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# Transportation rift over project funding in El Dorado County

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Issues of representation and how to divvy up a relatively small pot of transportation funds have produced a rift among members of the El Dorado County Transportation Commission.

The panel establishes rules and regulations for administering transportation planning and allocation of Transportation Development Act funds in western El Dorado County. The commission's six voting members consist of three members of the county Board of Supervisors and three Placerville City Council members, representing the only city on the western slope.

Commission members say they have worked well together over the years, generally achieving consensus on projects selected for funding. But two of the county's commissioners, Supervisors Helen Baumann and Rusty Dupray, say they have been beset with complaints from constituents in El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park who think the county's two most populous communities are not adequately represented on the panel.

Though the county and city each have three representatives, Baumann and Dupray noted that Supervisor Jack Sweeney's district includes the city of Placerville, leading some to argue that Placerville has an unfair advantage.

Baumann at the commission's June 5 meeting proposed adding a seventh voting member who might be drawn from El Dorado Hills or Cameron Park. An odd number of commissioners would help avoid tie votes, she said, and make residents of communities that may one day become cities feel more a part of the transportation planning process.

Dupray said he supported the additional representation, but state legislation likely would be required to change the commission's composition. He argued that a greater sense of equity could be achieved by revising the way the commission distributes Rural Regional Surface Transportation Program funds.

At issue is about \$888,000 annually of the approximately \$12 million that the panel currently administers, commission members said. Most of the funds other than the \$888,000 have specific guidelines for their use.

Dupray suggested dividing the funds between the city and county strictly on the basis of population, without consideration of the miles of road each jurisdiction maintains. Under that formula, he said, Placerville would receive about 7 percent of the rural transportation funds, and the county, 93 percent.

The proposal did not sit well with city representatives, who argued that road projects should be considered on their merits.

"If we got 10 percent, it would take us five to six years to build up enough money to do a project," said Mark Acuna, a commissioner and Placerville city councilman. "This is not a lot of money. We need to keep that in perspective."

Richard Shepard, county transportation director, said it was clear there wasn't enough money to go around.

But, he said, "It's easier to plan with a known quantity than to go through a competitive process."

The county has so many pressing road maintenance needs that it might qualify for all the funding in a competitive process, he warned city officials.

City Manager John Driscoll argued, however, that Placerville, as the county seat and home to the only hospital on the western slope, is a regional hub. As such, he said, the city's streets are heavily used by people from the surrounding unincorporated area, not just city residents.

Reduced funding for city street maintenance could affect sections of Highway 49, Cedar Ravine and Carson Road.

Supervisor Sweeney said he believed the concerns about equitable funding have arisen because people see the state Department of Transportation's project to improve Highway 50 through Placerville and the county's work to rebuild the Missouri Flat Road bridge over Highway 50 and think the Placerville area has received a windfall.

But those projects were years in the planning and happened to come to fruition at the same time, he said.

The commission will consider acting on proposed changes in the funding formula and the makeup of the panel at its July 3 meeting.