in any way as of today (yesterday)."

The transportation commissioner said he, Gov. Ray Blanton and Adams met earlier this year in Kentucky "primarily to talk about coal . . . but at that time he said that his administration is dedicated to completing the 10 per cent of the interstate that has not been finished."

In Washington, environmentalist attorney John Vardaman, who has represented Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, said, "I guess I can say we would like for him to have ruled the other way."

"But I think Secretary Adams will recognize, as have other transportation secretaries before him, that this route can't be approved under the law as it stands."

Vardaman said he has not mapped out specific plans for further litigation in the park dispute, but he said it "is no secret" that environmentalists if necessary will once again resort to the courts in hopes of another I-40 roadblock.

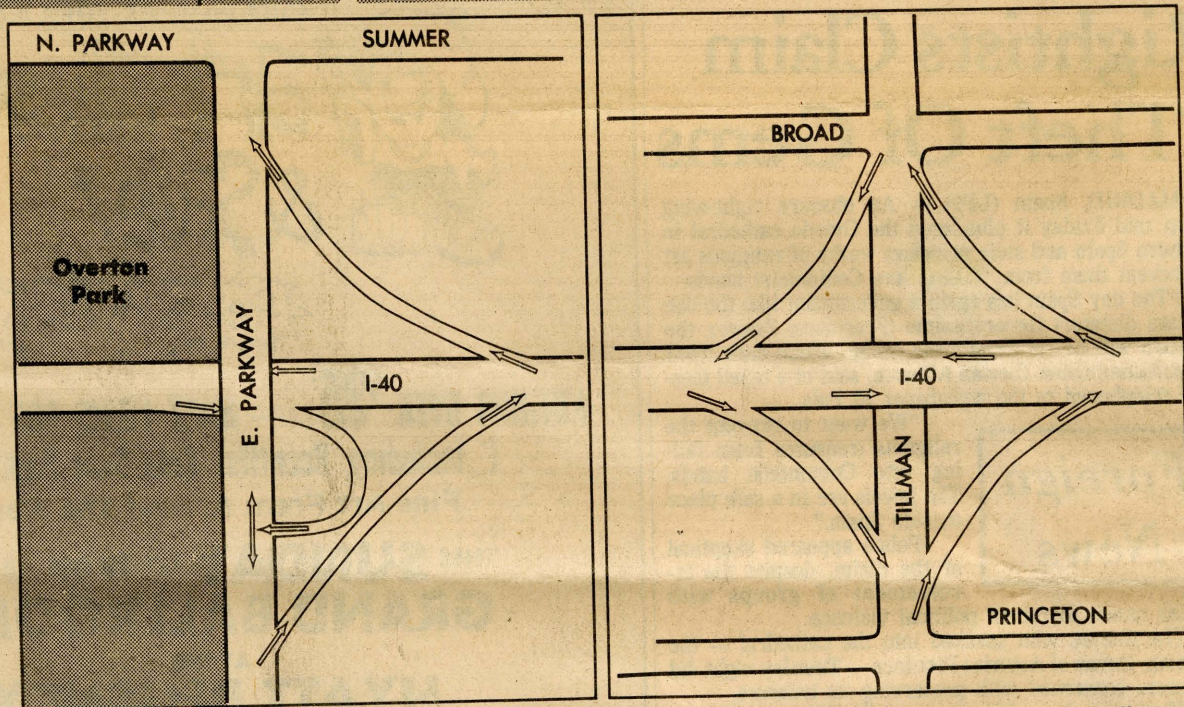
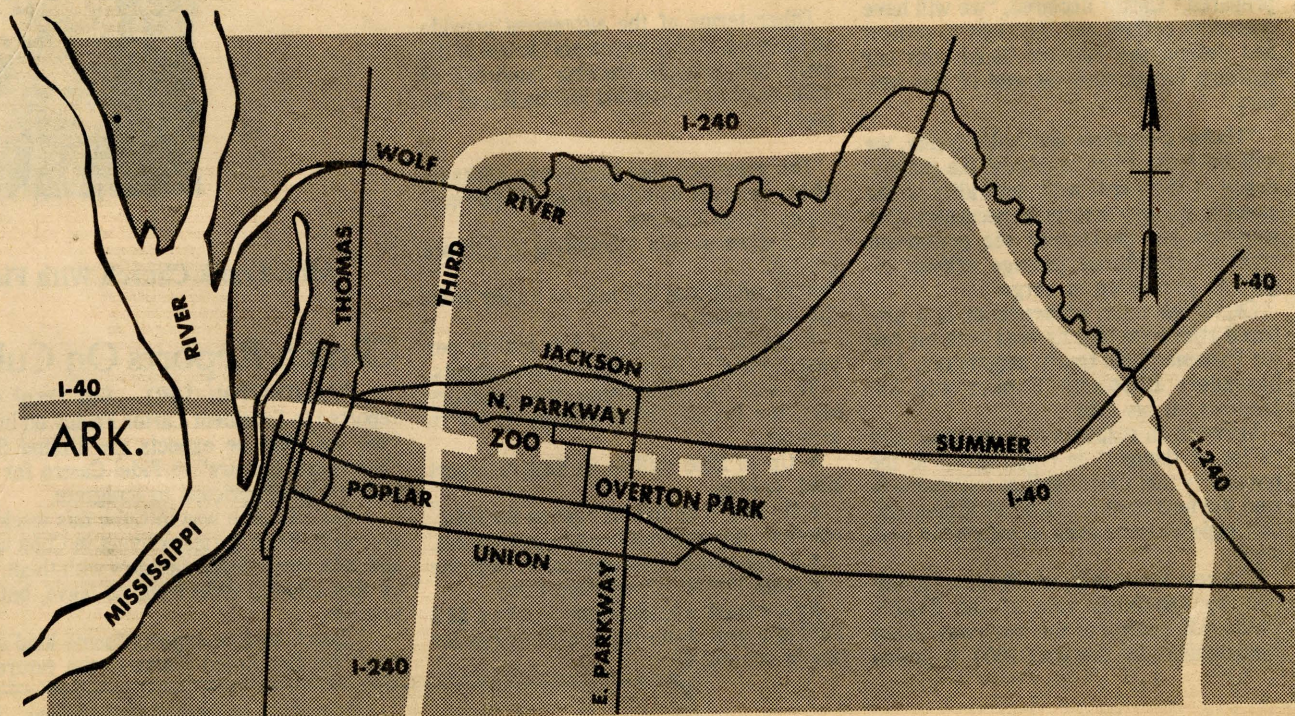
Memphis attorney J. Alan Hanover, special counsel for the Tennessee Transportation Department, said he is not familiar with engineering aspects of the proposed park route. But he said, "I don't believe that elimination of the Avalon interchange or the ramp will affect the legality of the routing."

