

U.S. Won't Back Freeway Through Park in Memphis

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — The federal government withdrew its support from a controversial Tennessee plan to run Interstate 40 through a park in Memphis.

Outgoing Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe said the record in the case isn't sufficient for approving a route through Memphis' Overton Park.

The decision, which reverses earlier federal approval of the road, follows a Supreme Court ruling two years ago that new superhighways can be routed through parks only in "the most unusual circumstances." The high court, returning the case to the Transportation Department for further proceedings, said the law required the agency to determine whether an alternate route was feasible or whether harm to the park could be reduced.

In his latest decision, Secretary Volpe said the record on these two aspects didn't justify approving the road. A Transportation Department official also noted that since the department's original approval, Congress has set new environmental standards for roads and also has passed highway noise standards that the Memphis project doesn't meet.

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