

Cooper depression plans hit by fund woes

By Ken Walton

Depression and widening of Cooper Street may be delayed or even deleted from 20-year construction projects of the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation, District Engineer J.R. Stone said Wednesday.

"There are some projects that we are committed to that we will not be able to fund," he said in a telephone interview. "Our commitments exceed the income that we expect for the next 20 years."

Dudley Wetsel, vice president for business affairs, said Wednesday the state had committed \$550,000 to Cooper Street

and that UTA didn't have the money for depression right now, either.

"They're in the same boat we are," he said. "That (the depression) is in our long-range plan but when it will take place, I really don't know."

Stone said the state was not renegeing on any commitments, "but there may be a time when we have to back out or delay them."

The highway department, which receives funds from the gasoline tax, license tag sales and a federal government trust fund, has been hit hard by inflation, he said, because many

petroleum products are used in construction. "It costs us twice as much now to construct a road as it did in the late '60s."

Wetsel said he felt depression was the best solution to connect the campus and that Cooper should not be rerouted.

Early highway department plans called for the depression to begin just north of the Fine Arts Complex and come up just before it reaches Campus Drive.

Three crosswalks would bridge Cooper — one between University and Davis halls, one in front of Texas Hall and one between the Fine Arts Complex and Science Hall.

Cooper Street has been agonized over by administrators, city officials and highway officials for several years. President Wendell Nedderman said last semester the pedestrian lights were "the best temporary solution."

The Board of Regents has tagged \$1.5 million to the depression along with the highway department's half-million-dollar commitment.

Wetsel said Wednesday that two years ago the cost was predicted at \$3.2 million and said he didn't have a figure now, but was sure it was considerably higher.

Dr. Nedderman said last year the depression would be high on the priority list of the new five-year building plan to be formulated in 1978. He said then the building funds for the present five-year plan had already been depleted and no more would be available until 1978.

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