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OPE 29-04

# Blanton Says He Expects I-40, Park Ruling Today

By WENDELL POTTER  
The Press-Scimitar Bureau

WASHINGTON. — Tennessee Gov. Ray Blanton said today he has reason to believe the U. S. Department of Transportation is ready to announce a decision on completing I-40 through Overton Park in Memphis.

Blanton said he was to meet this afternoon with Federal Highway Administrator William Cox and said he expects Cox to

announce whether U. S. transportation officials have accepted the state's most recent proposal for completing the expressway.

The Tennessee governor said federal and state transportation officials have communicated almost daily in recent weeks in an effort to iron out problems with the plan submitted early this year by the state, which calls for a partially depressed tunnel through the park, covered

at intervals with plazas.

The governor said he believes the department has decided to accept the plan and to approve the expressway if at least one intersection in the park area can be eliminated.

I-40 now ends about one mile on either side of the Midtown park and environmentalists have fought, through the courts, all attempts to take park land for the expressway route. Federal laws prohibit the use of

park property for road projects if a "feasible and prudent" alternative exists.

The state has argued that there is no other "feasible and prudent" alternative and has addressed itself in recent years to questions of design. The environmentalists who oppose the route say, however, the question of routing must first be resolved and that they will go back into the federal courts to attempt to block any road through the park.

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