

# VTD - Rail board cleared to seize 8 more Fresno properties

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The agency overseeing California's high-speed rail project won permission Friday from a separate state board to begin eminent domain proceedings against eight properties in Fresno that are needed to build the line's initial segment.

Three of the eight properties are businesses, while five are vacant lots or vacant buildings, said California High-Speed Rail Authority spokeswoman Lisa Marie Alley.

The rail authority must acquire 381 Central Valley properties to build the initial 21-mile segment. It now has permission from the state Board of Public Works to seize a total of 10 properties and has contracts to buy another 47.

It has submitted written offers on 166 and is in the process of negotiating terms with the remaining property owners.

An opponent said it is premature for the state to seize the properties because it is uncertain whether the bullet train project can clear several legal hurdles to begin construction.

The 3rd District Court of Appeal is conducting an expedited review of two lower court rulings by Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Michael Kenny, who determined the project as currently envisioned does not meet the promises made to voters when they approved nearly \$10 billion in bonds for the project in 2008.

The judge ordered the state to write a new plan to pay for the \$68 billion rail project and blocked the sale of \$8.6 billion of the voter-approved bonds.

"It just seems odd that the state government can decide to take someone's property away from them for a project that isn't legal and that they have no money for," Frank Oliveira, co-chairman of the group Citizens for High-Speed Rail Accountability, said in a telephone interview after Friday's decision by the public works board.

Also on Friday, the State Water Resources Control Board announced it has approved a permit required by the federal Clean Water Act that addresses water quality effects from the high-speed rail construction project. The act requires contractors to capture debris and contaminants so they don't wash into waterways.

It is one of myriad environmental permits the project needs from several agencies before construction can begin.