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"Meeting Set On March 24 For Overton"

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March 17, 1977

Meeting Set On March 24 For Overton

From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Gov. Ray Blanton of Tennessee and Transportation Secretary Brock Adams will discuss Memphis' long-stalled Overton Park expressway project at a meeting here March 24.

The governor formally will present the state's plan for a sunken plaza-type roadway through the park to close the vexing 3.7-mile gap in Interstate 40.

Blanton's office in Nashville confirmed plans for the meeting and said the governor probably will be accompanied by deputy Tennessee Transportation Commissioner Bill Goodwin and Jack Strickland, director of policy and planning for the governor's office.

Federal environmental laws require that before a federal-aid highway may enroach upon a public park the U.S. Secretary of Transportation must find there is no "prudent or feasible alternative" and that the highway design minimizes environmental damage to the park.

The Blanton-Adams meeting will mark the beginning of efforts by the Democratic administrations in Nashville and Washington to find a solution to the expressway problem, a solution that eluded preceding administrations.

Adams, who became familiar with the Memphis problem while serving as a member of the House, has cited it as one of several snarled interstate projects across the ation that he wants to unravel.

Tennessee Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw has said that if the federal government does not approve plans this year for closing the I-40 gap in Memphis the state will abandon the project. "If we don't receive some encouragement," Shaw said, "we're going to drop it."

The 3.7-mile strip through the park has been the object of a 20-year battle between highway planners and environmentalists trying to protect the park.

The most recent estimate of the cost of the so-called plaza design is \$33 million. Last year Adams' predecessor, then Transportation Secretary William Coleman Jr., entertained the idea of a tunnel design costing more than \$100 million.

A spokesman for the Department of Transportation said the idea of a public hearing in Memphis has been shelved pending the Blanton-Adams meeting.

OPPE 28-15-

CA

March 17, 1977

Re I-40: TV
on Channel 3 news (6 P.M.), Thurs,
March 10, 1977, Gov. Blanton
announced a meeting had been arranged
w. Sec'y Transp. Brock Adams for
March 24. (No account
appeared in next morning's Commercial —
acc. both to me and Stoners.)
(Note that newspaper announcement
appeared as full week later!)