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Panel advocates engineer hiring

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A Senate budget subcommittee Tuesday voted in favor of hiring nearly 600 permanent state engineers instead of contracting with private firms seeking a share of some \$20 billion in highway construction approved by voters.

The subcommittee's budget recommendation was a boost to efforts by the 10,000-member Professional Engineers in California Government Association to keep the highway work authorized by 2006's Proposition 1B in-house.

The California Department of Transportation's budget request recommended freezing 100 open state engineering jobs and contracting with 595 outside engineers and consultants to handle the surge of work.

The Senate subcommittee voted to recommend the near opposite -- hiring 595 permanent state employees.

Bruce Blanning, PECG executive director, argued that in-house engineers are less expensive and said California has sufficient long-term highway work to justify adding the permanent positions.

Paul Meyer, executive director of the private Consultant Engineers and Land Surveyors of California, said the decision -- if it stands -- could deprive the state a jump-start in highway construction and cost substantially more money over time.

-- Peter Hecht, Bee Capitol Bureau

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