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State I-40 Plan Uses Sunken-Plaza Design

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

The Tennessee Transportation Department's final proposal for the Overton Park segment of Interstate 40 calls for construction of a sunken plaza-design roadway built by the slurry wall method at an estimated cost of \$33 million.

A spokesman for the transportation department said yesterday the plans are outlined in the environmental impact statement to be completed this weekend for delivery Monday to U. S. Transportation Secretary William T. Coleman.

The state's choice of the slurry wall method is a last-minute concession to highway design experts who recommended the construction technique last year to reduce the amount of parkland disturbed during construction and reduce traffic noise when the highway is in use.

The slurry wall method, more common in Europe than in the United States, calls for construction of the two outside walls of the highway by digging trenches and filling them with concrete and steel.

State highway planners had considered the method earlier in connection with a cut-and-cover tunnel design, but "we figured if we could use it with a tunnel we could also use it with a partially covered highway," the spokesman said.

The plaza design calls for a fully depressed or sunken roadway covered at intervals with grass and shrub-laden plazas or decks. As recommended in the environmental impact statement, there would be five plazas on the one-mile park segment covering a total of 1,700 feet of the roadway or slightly more than 40 per cent of the park segment. The rest of the segment would be exposed.

When Transportation Commissioner Eddie Shaw first recommended a plaza design here in July, he estimated it would cost about \$30 million, but the estimate to be given Coleman is \$33 million. The agency spokesman said the difference is due primarily to the cost of the slurry wall construction method.

In draft versions of the environmental impact statement, the state had recommended two alternatives to reduce highway noise inside the park — building barrier walls along the highway edges or limiting the weight of trucks which could use the highway. The latest statement chose the truck-weight limit and specified no truck weighing more than 10,000 pounds (five tons) would be allowed access to I-40 inside the city.

The transportation department spokesman said Deputy Transportation Commissioner W. A. Goodwin will complete the statement during the weekend and fly to Washington Monday to deliver it to Coleman personally.

Coleman has promised a ruling on the route and design of the segment by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, Charles F. Newman, attorney for environmentalists opposing use of parkland for the route, said of the latest proposals, "I'm not going to try to comment on the final draft until I've had a chance to study it. But it's inconceivable that the state could justify use of parkland under the law as it now stands.

"No improvement in the design of the expressway could under the law justify use of parkland unless or until they can demonstrate that there is no feasible and prudent alternative."

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