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"More I-40 Delay"

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THURSDAY MORNING, MARCH 9, 1972

More I-40 Delay

ABOUT THE only clear point on the future of the east-west Memphis expressway at this moment is that new hearings will be held on the Overton Park segment.

This is another disappointment, another delay, and a needless one so far as we can see.

What more can be said that has not been said already?

What new evidence is there to elicit?

For years the question was when the federal government would produce the 90 per cent financing for the cross-city expressway. Then the issue switched to the long-planned route following the present bus avenue through Overton Park. Years of litigation have followed, complicated by the passage of the recent National Environmental Policy Act. Meanwhile, the rights of way have been purchased, and there they sit, between an I-40 deadend on the east and a bridge being constructed across the Mississippi River for a westside connection.

Despite all the debate and discussion, the federal Transportation Department, headed by John Volpe, is asking

for more words to add to a voluminous record.

After extensive testimony Dist. Judge Bailey Brown forced the question of Overton Park back on the Transportation Department. In effect, the department is refusing to make a new decision and instead is being super-cautious. Jeffrey Shane, a lawyer on the department's staff who deals with environmental affairs, says, "I think there is no doubt we are going further than the court ordered . . . I happen to think that's the wise and prudent approach."

Every conceivable angle has been explored in federal court. Secretary Volpe has mountains of information on the feasibility of various possibilities for the route which Interstate 40 should take through mid-Memphis. Additional hearings mean nothing more than months or years of further delay.

BUT THIS IS the order. So let the hearings begin as quickly as possible. Let them be expedited. Needless though this exercise may be, let's get the record straight, satisfy the law and the court, and meet the real need—the completion of this section of I-40 which is lying in limbo.

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