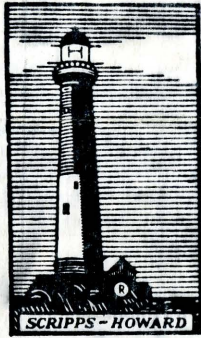


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"Right On, Secretary Coleman!"

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Saturday, February 7, 1976

Give Light and the People Will Find Their Own Way

Right On, Secretary Coleman!

Here's something to cheer about! A "final decision" on the 20-year-old proposal to run the Interstate 40 expressway through or around Overton Park may at last be forthcoming this summer.

U. S. Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman promised it as he met in Washington Thursday with a group of Tennessee officials and citizens.

"I'm appalled that this thing has gone on as long as it has," Coleman said, "and I mean to see that a decision is made soon."

That sort of direct language is music to our ears.

The only gap between the West Coast and the East Coast on this interstate highway is 3.7 miles — a stretch including approaches east and west of Overton Park and about a mile through the park itself.

A majority of Memphians voted years ago in favor of running the road through the park. But the way has been blocked in the courts by Citizens to Preserve Overton Park and affiliated environmentalist groups.

Alternate routes around the park have been found unfeasible by engineers, who have submitted various designs for a park expressway that would do a minimum of damage to trees and the natural landscape.

Cost estimates have escalated from the original \$14 million to \$169 million for a tunnel-type expressway today. State officials said Tennessee couldn't afford to pay its 10 per cent share of such an expensive project.

The latest proposed design, presented to Secretary Coleman the other day, would cost about \$50 million. It calls for a depressed and partially covered roadway.

Coleman has ordered a new environmental impact report on all I-40 plans to go through the park. When it is ready, he said, a public hearing will be held in Memphis — with opportunities for all concerned to express their views. He estimates a final decision, as far as he is concerned, can be made in July.

Also in the group that met with Coleman was John Vardaman, an attorney for the environmentalists. If the decision is to go through Overton Park, he told Coleman, there will be another court suit — no compromise.

But maybe this time it will be different. Coleman seems to be taking a more personal and aggressive interest in our problem than preceding Transportation secretaries.

As he observed, a final decision on filling up that gap is long overdue.