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"Push For Park Route"

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As of May 15, I am told Baker did say this - newspaper + Brinegar's name had numerous credit checks

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

A Scripps-Howard Newspaper

GORDON HANNA, Editor

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W. FRANK AYCOCK JR., Business Manager

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Friday Morning, May 11, 1973

Push For Park Route

THE GET-TOGETHER held by some of Tennessee's top political leaders in Washington to press for the building of Interstate Highway 40 through Overton Park brings some needed light to the subject.

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.) is a welcome addition to the leaders who have been trying for some time to clear the way for completion of I-40 through Memphis on the park right-of-way already owned by the state. "It is time to build the road," he says. "Too much time has gone by already."

More than 15 years, in fact. It is ludicrous today to look at the yellowed newspaper clippings on efforts by local leaders a dozen years ago to speed up expressway construction and to have the entire Memphis interstate system completed by 1967. But that was the feeling of most people then, and a couple of times it brought full federal approval of the Overton Park route.

THE THING to remember is that a small group blocked the 1969 "final" approval when Dist. U.S. Judge Bailey Brown held that the record was not adequate and called for a new determination. Congress, in the meantime, passed the National Environmental Policy Act, and changes in highway aid laws also altered the picture. Thus Transportation Secretary John Volpe, who resigned last January, had to retrace old steps under new laws. Last Jan. 18, just before leaving office, he ruled that he could not find that there were no prudent and feasible alternatives to the park route and refused to approve the route "as proposed by the state." He did suggest several alternatives (even including a park tunnel) but did not specify which should be used.

On April 19, acting on a petition by the state, Judge Brown said Volpe's action did not live up to court requirements, that having said there were alternatives it was his duty to select one. There has not been a valid route decision, in other words, and the court has told the new secretary of transportation, Claude S. Brinegar, that he has the discretion to reconsider the design decision. That consideration may include the park route, since Volpe's rejection of it was not done in the court-ordered manner.

The court gave Brinegar 45 days to come up with a decision, and much of that time already has passed. Thus it was that the Tennessee leaders felt

they had best get busy. Gov. Winfield Dunn, Sen. William Brock (R-Tenn.), Rep. Dan Kuykendall (R-Tenn.), the state highway commissioner and state attorney general joined in planning strategy, which will center on showing Brinegar how strongly the people of Memphis favor the I-40 park route.

A collection of the resolutions, statements, endorsements and pleas for that route will represent a monumental expression of public opinion.

Brinegar, like Volpe before him, has to abide by current law. But it would be regrettable for him to hear only from the park route opponents who have been putting the heat on him. Dunn, Baker, Brock and Kuykendall were elected to speak for the people of Tennessee and Memphis in such matters, and that is what they plan to do. A dozen years ago it was former Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) who was actively campaigning to get the I-40 bridge started, so it could connect with the highway expected to come through Overton Park. Now the bridge is due to be completed by midsummer, ready to dump interstate traffic into a confusion of already overcrowded city streets.

As Baker says, "It is time to find a way to build that highway through that park."

MEANWHILE, Memphis should not allow the I-40 issue to become confused further by the Memphis Park Commission proposal to move the zoo to the penal farm and turn the grounds over for an expressway route on the northern edge of Overton Park.

That idea comes years late.

So far as moving the zoo to open that area for the interstate highway, a group of Memphis architects proposed that in 1970 and the idea never caught on.

As for the penal farm, years of discussion on land use are now behind us, plans are underway for a model "new town" with a large acreage of lowland reserved for park use but subject to flooding. If the park commissioners seriously want a high-ground spot for a new zoo there, they should have been at the front of the line a long time ago.

But one of the biggest arguments for keeping the zoo intact is that it is now accessible to the inner-city poor. The zoo is also one of the inner city's major attractions, for visitors as well as residents. It would be a mistake to add it to the other kinds of flight to the suburbs.

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