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"Another Plan For I-40"

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Thursday, July 17, 1975

Another Plan For I-40

A PROPOSED route along North Parkway for the completion of Interstate 40, instead of going through Overton Park, has won the support of County Court Squire William Farris and Mayor Wyeth Chandler, among others. The plan must be studied. No possible solution to the expressway problem should be dismissed out of hand. But we aren't optimistic that this is a "prudent and feasible alternative," to use the words of the federal court.

One thing's for certain. The proposal can't be allowed to delay the work now being done on a park route by the state Department of Transportation. In April William Coleman, U.S. secretary of transportation, asked state engineers to study a cut-and-cover tunnel through the park, with special attention to an innovative slurry-wall technique that could reduce the width of the missing expressway link.

Perhaps the most attractive part of the North Parkway plan is the estimated cost of \$26 million. Supporters compare this with the \$180 million or more they say would be needed for a park tunnel, although state engineers report that slurry-wall construction, if feasible, might hold the expense of a tunnel to \$100 million. In any event, money should not be the only consideration.

A raised interstate link over North Parkway, as proposed, would be a monstrosity. The beauty of the street along and east of the park would be damaged. The noise of rumbling concrete and steel would be added to that of traffic. And

after so many homes have been destroyed and families forced to move, it's not easy to think about more destruction and uprooting that would be necessary to let the expressway return from North Parkway to the route already cleared.

Last year City Councilman Jack McNeil urged the state to shift the interstate plan to North Parkway and a "sliver" of Overton Park. That was rejected on grounds that environmentalists would fight any use of the park. In April, Coleman wrote off a tunnel under North Parkway as too expensive. The new proposal involves different engineering, which may make it more practical. But there have been so many diversionary tactics and tangential suggestions in the long controversy over the interstate that this, too, may turn out to be another blind alley rather than a realistic alternative.

IT'S PATENTLY ridiculous to let the 3.7-mile gap remain in I-40. The transportation secretary has indicated his support of a cut-and-cover tunnel. The state is going ahead with appropriate studies. This is the direction that officials should continue to follow as quickly and decisively as the law permits. The North Parkway plan and any others that may be brought up should be examined for their merits. They should not be allowed, however, to delay the main work, which has grown out of years of planning, court tests and state and federal discussions. If a tunnel is found to be "prudent and feasible," that would be the preferable choice.

"By George, Apex, I think you've done it!"

