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## "What's the Alternative?"

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Page 6

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## What's The Alternative?

THE BIG question about the gap in Interstate 40, as state Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw told city officials Monday, is "where do we go from here." That's been the big question for too many years now. And it doesn't get any easier.

State plans to build the remaining 3.7-mile segment through Overton Park have failed to get the approval of either the federal courts or four U.S. secretaries of transportation. Yet the state seems to be as baffled as ever about what kind of a plan would be approved.

Brock Adams, the latest secretary to consider the park route, said last week that the state's latest proposal doesn't meet the standards set by the U.S. Supreme Court under federal environmental protection laws.

The court also said the park route would be appropriate if there was no "feasible" alternative. Adams' rejection of the state plan carries a presumption that there is a "feasible" alternative. If so, what is it? Adams didn't say, nor has the state received information about the grounds for his decision.

SHAW SUGGESTED three options of his own:

- Modification of the proposal for a depressed roadway to try to follow more closely Supreme Court standards and whatever reservations Adams had about the specific design. If that works, fine. But we had thought just about every conceivable design already had been considered.

- A request to the Tennessee congressional delegation for a special act to exempt Overton Park from the Park Lands Act and the Environmental Protection Act. No one seems to think such a request would be granted. For one thing, the Tennessee delegation would be up against a nationwide environmentalist lobby.

- Federal legislation to exclude the park link from the Interstate system, thus permitting the city and state to build it with their own funds. Again, legislation would be difficult to get through Congress. On top of that, the link would cost more than \$20 million at present estimates, and who knows how much as time passes. State and local funds are too tight for such spending.

THERE ARE OTHER possibilities, slight or improbable as they may be. It's

been suggested that the stub end of I-40 to the east of the park be extended northward to tie up with the northern leg of the expressway system (I-240). But that would cause further urban blight throughout the northern part of the city. Efforts to widen roads and reroute traffic around the I-40 stubs both east and west of the park to provide easier access across the unfinished gap would be far more expensive and disruptive than the benefits would justify. Any other route than the one through the park, such as North Parkway or the L&N railroad tracks, would be catastrophic.

Many opponents of the Overton Park route argue that the I-240 leg will solve all the traffic problems when it's finished. But that's not what traffic projections indicate. Because of the tremendous growth in Raleigh, Bartlett and other areas to the north, a great deal more traffic is projected for I-240 than when it was designed as primarily a northern bypass of the city. The city's traffic engineer, Norman Picklin, says the I-240 leg will quickly turn into another bottleneck if the I-40 link isn't also available. And then would more untold millions of dollars have to poured into I-240 to widen it for still more and more traffic? It's axiomatic that a major highway, by its very existence, generates a major increase of traffic.

OPPONENTS OF THE park route also seem to think that most Memphians agree with them. Mrs. Sunshine Snyder, one of the plaintiffs in the suit against the park link, says the "wishes and interests" of the general public don't support that route. But Mrs. Snyder and other members of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park, as active and diligent as they've been, don't represent or speak for the public at large. Every poll that we know of, in fact, indicates that the majority of Memphians do support completion of I-40 through the park.

The inadequacy of every alternative leaves the city and the state in a serious and increasingly impossible bind. Their determination not to give up on the park route is commendable. But we hope that they get more assistance from Washington in working out an agreeable solution and that Memphians don't have to continue losing to their now notorious traffic problems while the law is debated year after year.

