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Motorists might keep pedal to the metal

By: Roger Phelps

Hoped-for legislative help, it turns out, will not arrive to beef up El Dorado Hills law enforcement.

A plan has been scrapped by Assemblyman Alan Nakanishi, R-Lodi to author a bill to increase speed-spy patrols by El Dorado County Sheriff's deputies.

Proponents of incorporating the community in 2005 said cityhood would help cure what was deemed insufficient presence of law officers on local streets, but the bid was defeated.

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office maintains a substation in the area. Department Sgt. Brian Golmitz said deputy assignments to El Dorado Hills vary by shift, averaging three cars in the community at a given time - sometimes as many as five - with department discretion to pull in additional cruisers during emergencies.

Jeff Hale, a Nakanishi spokesman, said the idea of state legislation around county speed-spying emerged as complicated. Early questions were whether law should permit or mandate increased law enforcement, and whether that enforcement would extend beyond speed monitoring.

"My office has contacted the El Dorado Sheriff's Department, which has indicated that if legislation permitted them to enforce all vehicle code violations, they would not do so because the department does not have the personnel to dedicate to traffic units, and also because they believe current enforcement is sufficient," Nakanishi wrote Nov. 26 to officials of community group El Dorado Hills Citizens Alliance.

The group takes a different view on sufficiency.

Members estimate current population at 44,444, and peg the number of road miles at 122. Doing the math suggests a discrepancy between what's needed police-wise and what's there, alliance members believe. They say speeders with impunity are causing an inordinate number of auto collisions, including pedestrian-injury collisions.

Highway patrol officer numbers are up in California recently, and El Dorado Hills stands to benefit from that increase, Hale said.

"For the past few weeks we have had an additional officer assigned to El Dorado Hills in particular, as well have been spending a considerable amount of our budgeted overtime in the area," said highway-patrol Officer Sean Ricci. "Office space has been secured in El Dorado Hills and a sergeant or an officer will be assigned full time beginning the first of the year."

The legislation idea just proved unwieldy.

"If ... legislation mandated additional enforcement, the state would be required to reimburse all cost increases," Nakanishi wrote to the citizen group. "Any legislation that contains a state mandate has little chance of passing in the Legislature due to budget constraints. After extensive research and consideration, I have decided not to carry legislation on this issue."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2007 budget funded 240 additional highway-patrol officer positions.

Paul Raveling, citizens alliance president, wrote in a newsletter that many members believe the highway-patrol



Assemblyman Alan Nakanishi's proposed legislative measure to beef up law enforcement on the roads of El Dorado Hills to help cure a perceived notion of insufficient traffic patrol officers was scrapped because of budget constraints. Andrew Nixon/The Telegraph

increase will prove to be too little to curtail speeding in El Dorado Hills.

"At this time, the CHP is increasing its presence in El Dorado County, but only one CHP officer is assigned specifically to cover El Dorado Hills, using Fire Station 85 as his base," Raveling wrote. "So far our best chance for better traffic patrol was the 2005 attempt to incorporate as a city. Opponents correctly pointed out that the initial police operating budget per capita would have been about half that of Folsom, but this still would have dramatically improved traffic-patrol level of service ..."

The newsletter states that a reasonable goal would be "20 CHP officers dedicated to 24-7 patrol."

Raveling said he understood the obstacles to the desired legislation.

"It kind of flies in the face of the way state law is written," he said. "The laws did not anticipate that unincorporated areas would become real, live cities."

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