

# State considers more condemnations for Valley high-speed rail route | High-Speed Rail

By Tim Sheehan

The Jensen & Pilegard feed and equipment store on G Street will be considered for possible condemnation by the state Public Works Board on Friday. The building, which dates to 1930, and its now-unused feed mill are at the site of a future high-speed passenger train station in downtown Fresno.

TIM SHEEHAN / THE FRESNO BEE

Five more properties in Fresno are set for possible condemnation by the state Public Works Board to make way for California's high-speed rail project.

Meeting Friday in Sacramento in the state Capitol, the board will consider resolutions declaring the need to use eminent domain to acquire the sites. The most notable is the Jensen & Pilegard feed and equipment store on G Street between Fresno and Tulare streets in downtown Fresno.

Both the Jensen & Pilegard store and a neighboring warehouse to the north sit where the California High-Speed Rail Authority expects to build a passenger station for its San Francisco-Los Angeles bullet-train network.

Also up for a vote by the Public Works Board are a small vacant lot at the corner of Ventura and F streets, and two sites in the northwest part of the city, near Golden State Boulevard north of Shaw Avenue.

Chris Pilegard said his business -- which was started more than 70 years ago by his father -- remains in negotiations with the California High-Speed Rail Authority and declined to talk about the Public Works Board's potential condemnation resolution. The venerable 1930 building, marked with its now-unused feed-mill towers, is the original Fresno location for the company. Jensen & Pilegard also has stores in Clovis, Visalia and on Blackstone Avenue in central Fresno.

The heads of the state's Finance, General Services and Transportation departments comprise the Public Works Board. Since late 2013, the panel has adopted 23 resolutions authorizing the use of eminent domain to acquire land from owners with whom the rail authority has failed to negotiate a sale or who simply don't want to sell their property.

Eminent domain or condemnation is a legal process by which a government agency can declare a public need for property and sue to acquire it if the government cannot reach agreement with the landowner.

A judge decides whether the agency is entitled to the property; in a second phase, a trial determines the fair market value and other "just compensation" due the owner. Verdicts can be no lower than the agency's offer and no higher than the owner's counteroffer.



Contractors for the rail agency have started demolishing a few scattered buildings along the first 29-mile construction segment from Madera to the south end of Fresno, and expect to begin construction this year. So far, the agency has acquired 76 of the more than 550 properties it needs in that section. Another 579 parcels will be needed for the second construction section from Fresno to the Tulare-Kern county line.

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