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Zoo Expert Indicates Expressway Is Not Likely To Affect Animals

By MICHAEL LOLLAR

An Illinois zoo expert testified during the Overton Park expressway hearing in federal court yesterday that highways near zoos "have no noticeable effects on the death rates of zoo animals."

Robert Everly, an engineer and zoo planning specialist of Winnetka, Ill., testified for the state Highway Department, disputing earlier testimony by Overton Park Zoo director Robert H. Mattlin.

Mr. Mattlin had testified for the Citizens to Preserve Overton Park and other plaintiffs that existing traffic near the zoo has already resulted in poor breeding habits among zoo animals and that exhaust fumes often cause lung cancer in some animals.

Later yesterday, George Barnes, civil engineer in charge of the Mid-South division of Buchart-Horn Inc., testified that his firm was hired by the state Highway Department to re-evaluate previous design studies prepared for the park route by Harland Bartholomew & Associates.

"Ultimately, our study was a check on the work already done by Harland Bartholomew & Associates," Mr. Barnes testified. He said Buchart-Horn determined after extensive studies that the Harland Bartholomew plans "were accurate, and we verified those."

However, Mr. Barnes said, the state did accept a Buchart-Horn recommendation for re-design of the expressway interchange at East Parkway, locating it almost entirely outside the park. The interchange had first been designed as a full cloverleaf, he said, which would take about 8.1 acres inside the park. "But, we confirmed that the interchange could work effectively

with the elimination of one loop, thereby leaving only a single ramp inside the park." The single ramp takes 1.9 acres of park land.

Mr. Everly testified that zoo animals cannot adjust easily to sudden noises, but adjust easily to droning noises like those created by automobile engines.

He said modern zoo design provides built-in protection for animals in the form of artificial land barriers, special breeding areas and breeding stimulants.

"We get records of all deaths in zoos," Mr. Everly said, "and we keep a pretty accurate record of the mortality rate in zoos. And, we find there is no noticeable difference in those zoos that are adjacent to highways or throughways."

Under cross-examination by Charles F. Newman, an attorney for the plaintiffs, Mr. Everly cited an unusual example of the artificial measures used to promote breeding.

He said the Milwaukee, Wis., zoo is the "newest modern zoo in America. They have a moose exhibit. Now, moose are probably the most skittish of all . . . hoofed animals, and in the Milwaukee zoo they are located adjacent to a throughway, and they continue to have the best record of moose breeding of any zoo in the world in spite of this . . ."

"What do you attribute this to?" Mr. Newman asked.

"You wouldn't believe it," Mr. Everly said.

"I'll believe it," Mr. Newman pressed.

"By accident, they learned that the reproductive operations in a moose respond very favorably to the feeding of bananas, so they have been feeding them bananas, and even though bananas don't occur in the moose's natural habitat, this seems to stimulate them and works out very well."

J. Alan Hanover, attorney for the state Highway Department, interrupted: "Everybody is going to start eating bananas."

Mr. Everly later said that

"many animals are skittish and react to strange situations or strange noises. There are many animals that might do this to firecrackers or the bursting of a balloon or any number of things like this."

But, he said, "In my opinion, the location of the road (I-40), whether it was on the east side, north side, underneath or above, or fourteen miles away . . . would have no effect on the operation or the condition of those animals."

"What about the effects of air pollution on animals?" Mr. Newman then asked.

Mr. Everly said many conclusions about the effects of air pollution are based on rumor. "I think the best example (to the contrary) is in Los Angeles which is one of our great pollution centers of the country. I made careful study of (Los Angeles zoo animals) . . . and they have a good birth record and a good reproduction record."

"Some species of animals are very sensitive to tuberculosis or lung problems . . . and particularly the primates (monkeys, for instance)." He said 35 to 38 per cent of all primates that die in zoos die from lung complications.

"So, we are putting them all behind glass today . . . including here in Memphis."

He had testified Tuesday that Overton Park Zoo's poor success in breeding bears is not because of existing traffic, but because the zoo does not now have proper breeding facilities. Bears should be provided with cubbing dens, he said, which are completely dark and quiet. A mother bear will kill her cubs if she is frightened by noise, he said.

C.A.

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