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By Rick Alley

It's A Tunnel Or Nothing, State Told

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams will consider nothing but a tunnel to carry Interstate 40 through Overton Park in Memphis, the Tennessee Department of Transportation was told Thursday.

The state was advised to forget about a partially depressed "plaza" design, including one newly revised so that 60 per cent of the highway would be covered.

The new federal guidelines were laid down at a meeting between William Goodwin, deputy state commissioner of transportation, and a half-dozen state Department of Transportation (DOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHA) officials. Aides to Adams were present, but Adams himself was not.

Only the day before, Goodwin and his superior, state Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw, had presented the idea

of a 60 per cent-covered roadway to DOT and FHA officials, and had received some encouragement.

Expressing disappointment at the turn of events, Goodwin said, "We came in here yesterday with what we thought was a good faith effort to complete the project, short of an actual tunnel."

Cut-and-cover tunnels of the types Goodwin said were discussed at Thursday's meeting would cost up to \$180 million, plus up to \$2 million a year for maintenance, Goodwin said.

By contrast, the 60 per cent-covered design carried a construction price of about \$40 million, with no appreciable maintenance expense.

"Professionally," said Goodwin, who is on leave from a position as dean of research at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, "I think the plan we presented yesterday is equal to or better than a tunnel in all respects, and certainly would cost far less. We thought we had an excellent compromise. Now we have been told

the only thing they will look at is a tunnel."

While the federal government pays 90 per cent of the cost of interstate highway projects, it contributes nothing to maintenance expenses. The state must pay 10 per cent of construction costs and assume all maintenance costs.

The state's interest in a tunnel long has been chilled by these cost considerations, as well as by the engineering problems that a full-scale tunnel in the Overton Park area would present. Drainage is regarded as a particular problem because of underground water. Gov. Ray Blanton has said that because of drainage problems a tunnel in the area would become "the world's longest swimming pool."

Goodwin said DOT officials limited Thursday's discussions to some kind of cut-and-cover tunnel, rather than a bored tunnel. "A bored tunnel would be entirely too expensive," he said.

While Goodwin said he discussed tunnel

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Blanton Called Key To Tunnel

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nels with the federal officials, he conceded a final decision on whether the state will propose one will be up to Blanton. "Governor Blanton will make the decision," he said.

No comment was forthcoming from the governor's office Thursday, with Brooks Parker, the governor's press secretary, saying, "The governor has not been briefed on that. We don't have any statement to make at this time until the governor receives a full briefing."

While Blanton in the past has frowned on the idea of a tunnel, he never before has been confronted so squarely with choosing between a tunnel or leaving the uncompleted, 3.7-mile segment of I-40 as it is now — an option DOT officials call "no build."

The state's last formal proposal, a depressed, 40 per cent-covered "plaza" design, was rejected by Adams Sept. 30 in a letter to Blanton.

Now it is the state's move again. The state-federal talks here were to determine what Adams might accept. The answer was a tunnel.

If the state chooses to proceed, the next step would be to draft a design for a tunnel and present it to Adams. However, before that, there must be talks in Nashville. "The state," Goodwin said, "is not at the point of deciding whether to propose a tunnel."

Adams is in his roadblock position because of federal environmental laws. The laws provide that before a federal aid highway may encroach upon a public park the U.S. secretary of transportation must determine there is no "prudent and feasible" alternative and that the design minimizes environmental damage.

Goodwin said side-by-side as well as over-and-under tubes to carry I-40 under the park, three lanes in each direction, were discussed at Thursday's meeting.

Goodwin said he is "hoping" a proposal can be presented to Adams by Jan. 1.

Goodwin also mentioned that Congress is considering assuming interstate highway maintenance costs, which would free state revenues for other highway purposes. But he conceded this could be years away.

Adams signaled at a Senate subcommittee hearing Oct. 7 that he would be favorably inclined toward a tunnel under Overton Park. He also observed the state did not seem disposed to a tunnel because of the cost.