

# Center City Calls For Park Route Decision Based On Current Law

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**T**HE TENNESSEE Transportation Department's decision to shelve its request for federal approval to complete the expressway link through Overton Park signals the continuing polarization and lack of progress surrounding this unending controversy.

Supporters of the park route believe that any decision by aides to Transportation Secretary William Coleman would be adverse to a route across the park. They are hoping that when Jimmy Carter takes office the chances of getting a park route approved would be more favorable.

This latest turn of events came amid complaints that Coleman was not sympathetic to the park route and was dragging his feet.

Because the route would destroy public parkland the state needs it approved by the U.S. secretary of transportation before

it can proceed. State officials will now be seeking a new hearing before the incoming secretary.

Although the park route request will be submitted again, the delay and resubmission further hinders a settlement of this long pending issue.

IT IS DIFFICULT to understand what difference the party in power makes when it comes to enforcing environmental protection legislation.

The state's Democratic governor and senator will have some influence with the Carter White House. But the influence of Sen. Howard Baker and Sen. Bill Brock with the Ford White House could not resolve the matter and there is no reason to think the process now will be different.

Although the state continues to say it wants an early deci-

sion on the park question, its latest steps belie that claim. It wants an early decision, but only if that decision reinforces its position.

Sooner or later the state will have to realize that its insistence on a route across the park is very likely in conflict with federal laws aimed at protecting public parkland. These federal laws are not just bothersome and unnecessary obstacles to automotive progress. They are aimed at protecting the state from itself. They protect against ill-considered and expedient destruction of irreplaceable natural resources.

OVERTON PARK IS one of this city's most precious natural resources. The transportation needs of the city are not so great as to justify an overground route across either the park or the neighborhoods around the park.

The opposition to an expressway park route is strong, broad-based, and ongoing. The opponents are motivated by aesthetic, cultural, social and environmental concern for the future of the center city.

WHATEVER DECISION is made by the Transportation Department in Washington will be contested in interminable litigation. In the absence of some voluntary settlement the expressway issue will continue to wind a path through the courts even more slowly and tortuous than it has proceeded through the political and administrative stages.

A sizeable percentage of the Memphis population, does not want the expressway completed above ground through the park or adjacent residential areas. It is time to take a count of this opposition and reach some accommodation. The expressway should either be completed underground, or left as it is.