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El Dorado transit panel to study fair representation

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The panel that oversees distribution of transportation dollars in El Dorado County has agreed to study changing its membership to better represent the county's largest communities.

But the commission declined to adopt a formula for divvying up a small pot of discretionary funds that some county representatives argued would allow more money to be directed to population centers like El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park.

Commission members Helen Baumann and Rusty Dupray pushed for the changes, citing the perception among constituents, particularly in El Dorado Hills, that their community is not receiving its fair share of transportation funds.

That perception, they said, derives partly from the commission's makeup. The panel, which establishes rules and regulations for administering transportation planning and allocation of Transportation Development Act funds in western El Dorado County, consists of six voting members: three from the county Board of Supervisors and three from the Placerville City Council.

Kathryn Mathews, the commission's executive director, said a change would require state legislation.

Dupray argued during the panel's July 3 meeting that "it's just a matter of time before the composition of this board changes when El Dorado Hills incorporates. I think we need to do something sooner than that."

As it is, he said, Placerville, as the only city on the western slope, has 50 percent of the votes on the commission although it represents about 7 percent of the population.

In contrast, he said, unincorporated El Dorado Hills has about 25 percent of the population.

Several El Dorado Hills residents urged the commission not to wait for their community to become a city to afford it greater representation.

"I don't share Rusty's optimism on incorporation," said Norm Rowett, chairman of the El Dorado Hills Community Council and a leader of the failed 2005 incorporation drive. "I don't believe it's anywhere close in the next five to 10 years."

T. Abraham, chairman of the El Dorado Hills Chamber of Commerce board of directors, said he works for Marshall Medical Center in Placerville and represented a broader perspective than that of El Dorado Hills.

Abraham urged the commission to find a way to provide more equitable representation for the county's unincorporated communities.

Commission member and Placerville Mayor Carl Hagen took issue with the argument that El Dorado Hills is under-represented. One-third of the board members – Supervisors Dupray and Baumann – represent the community, he said.

Dupray and Hagen were appointed to study alternatives and directed to present a status report at the commission's next meeting, on Aug. 28.

But the panel, on a 4-2 vote, defeated Dupray's motion to establish a formula based on population, miles of maintained roads and taxable sales to divide about \$1 million annually in Regional Surface Transportation Program funds between the city and county.

Dupray estimated that Placerville would receive about 12 percent of the funds under the formula, an amount that city officials said would not allow them to adequately maintain roads that serve county as well as city residents.

Randy Pesses, the city's public works director, said the commission should take into account that Placerville is the county seat. As such, it is home to county government, as well as state and federal government offices that generate traffic but don't contribute to the city's tax base.

Marshall Medical Center, the only hospital on the county's western slope, as well as the courts, also draw people from throughout the county to the city, he noted.

Pesses said a recent study indicated that 43 percent of peak hour traffic on Placerville streets comes from outside the city limits.

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