

Adams' Retrenchment Maintains Slight Hope For I-40's Completion

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' retrenchment Friday in the Overton Park expressway case has kept a flicker of hope in Nashville that Interstate 40 may be completed through the Memphis park.

Adams, questioned Friday by Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) before a subcommittee of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said the state could build the highway in a cut-and-cover tunnel through the park, and weakened last week's stand against the park expressway.

Adams said, "Senator, if they (Tennessee officials) want to come in and tunnel that park and stay within that busway and ventilate it, then that project can be built."

Baker told Adams that Tennesseans are "tired of the federal government diddling with them."

Eddie Shaw, state transportation commissioner, in 1975 said he would reject a tunnel design because the state could not afford its 10 per cent share of the cost, estimated at between \$100 million and \$180 million. Annual maintenance costs, which the state would pay, are estimated at between \$2 million and \$4 million.

Shaw could not be reached for comment yesterday, and a spokesman for him said, "We frankly don't know whether he would reconsider a tunnel."

But the spokesman said the state has not ruled out the possibility. And he said the state now wants to meet with Adams or Federal Highway Administration officials to see if the tunnel option might be "compromised" with the state's own plaza design proposal, a variation of the basic cut-and-cover design.

Paul Allen, public relations spokesman for the state transportation department, said Adams and his staff still have not informed the state "specifically" why the transportation secretary turned down the state's plaza design.

The state design proposal, which would have cost about \$33 million, called for the 3.7-mile park segment to be built below ground level and covered at five intervals with concrete plazas covered with earth, shrubs and other greenery.

The plazas would have been "mini-parks," picnic areas and walkways connecting the Memphis Zoo on the north to the rest of the park on the south.

Allen said William Goodwin, deputy state transportation commissioner, wrote a letter Friday asking for a meeting with Federal Highway Administration officials. "He wanted to find out specifically why Secretary Adams turned down the proposal and whether a compromise of our plan might work."

Mayor Wyeth Chandler, contacted in Knoxville yesterday, said, "I assume the next step will be to sit down and have a head-on talk with him (Adams). We want that highway completed, but we're in a sort of never-never land right now."

"I don't want to cut down any possibility, including a cut-and-cover tunnel."

But Chandler said a bored tunnel, completely submerged, would be "absolutely extreme. The last cost estimate I heard for that was around \$237 million. I don't know what good that kind of money could do for anybody."

Engineering objections to a tunnel de-

sign, including the cut-and-cover option, have revolved primarily around ventilation and drainage problems.

Gov. Ray Blanton, in London, was not available for comment yesterday. But he has scoffed at tunneling proposals, saying a tunnel through Overton Park could be "the world's longest swimming pool."

J. Alan Hanover, special counsel to the Tennessee Transportation Department, was on a camping trip yesterday and could not be reached for comment. But, Hanover, too, has frowned on tunnel proposals, instead urging Congressional moves to exempt Overton Park from the National Environmental Policy Act.

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