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## "Park Route Is Likely To Stand"

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Authors	Crawford, Carl
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# Park Route Is Likely to Stand

CA 2/16/68

By CARL CRAWFORD

Assistant Metropolitan Editor

**T**HE RENEWED TALK over whether to build the city's new expressway through Overton Park is almost sure to reach one conclusion eventually—there is no alternative to going ahead with the planned route.

To be sure, nobody likes taking parkland for expressways.

Especially so, when the plan calls for slicing into two pieces an unusually large acreage in the middle of an urban area. Few cities have such luxurious acreage in the first place.

And a case can be made, in Memphis and elsewhere, for the bad effect of expressways through or near parks. Riverside Park, which lost a long strip to Interstate 55 south of the Memphis-Arkansas Bridge, is an example. Effectively cut off between McKellar Lake and the freeway, the golf course has deteriorated as its patronage has dropped.

**SUCH IS RESPONSIBLE** for the new concern—a kind of anger through chagrin—in the new City Council whose members are now opening their eyes to the big question of expressways for the first time.

But the plain fact may well be it's too late to look again.

As a matter of congressional policy, the 1965 federal law creating the new Department of Transportation and bringing the Federal Bureau of Public Roads under it said flatly and without equivocation no parkland shall ever be taken for an expressway "unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative."

**NOW THE QUESTION OF Overton Park** is in the hands of Lowell Bridwell, federal highway administrator. The outcome depends on whether he personally feels there is no "feasible and prudent" alternate route. He came to Memphis, talked to proponents and opponents of the park route, and personally toured the area Wednesday.

Mr. Bridwell in isolated private comments during his visit made it plain the costs in time, effort and money already invested in the Overton Park route weigh heavily on him. He once remarked he would have to be shown

"overwhelming evidence" that the planned park route is wrong—and just as importantly, that another route is so much better to warrant starting over after seven years.

**IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL** he was overwhelmed Wednesday.

If he was not, the City Council faces a peculiar choice which is really no choice at all. A city in Tennessee has a veto power over expressways that few other cities in the nation have.

State law says no street or alley can be closed without the approval of the local governing body—a law well-known to businessmen who often buy property across an alley, then want to close it and expand their business. Federal interstate highway law requires all state laws be honored in highway building.

So the City Council could easily stop the proposed east-west expressway. Many alleys and several streets must be closed in the freeway path. But the council is powerless to start the designing of a new, alternate route.

**THE TENNESSEE HIGHWAY** Department builds expressways and thus its officials must approve a new route. Mr. Bridwell's BPR provides 90 per cent of the money and his approval must be stamped on all blueprints.

"We won't build an expressway over the protests of local residents," Mr. Bridwell remarked while here. "But because local people cannot make up their minds, a small and expensive percentage (in urban areas) will never be built."

**IF TODAY IS TOO LATE** for Overton, no one can say it is too late for Audubon Park. That large East Memphis open space is in the "future traffic corridor" outlined as a second east-west freeway needed by 1985.

The Memphis Area Transportation Study Committee, an intergovernment planning group of the metropolitan area, will hear the specific plan of Harland Bartholomew Associates for the future McLemore-Southern expressway through or near Audubon Park on Monday.

And reports say a strip, although small, of the park may be needed for the proposed expressway.

*Important!*

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