

Pasadena Star News

Strength in numbers

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This is the second part of a series of editorials on transportation funding in the region. The first part ran Sunday.

IT plays like a broken record.

Whenever the MTA doles out transportation dollars, the San Gabriel Valley gets shortchanged and cries foul.

The latest insult occurred when the Metropolitan Transportation Authority voted not to fund 20 percent of the Gold Line Foothill Extension, a requirement of the federal government which was ready to pay the rest. The result: No local funds and no federal dollars either. Double zeroes.

Now, as the San Gabriel Valley - which represents 2 million people or about 20 percent of the population of Los Angeles County - crawls back to its corner with its tail between its legs, the governance problem is left unsolved.

It's time Valley cities change the way transportation dollars are distributed in this county by adding more San Gabriel Valley and Gateway cities reps to the MTA board.

Currently, the MTA board has only 13 members. Four are elected or appointed by officials from the city of Los Angeles (including the mayor), and three are county supervisors who always side with the City of L.A. mainly because nearly all of their districts fall within L.A. city boundaries. That makes seven reps who vote lock-step with L.A., for L.A. or westside projects, over other transportation projects. The other six members come from Santa Monica, Glendale, Duarte and Long Beach, plus the remaining two supervisors who represent regions that lie outside the city of L.A.

The result has been a 7-6 vote, a stacked deck against both the San Gabriel Valley and Gateway Cities projects.

The fix? The board should be more representative of the county's population. SGV and Gateway cities make up about 40 percent of the county's population, yet they only have a total of two reps on the board, about 15 percent of the board vote.

By adding members, more cities that are not related to L.A. can have a say in what freeways, what rail projects, what bus routes get funded.

When Orange County faced a similar equity issue, it met it head on by adding more members from outlying cities. Orange County's Transportation Authority (OCTA) now has 18 members and that includes one city member from within each supervisorial district, and one city member weighted by population from each supervisorial district. The OCTA even added public members, something MTA does not have.

Why should Orange County, with one-fourth the population of Los Angeles County, have 18 members on its key transportation board, while L.A. County has only 13? Could it be that the elephant in the room - Los Angeles - doesn't want to dilute its power?

Apparently, there's been talk of making such a move but it is just that - talk. The spineless representatives of our region don't want to make waves.

But we do.