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"The Highway Juggernaut"

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The Highway Juggernaut

TOM WICKER
The New York Times

The hounds are beginning to harry the flanks of the highway juggernaut as it rolls along toward the grim possibility of a paved America.

The latest check to its pollution-laden advance was administered by the Supreme Court, a welcome recruit to the cause. The Court held [March 2] that the interstate highway tycoons have not proven their unavoidable need to appropriate a 26-acre slice of a 342-acre city park in Memphis, Tenn.; in the absence of such proof, no freeway.

The law, the Court said, does not permit the Secretary of Transportation to authorize turning all or part of a park into an interstate highway because that would cost less or be more convenient to the engineers or present fewer obstacles to the bulldozers; rather the law permits

Trust Co-sponsors Highway Handbook

The National Trust has joined with The Conservation Foundation to co-sponsor a handbook for dealing with highway environmental problems.

The highway handbook is designed to provide an informational background necessary for effective citizen action in counteracting adverse effects of highways.

Publication is set for this summer.

federal highway construction through parkland only as a last resort and if there is absolutely no "feasible and prudent" alternative.

The Memphis park route already had been approved by two Secretaries of Transportation, but the Court ruling means that the issue will have to be decided again, this time with appropriate public hearings. Justice Black, in a separate opinion, observed that the record so far did not show that the Transportation Department (in either the Johnson or Nixon Administrations) "raised even a finger to comply with the command of Congress."

That's the way it goes in the world of the highway juggernaut, or used to; now the people are beginning to catch on. What was originally intended, back in the Eisenhower Administration, as a high-speed interstate highway system has become an \$80 billion bonanza for a conglomerate of industrial, commercial, construction and political interests. In order to keep the contracts rolling, the juggernaut has been pushed, not just between cities but into them—through parks, residential neighborhoods, business areas, historic sites—almost anywhere the planners have been allowed to get away with it.

But even motorists as avid as most Americans finally are beginning to realize that a freeway between the outskirts of Kansas City and St. Louis is one thing, but a freeway in the backyard or through downtown is something else entirely. Even an interchange for one of these smelly rivers of concrete can require 70 acres of land. . . .

But [nowhere] is the highway juggernaut as yet in check—which is a primary reason why so little is being done to develop high-speed, efficient and comfortable mass transit within American cities.

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