

More condemnations ahead for high-speed rail

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The California High-Speed Rail Authority's condemnation plans have drawn plenty of criticism. At a May hearing in Fresno, Charlene Hook of Corcoran sits with two of her sisters with a protest sign.

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The [California Public Works Board](#) will hit the ground running to start 2015, with condemnations of 29 properties in Fresno and Madera counties on tap for the board's first meeting of the year.

The parcels have been identified by the California High-Speed Rail Authority as necessary for the initial construction stage of the state's high-speed rail project. The Public Works Board will [meet Jan. 12](#) in Sacramento to consider declaring a public need to take the land — either in whole or in part — through eminent domain to make way for the rail route.

All but three of the resolutions that the board will consider Jan. 12 are for properties in Fresno County. Most involve property south of downtown Fresno, at the southern end of the first [29-mile construction segment](#) between Avenue 17 northeast of Madera and American Avenue south of Fresno.

The state board includes the heads of the state's Finance, General Services and Transportation departments.

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, and then a trial determines the fair market value and other "just compensation" that the government must pay the owner. Verdicts can be no lower than the agency's offer and no higher than the owner's counteroffer. Even after a resolution is adopted, however, negotiations often continue between the government agency and the property owner.

Since December 2013, the Public Works Board has approved 73 resolutions affecting 81 parcels, amounting to about 89 acres of land in Fresno and Madera counties.

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