

Central Valley Residents Say High-Speed Rail Is Running Them Over

By Jeffrey
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People in the path of high speed rail say the authority is mistreating them.

Some home and land owners in the pathway of California's high-speed rail project are claiming the rail authority is treating them with disrespect and presenting low-ball offers in an attempt to for the project through. Those are claims the head of the rail authority strongly denies.

Daryl and Shawna Archer

A couple hundred feet behind the Kings County home of Daryl and Shawna archer are freight train.

"These are refrigerated cheese cars. They come twice a day. Once empty, once full going back,"

The Archer's have no problem with this set of tracks, it's the new high-speed rail that has them upset.

They are two of the hundreds of people and business in the path of the 68-billion dollar project.

"What they are going to put here would be then fence, and then the piles of dirt because this thing is supposed to be elevated," Daryl said.

The rail authority says they need part of the archer's land for the rail and storage for empty train cars.

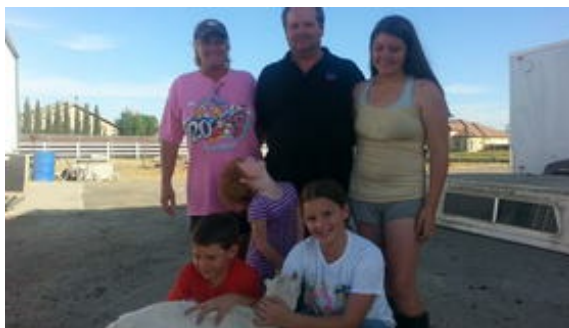
Archer says the land the rail authority wants would run right through their backyard where they raise goats, chickens, and other livestock.

"Look at the baby ducklings! Olaf's baby is out here with the big ducks," Archer said.

But the Archers say the process of working with the rail authority and their appraisers has been anything but pleasant.

Shawna recalls the day an appraiser showed up unannounced as she was leaving to get her kids from school.

"I saw them pull up in front of my house with a camera. I asked him what he was doing. He told me. I asked 'do you need you access to my property?' He looked backed at his truck full of friends, because there were four more guys in his truck, starting laughing. They all started laughing. He turned back to me and said 'no, I don't need access to your



property’,” Archer said.

The sale would also force them to remove their septic tank, which if it cannot be replaced, would condemn their home requiring them to move.

The couple says the estimate doesn’t come close to the value of the property or what it would cost to move.

But more than that, Shawna says it would not make up for the loss of what they consider their country dream home, where they can raise their animals and get their kids into a better school.

“There is nothing comparable to these properties. There is nothing else out there. These are irreplaceable. These are priceless properties.” Archer said.

And the Archers are hardly alone according to Aaron Fukuda, who is organizing landowners in the path of the rail.

“Every day I hear more and more outrageous stories about how landowners are getting treated by appraisers. And the authority tries to step in and fix that situation and it almost gets worse from that point,” Fukuda said.

Fukuda is part of a lawsuit trying to stop the project altogether.

He says he is not opposed to high-speed rail in general, just to this project specifically.

The rail authority is behind on acquiring the land that it needs to construct the railroad admits High-Speed Rail Authority chair Dan Richard.

Richard says they are catching up but not at the expense of landowners in the central valley.

“I think the numbers speak for themselves, 90% of the parcels we acquire are not through eminent domain. They are through fair, bilateral negotiations with land owners to give them the appropriate price for their land,” Richard said.

The rail authority has been stepping up its use of eminent domain but Richard says they are only doing that when necessary because doing so tosses the cases into court, further slowing the process.

Richard also says they are focusing on acquiring key land first.

But not everyone is reporting problems with the rail authority.

“That building there has been sold. This one I own. That’s in the process of being sold.

Jack Emerian, owner of Val Print

At Valprint printing in Downtown Fresno, owner Jack Emerian points out the three pieces of property that he is losing to the rail.

Emerian says his experience with the rail was highly positive.

He believes the train will ultimately benefit California.

“We can’t just keep building freeways and freeways and freeways. And as we know freeways cost more than a high-speed rail system. Why shouldn’t we build a high-speed rail system? It works in other parts of the world. I have ridden on them. I think they are fabulous,”

Emerian says the rail even increased their offer by 15-percent after he asked for a re-appraisal.

The rail authority does appear to be increasing its outreach, organizing events in farming communities and towns in



the path of the project.

High-speed rail chair Dan Richard says major construction to clear the way and prepare the path for the train should begin within a few weeks and that resistance to the project will not de-rail its ultimate completion.