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Traffic backs up on Highway 50 near Latrobe Road in El Dorado Hills, and growing congestion along that key artery is a reason a slow-growth movement is moving forward in that community.

Slow-growth ballot measure launched in El Dorado County

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Saying El Dorado County is growing too fast and Highway 50 is getting jammed, a group of activists launched a drive Tuesday to qualify a November ballot measure that would slow growth while encouraging the county to work harder to bring jobs to the area.

Petitioners hope to qualify their measure, called “Fix Highway 50 Traffic First/Keep Us Rural,” for the November ballot. It would be the second major grass-roots efforts in recent years to slow development in the lower reaches of the foothills county, where tens of thousands of commuters flow daily onto Highway 50, many bound for jobs in Sacramento County.

The group pushing the ballot measure, including former county Supervisor Bill Center, filed papers Tuesday with the county elections office.

If passed, the measure would amend the county general plan to prohibit the county from approving any more residential subdivisions of five or more parcels until overall traffic congestion is improved on Highway 50 from the current “level of service” F, or stop-and-go during commute periods.

The measure also prohibits the county from rezoning low-density residential, medium-density residential or rural-residential housing areas to higher-density housing. It also would require all land currently designated in the general plan as open space or agriculture to remain in that land-use category.

Center said his group believes the county has already zoned enough land for housing, and wants leaders to focus now on bringing more jobs to the county, rather than opening more land to housing.

“The County currently has 16,000 vacant parcels to build new homes, which is enough to last 20 years. Rather than approve more housing subdivisions that worsen traffic – the County should start approving job projects to reduce commute traffic,” the group said in its petition-filing statement.

The measure excludes the cities of South Lake Tahoe and Placerville, as well as areas near Lake Tahoe that are covered by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

County officials could not be reached for comment Tuesday. Kim Kerr, El Dorado County assistant chief administrative officer, said earlier in the week, however, that the county is working now on rewriting sections of its general plan to become more business-friendly so fewer county residents have to drive to Sacramento for jobs.

“We are evaluating what we can do,” she said. “Our goal is to find out how we can attract (businesses) here. Research and development (industries) is definitely something we have the potential for.”

The county last week held a groundbreaking to build a new Highway 50 interchange at Silva Valley Parkway. That project includes a pair of new merge lanes between Silva Valley and the El Dorado Hills Boulevard interchange. County officials say they have long-term plans to reduce the load on Highway 50 by building some major roads parallel to the freeway – such as a connection west of El Dorado Hills.