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Overton Park Will Be Topic Of Discussion

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM

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WASHINGTON — The Overton Park expressway project in Memphis will be discussed here today at a meeting of Tennessee and federal highway officials.

The session will be the first since U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams rejected the state's plan to close the 3.7-mile gap in Interstate 40 with a partially depressed, partially covered "plaza design" highway through the park.

Tennessee's deputy transportation commissioner, William Goodwin, said in Nashville that state officials want to discuss "technical modifications" of the rejected plan.

"We hope there will be a discussion of changes that will make the plan more acceptable," Goodwin said.

Goodwin said the language Adams used in turning down the state's plan "implied to me we could submit other proposals."

He said state officials want to explore this possibility as well as discuss the meaning of Adams' remarks to Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) at a Senate public works subcommittee meeting Oct. 7.

Adams' comments at the subcommittee session indicated he would approve a cut-and-cover slurry wall tunnel to carry I-40 under the park.

This contrasted with the interpretation that Federal Highway Administrator William Cox and FHA Executive Director Les Lamm put on Adams' rejection of the "plaza design." They said it meant Adams had ruled out any I-40 route through, under, or even over the park. "We are through with Overton Park," Cox said at the time.

"That is still my interpretation," Lamm said Tuesday. "I stand on what I said." Cox was out of town. He is due back this morning.

Adams turned down the plaza design in a letter to Gov. Ray Blanton Sept. 30. "There is a conflict between the letter, Cox's interpretation of it, and what Adams said to Senator Baker," Goodwin said.

Goodwin will accompany Tennessee Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw to the meeting. Cox is scheduled to head the federal group. Adams is not expected to attend, and Lamm said he had not been asked.

The 22-year-old problem is before Adams because federal environmental laws require that before a federal aid highway may encroach upon a public park the U.S. secretary of transportation must find there is no "prudent and feasible" alternative and that the highway design minimizes environmental damage to the park.

While Adams in his Oct. 7 remarks appeared to approve a tunnel under the park, Tennessee officials consistently have spurned this approach because of construction and maintenance costs.

The state's 10 per cent share of the estimated \$180-million construction cost would be \$18 million, and annual maintenance costs — which the state would bear alone — would amount to an estimated \$1 million a year.

"The state only takes in about \$42 million a year in state funds for highway purposes," Goodwin said.



By Robb Mitchell

Hurry Up And Wait Project

Grass, weeds and small trees grow through the rocks of the new, incompleted marina on Mud Island as the south end of the island is built up by dredging the Mississippi River to accommodate Volunteer Park. The first phase of the marina was completed more than a year ago, but it will be more years before it — and Volunteer Park — are open for visitors.

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