

High-speed rail construction could start next month near Madera

BY TIM SHEEHAN

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An artist's rendition of California's high-speed rail. **PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SW PARRA — The Fresno Bee**

An elevated viaduct near Madera will likely be one of the first major pieces of tangible construction for California's proposed high-speed rail line, with work starting as early as next month.

Jim Laing, a project manager for Tutor Perini Corp., talked about the construction plan Monday afternoon at an industry forum for engineering students, professors and professionals at California State University, Fresno. Sylmar-based Tutor Perini, Zachry Construction of Texas and Pasadena-based Parsons Corp last summer won a contract for just under \$1 billion from the California High-Speed Rail Authority to design and build the first 29-mile stretch between Madera and Fresno of a statewide bullet-train line.

"The first major construction activity we see is up on the Fresno River, a 2,000-foot-plus viaduct to go across the river, over Highway 145 and over Raymond Road," Laing said. "We're looking at doing some test pilings in May to prove the validity of our design of the columns and supports."

By this summer, Laing added, "we should be building that structure and really initiating construction."

The first construction section runs from about Avenue 17, near the BNSF freight railroad tracks at the eastern edge of Madera, south to American Avenue at the southern fringe of Fresno. In addition to the viaduct, the section includes a bridge over the San Joaquin River, elevated

tracks at the north and south ends of Fresno; a tunnel under Belmont Avenue and Highway 180, and a dozen street or road over- and underpasses.

Other early portions of work will likely be in downtown Fresno, Laing said. Contractors are working with the city to plan relocation of utilities before construction can begin on new underpasses that will route Tulare and Ventura streets beneath the new high-speed rail tracks as well as the adjacent Union Pacific freight railroad tracks.

Under its contract with the state, the Tutor Perini/Zachry/Parsons team has until late 2017 to complete its work on the Madera-Fresno section

Monday's daylong forum and workshops were part of a professional series that Fresno State's engineering program is organizing for students, professors and industry experts, said Ram Nunna, dean of the university's Lyles College of Engineering.

Nunna said his goal is for Fresno State to play a leading role in research for America's fledgling high-speed rail industry and train graduates who have bullet-train expertise as the technology spreads across the nation.

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