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New 'Covered' Design Urged For Park Route

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WASHINGTON — Tennessee officials here Wednesday presented to federal officials a plan for a depressed Interstate 40 route through Overton Park in Memphis that would be more nearly covered than an earlier "plaza" design.

Sixty per cent of the 3.7-mile I-40 segment would be covered over rather than 40 per cent as contemplated in the "plaza" design that U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams rejected Sept. 30.

Adams' action was interpreted at the time as terminating all thought of taking I-40 through the park. But a week after he turned down the state's "plaza" proposal, Adams told a Senate subcommittee he would approve a tunnel.

The new idea, while not a complete tunnel, would be another step in that direction — a direction Tennessee highway designers reluctantly have followed during the project's up-and-down 22-year history.

One federal official called the discussion with Tennessee officials a "good meeting" but no early decision is expected on the newest plan.

State Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw said recently completed wind tunnel studies at the Air Force's Arnold Engineering Development Center in Tullahoma had shown 60 per cent of the project could be covered without requiring forced air ventilation.

"We had thought if we went beyond 40 per cent we would have to have forced ventilation, which would add to the costs," Shaw added.

Shaw and his deputy, William Goodwin, estimated the cost of a 60 per cent covered design at around \$40 million, as compared to about \$35 million for the 40 per cent covered design.

The state has opposed a full tunnel because of cost estimates ranging up to \$180 million; plus maintenance costs estimated at up to \$1 million a year.

A major cost in maintaining a tunnel would be the machinery and energy required to ventilate it with an acceptable supply of fresh air.

State officials are now sounding the modification to the "plaza" design, to determine if the idea is worth pursuing.

Emerging from the meeting, Federal Highway Administrator William Cox said, "It was a good meeting." Asked if any progress had been made toward a solution, Cox said, "Yes, I think we made some progress." Cox and his chief aide, Les Lamm, declined further comment.

Goodwin said he will continue discussions with FHA officials this morning.

Even if state officials are encouraged to pursue the new idea, engineers will have to produce a new design, and other steps taken before a completed, revised proposal can be placed before Adams for a ruling.

Federal environmental laws require that before a federal aid highway can encroach upon a public park, the U.S. secretary of transportation must formally determine there is no "prudent and feasible" alternative and that the design minimizes environmental damages.

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) had encouraged Wednesday's meeting by asking Adams, at the Oct. 7 Senate subcommittee meeting, to take an active part in solving the I-40 impasse in Memphis.

Adams meanwhile has injected a degree of urgency by recommending to the White House that states decide by 1982 whether they want to finish uncompleted interstate highway segments. States would have to commit themselves to construction by Sept. 30, 1982, or request that the money be made available for other projects, including mass transit.

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