

"Coleman Sees I-40 Decision By Year's End"

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Coleman Sees I-40 Decision By Year's End

U.S. Transportation Secretary William Coleman says the deputy secretary in charge of the Overton Park expressway case will make a final decision on completion of the 3.7-mile interstate highway segment before Dec. 31.

In a letter to The Commercial Appeal dated Nov. 9, Coleman said that after he disqualified himself from the case to avoid a possible conflict of interest, he instructed Deputy Secretary John Barnum to "follow the same time schedule which I had set. Thus, this matter will be decided finally one way or the other on or before Dec. 31, 1976."

Coleman's withdrawal in October from the 20-year dispute came after his daughter was hired by the Washington law firm which originally filed suit to halt completion of Interstate 40 through Overton Park.

When Barnum took over the case, he announced a public hearing to be held at 10:30 a.m. Nov. 23 at the Holiday Inn-Rivermont for his "own enlightenment." Sources in the department then said Barnum would accept written comments about the proposed park route through Nov. 30 and that any decision would come 60 to 90 days later. The hearing, the latest in a series since the park route dispute began, had been planned by Coleman before he stepped down from the case.

Coleman had told Gov. Ray Blanton as early as September that, after he received results of another hearing, he would decide for or against the midcity interstate route by the end of the year.

Barnum could not be reached last night for comment.

"I was the first secretary of transportation to come to grips with making a decision in the I-40 matter," said Coleman in the letter responding to an editorial in The Commercial Appeal. "I agree that much too long a time has elapsed since this highway was first proposed."

As the Oct. 29 editorial pointed out, Coleman is actually the third transportation secretary to pass on making a decision about completing the freeway. Secretaries John Volpe and Claude Brinegar both left office before the matter was resolved.

The Tennessee Transportation Department in mid-October presented Coleman its final proposal. It called for a sunken plaza-design road utilizing a slurry wall method of construction. About 40 per cent of the roadway through the park would be covered by grassy areas. Construction costs were estimated at \$33 million.

Meanwhile, Mayor Wye Chandler Wednesday said he would do "everything I can" to stop the Nov. 23 public hearing. Chandler said he had been told Barnum, labeled an environmentalist, "has not been favorably inclined toward the park route." The city's "best interests" would be served by stopping the hearing, he said.

"We would not feel this way if Mr. Coleman were hearing it," Chandler said.