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## Decision paves way for road's future

**By Tony Bizjak - Bee Staff Writer**

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In a surprise move two weeks ago, state transportation officials plucked a crooked little foothills back road out of obscurity and promised it \$22 million in upgrade funds.

It was, El Dorado County Supervisor Rusty Dupray said, a "yee-hah!" moment.

White Rock Road, string-bean thin and bumpy as it runs through eastern Sacramento County into El Dorado County, suddenly has a muscular future as a multilane alternative to congested Highway 50.

"People don't want to spend an hour and a half to get to downtown," said Dupray, who was among many local officials lobbying for the funding. "We see this as a tremendous timesaver."

But up in suburban El Dorado, where officials struggle to transform yesterday's hill roads into broad avenues to match suburban growth, "yee-hah" moments can come with uh-oh caveats.

Days after the state OK'd White Rock Road funding -- plus another \$20 million for more carpool lanes on nearby Highway 50 -- word surfaced that a developer expressed interest in opening several thousand more acres for growth, and more commuters than officials planned for.

The idea by Angelo K. Tsakopoulos, involving Sacramento County pasturelands on the El Dorado border, is merely exploratory, said Robert Holderness, an attorney speaking for Tsakopoulos.

Any change in the status of the land would need to be approved by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, which is scheduled to discuss the request at a workshop Wednesday.

Holderness said it's premature to speculate on potential impacts of development on foothills congestion. The Board of Supervisors has yet to say yes to even studying the idea. And, if they do, construction is years away, he said.

"My client doesn't have any (specific) plans," Holderness said.

The surprise request, however, puts a spotlight on a corner of the Sacramento region and its particular transportation issues.

Supervisor Dupray said El Dorado County residents literally are "paying for the sins of our forefathers."

The county for years allowed growth without building sufficient roads to support it, Dupray said.

In an attempt to make up for it, the county now imposes hefty transportation mitigation fees on new development, from \$17,000 on a new house in outlying areas to \$37,000 in the Cameron Park area, officials said.

The money goes not only to expand local feeder roads, but also to the county's de facto Main Street -- Highway 50 -- which serves as its transportation spine.

If something goes wrong on Highway 50, foothills commuters have few alternatives. Lisa Lill of Pollock Pines recently found herself in a highway jam caused by an accident. "You're stuck there. Even if you know about the problem (beforehand), there aren't ways around it."

Highway 50 is due for more carpool lanes and new interchanges. Officials hope those expansions will ease the impact of an expected increase in traffic when an Indian casino -- opposed by the county -- is built near Shingle Springs.

Near the Sacramento County line, planners say they intend to build what essentially will be dual

bypass roads flanking Highway 50 for local travelers into and out of the foothills.

White Rock, planned for expansion starting 2011, would be one. It will feed people into the office complexes of Rancho Cordova.

The other will be Saratoga Way, north of the freeway, which will connect to Iron Point Road in Folsom and its shopping areas and a light-rail station.

Supervisor Dupray said this week he knew little about Tsakopoulos' proposal but said that although the land sits in the neighboring county, he would want El Dorado to be reimbursed for costs of any future projects there that require bolstering roads in El Dorado.

Board Chairwoman Helen Baumann said news of the Tsakopoulos proposal does not concern her.

"There are projects that come up all the time," she said. "My county is finally getting into a good position to handle that additional growth."

Down the hill, in Sacramento County, though, a key transportation planner is concerned.

Mike McKeever, executive director of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, the region's transportation planning agency, called the proposal a "diversion."

McKeever said he hopes the Board of Supervisors will set the proposal aside until the region can draw plans for a major beltway -- with White Rock Road as a part of it -- from Highway 50 in El Dorado Hills to Elk Grove.

That beltway -- the Elk Grove-Rancho Cordova-El Dorado connector -- is planned as a way to ease highway congestion from existing and already planned development.

"We are very hopeful (Sacramento County supervisors) will take this off the table this year," McKeever said. "The connector (road) is specifically intended not to induce growth."

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