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Authors	Kellett, Robert
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CA, May 26, 1977 P.31

Shaw Expects Loss Of Interchange, Ramp From State Park Route Plan

By ROBERT KELLETT

The state's plan for an expressway through Overton Park is probably going to lose an interchange at Avalon and an on-ramp at East Parkway to comply with suggestions of the federal highway administrator and to enhance its chances of approval, Commissioner Eddie Shaw said yesterday. He spoke at a noon meeting of the Sertoma Club of Memphis.

Shaw, head of the Tennessee Department of Transportation, said William Cox, federal highway administrator, asked him to consider the deletions Monday in a Nashville meeting between the state transportation department and opponents of the park expressway route.

Cox recently heard both sides of the issue and toured the park during a trip to Memphis. He is to make a recommendation to Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams who will decide if Interstate 40 will be built through the park.

Although Shaw indicated he saw the Cox requests as an indication the highway administration is looking favorably at the state's "plaza design" for a park route, opponents quickly dismissed the importance of the requests.

"If Mr. Shaw thinks that anything which Mr. Cox said at that meeting gave the state any basis for optimism, then we think that Mr. Shaw is grasping at straws," said Charles F. Newman, attorney for opponents of the park route.

A spokesman for the Federal Highway Administration declined to comment on Shaw's remarks, but said Cox is expected to make his recommendations to Adams in about three weeks and Adams then will review the case.

Shaw said the meeting in Nashville was called after opponents said they had not been given a full explanation of the state's proposal to build a depressed, partially covered route through the park.

During the meeting, said Shaw, "Mr.

Cox asked 'would you consider the elimination of an interchange — the Avalon interchange — and one on-ramp at the east end of the park?'

Cox also wanted to know what the state planned to do with dirt excavated from the park, Shaw said.

"Now we've got to find a place to put the dirt. We will do that next week."

He predicted that Adams will have a final decision by August and "I think it will be favorable, but that's just my opinion and it doesn't mean a thing. I think regardless of the decision we'll be in court the next day."

Newman confirmed that Cox said elimination of the Avalon interchange and the Parkway on-ramp would "lessen adverse environmental impact." He said "that doesn't indicate in the slightest that the secretary of transportation, who is the

man who has to make the decision, is any more likely to approve the use of parkland for the highway.

"In our opinion, it is extremely unlikely that this secretary of transportation or any other secretary of transportation can under the law approve the use of any portion of the park for a highway."

Although Shaw suggested that some opponents softened their positions after Monday's meeting, Newman said "it doesn't alter the opposition one whit. We are just as sure that there do exist feasible and prudent alternates to use of park land and that the highway can't be built through the park."

The Avalon interchange, which would be in the middle of a residential neighborhood, drew opposition from residents of the area. The proposal for an on-ramp at East Parkway drew complaints that it would damage the forest section of Overton Park.

Shaw appeared to soften one position he took earlier this year in the controversy surrounding the 3.7-mile park route. In February the commissioner said that if the state received no encouragement this year for completion of the route, the plan would be dropped.

When asked yesterday by a Sertoma member if that was his position, Shaw said that if the Adams ruling is unfavorable "we will regroup and start again. We can't just drop it."

PARDON THE INCONVENIENCE

The right southbound lane of Levee Road east of Thomas will be closed for an unknown amount of time for work by Memphis Light, Gas & Water Division crews.

LG&W work will also close the alley west of Third at Madison today.

* Cf. Aug. '76 letter after public hearing on EIS, re Sertoma Sponsorship!

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