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Park Action Brings Sorrow, Joy

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

Supporters and opponents of an Overton Park expressway, again disappointed and elated, were as widely aligned yesterday as the farthest extremes of the coast-to-coast highway.

State Transportation Department officials in Nashville closeted themselves for strategy talks most of the day, then announced they will not give up their two-decade crusade to close what they called the "missing link" in Memphis.

Politicians were unanimous in their disappointment with U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' rejection of the park route, and environmentalists, pleased once more, said they were prepared for the state's next move.

State Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw expressed bitter disappointment at the decision, but declined to discuss immediately what course the state will take now other than to say, "Our efforts to finish I-40 in Memphis are far from finished."

Such alternatives, however, likely will be discussed when Shaw and other state transportation officials appear at a news conference in the Memphis City Council conference room at 1 p.m. Monday.

"It's disappointing," Shaw said of Adams' decision, "because we feel our proposal would have adequately protected the park and still have provided for this necessary link in our transportation system."

Mrs. Sunshine K. Snyder, a named plaintiff in the 8-year-old lawsuit that now legally forbids construction inside the park, said she expected the ruling. "The Supreme Court in its last decision was very decisive. I would have been shocked had it been otherwise."

Mrs. Snyder said the plaintiffs are ready for the next move. "Sen. Howard Baker has apparently been mouthing off about sponsoring a law to circumvent the National Environmental Protection Act. But he's also very ambitious and politically expedient."

"I would think he would take pause to reflect now whether he will continue to follow the wishes of a financially defunct Chamber of Commerce that apparently has little public support as opposed to the wishes and interests of the general public of Memphis."

Baker, the Senate minority leader, is-

sued a statement from the Senate floor in Washington: "I am greatly disappointed." The senator said he will wait until Gov. Ray Blanton returns from London and "talk with him to see what will be the best course of action."

Asked about congressional action to amend stern environmental provisions against park intrusion, Baker said it is "something to be considered." But he said he preferred to talk to state transportation personnel before committing himself further.

The special Memphis counsel to the state Transportation Department, J. Alan Hanover, said he was not surprised by Adams' ruling: "I didn't expect anything different from a politician in Washington. I think the only recourse that people of this community have is to convince the congressmen and senators that they must have special legislation to build the highway."

"From previous experience, we've never found any secretary of transportation or members of his staff that were sensitive to our feelings and our needs. We need to have this road complete. . . . That ground is not sacred when compared to the safety and economy of the people of this area."

Charles F. Newman, attorney for Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, said the divisiveness through the years, with parties aligned at opposite extremes has "I think been based on misunderstanding of the facts and the law."

"There's not really anything so unusual about the controversy itself, however. One of the best things about our system is that it permits, even encourages controversies like this one to develop. Sometimes, as in this case, the resolution of the controversy takes longer than we want. But I can assure that no one has been more anxious to get this thing resolved than our clients."

Newman said if legislators or attorneys who favor the park route felt they could amend the law to exempt Overton Park from strict environmental provisions "they would have done it long before now. That remains to be seen. But it would be a great tragedy for Congress to emasculate the environmental laws."

Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis said after the ruling, "I'm afraid it might start another 20 years" of litigation.

"I guess my initial reaction was that I was concerned that no alternative plans

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Three Forks Left In Road

Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams' decision yesterday leaves the state with three basic avenues to pursue. The state can:

- Drop the missing 3.7-mile link altogether and rely on the circumferential expressway and city streets in the area to carry the entire load of intercity traffic.
- Seek an act of Congress exempting the missing link from the federal interstate system and, if granted, then build a ground-

level route at a cost of more than \$35 million with 100 per cent state financing. It would be at least next year before legislation could be approved, and there would likely be lengthy litigation after that.

- Submit a new plan for routing the interstate which would not cut through the park — possibly aligned with North Parkway. Any new plan could take years of hearings, approvals and litigation.

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for completion were offered by the secretary." Ford, who said he will meet with Adams soon, said he has consistently urged some form of connecting link between the ends of I-40 that don't meet.

"I've never been strongly in favor of going through the park, but just connecting it, over, under, around, anything, somehow."

Efforts to reach Blanton, who is on an "international trade mission" at the Churchill Hotel in London, were unsuccessful. Hotel employes said the governor was in

conference at the hotel.

Memphis Mayor Wyeth Chandler, at home with a virus, said: "Obviously I'm deeply disappointed."

The mayor, who had fought for the I-40 link as a city councilman earlier in his career, described it as "a crippling gap in the city's interstate system. It's inconceivable to me that anyone could have rendered such a termination. Apparently this division of government has gotten overrun with environmentalists and so forth."

Chandler said he will discuss the decision with state transportation officials. "If

no action can be taken on that level, we'll seek to have special legislation enacted in Congress. The state had presented a plan that should have definitely been approved."

Rep. Robin Beard (R-Tenn.) said he was not only disappointed with Adams' decision, but "infuriated . . . Except for a handful of environmentalists, this plan had the solid support of Memphis citizens, local and state officials. Hundreds of man-hours had been spent preparing this proposal that affects the whole life and economy of the city of Memphis."

Sen. Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.), who was in gas deregulation hearings on the Senate floor, could not be reached for comment. But a spokesman for the senator said he wanted to confer with state transportation officials before commenting.

Mrs. Anona Stoner, secretary of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, said, "Based on what we have heard about the secretary's decision, we are very pleased that Overton Park is to be kept free of highway intrusion. He has shown due consideration of the importance of parklands and recreation areas."

And, the man who began it all, planning consultant William Pollard, who recommended the park route in 1955, said he was disappointed both personally and "for all the Memphians who will have to wrestle with getting from place to place."

"The issue is not over in terms of the significance. This leaves Memphis with a huge gap in its system of thoroughfare, and it means we'll have to deal with congestion and accidents. An alternative is to try to improve all the streets in the area to get them do the work of the expressway."



Newman

Hanover