Charles Newman, Memphis attorney for the Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, was vacationing yesterday and could not be reached for comment.

State House Speaker Ned McWherter (D-Dresden) said last night: "I believe we can expect a favorable recommendation within 30 days after Congress goes back into session in Washington." McWherter said he felt the recommendation by Cox would be "the most acceptable to all parties."

His estimate of a timetable for Adams' decision would make it within 60 days. State Transportation Department spokes-

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Staff Maps

## Expressway Route

The route under consideration for Interstate 40 through Overton Park would eliminate two previous proposals — an interchange at Avalon and one ramp inside the park at East

Parkway. Two groups of ramps to enter and leave the expressway would be provided near Broad and Tillman and at East Parkway south of Summer. Another single ramp in the vicin-

ity of Autumn and North Merton has been proposed for entering westbound traffic, but it still is in the design stage.

## Environmentalist Group Maintains Tough Stance

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men in Nashville said they have been given indications a decision is more imminent, possibly as early as next week.

Cox's recommendation was placed on Adams' desk on July 15, shortly before Adams' legal counsel made her confidential assessment of the park route to Adams, sources said yesterday.

Ben Smith, administrator of environmental planning for the state Transportation Department, said the ramp that Shaw agreed to exclude from the park would be replaced by another ramp that would be built further east of the park.

That single ramp, in the vicinity of Autumn and North Merton, would be an entry ramp to I-40 for westbound traffic. Smith said the isolated entry ramp at Autumn and North Merton "could be confusing, especially for people who are unfamiliar with the city, but it would provide needed additional access to I-40."

He said the exact configuration of that replacement ramp still is in the design stage.

Mrs. Anona Stoner, secretary of the Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, said last night the environmentalists will not give up their fight. "Our stand is what it has always been, regardless of whatever Mr. Cox' recommendation is. That is, we will continue to protect Overton Park from intrusion of an interstate highway by whatever means."

Mrs. Stoner said the park route opponents consider any design or construction method involving park land "destructive and illegal."

The state's so-called plaza design for the park segment, the design currently in Ad-



Eddie Shaw

ams' hands, was proposed last year as a compromise to its original uncovered gash across the park.

The \$33-million project now calls for the 3.7-mile roadway segment to be depressed (below ground level) and covered at intervals with five plazas. The concrete plazas would be covered with earth and planted in shrubbery and other greenery that would have walkways connecting the northern and southern segments of the park.

Opponents of the park route have said they would not give up their fight even if the roadway were submerged beneath the park in a bored tunnel. And Shaw said last year the state will give up its efforts for a park route if given no choice but a tunnel design.

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