

Fresno open house for high-speed rail will field questions, concerns

By Tim Sheehan



Heavy equipment clogs a closed-down F Street between Tulare and Kern streets earlier this month in Fresno's Chinatown as crews reroute underground utilities to make way for a high-speed rail route through downtown Fresno. An open house on the rail project is slated Thursday, April 30, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Fresno Fire Department Museum, 911 H Street, across the Union Pacific Railroad freight tracks from Chinatown.

TIM SHEEHAN — THE FRESNO BEE

- If you go

What: High-speed rail open house

Where: Fresno Fire Department Museum, 911 H St.

When: Thursday, April 30, 5-7 p.m.

Information: Elizabeth Jonasson, (559) 248-6376 or elizabeth.jonasson@hsr.ca.gov; or Maurice Young, (559) 385-7025 or contactCP1@TPZPJV.com.

- *An open house Thursday will offer information on the bullet-train route through Fresno.*
- *The first 29-mile construction section includes overpasses, bridges and a tunnel.*
- *Concerns include the use of eminent domain for property acquisition and the overall cost of the rail project.*

High-speed rail skeptics, supporters and those who are just downright curious about the massive public works project have an opportunity to learn more about the first rail construction section at an open house Thursday evening in downtown Fresno.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority and contractor Tutor Perini / Zachry / Parsons are holding the information event from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Fresno Fire Department Museum, 911 H St. The site is across Tulare Street from Fresno's future high-speed train station and across H Street from the Chukchansi Park baseball stadium.

Both the rail agency and the contractor will have staffers on hand with information about the project's design, right of way needs, employment opportunities and how small businesses can take part in the project. They will also answer questions and address concerns from the public over the rail project.

Construction has commenced in the downtown area to relocate underground utilities to make way for the rail line, which is planned to eventually connect San Francisco and Los Angeles with electric-powered, 220-mph passenger trains by way of Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley. A 29-mile segment from Fresno to Madera is the first construction section of the statewide rail system under a contract for about \$1 billion.

The segment, from American Avenue at the south end of Fresno to Avenue 17 at the northeastern edge of Madera, will include 12 road over- or underpasses, bridges over the Fresno River in Madera and the San Joaquin River at the Fresno-Madera county line, two stretches of elevated tracks, and a tunnel north of downtown Fresno.

Along the way, the rail authority needs to acquire all or portions of about 522 pieces of property for the railroad right of way and associated structures. It's that land acquisition that is one focus of controversy in Fresno and the Valley, as the agency's progress has been slower than originally anticipated. As of mid-March, it had secured legal possession of about 154 of the 522 parcels, and made 137 of those properties available to the contractor for construction. Over recent months, however, the state has accelerated the pace at which it is using the legal process of eminent domain, or condemnation, to get the land it needs.

In nearby Chinatown, just across the Union Pacific Railroad freight tracks from the future high-speed train station, advocates of the historic district complain that they are being threatened with eminent domain and that businesses are being disrupted for weeks by streets being torn up for the utility relocation work.

More information about the open house is available by contacting rail authority information officer Elizabeth Jonasson at (559) 248-6376 or elizabeth.jonasson@hsr.ca.gov or Maurice Young, a spokesman for contractor Tutor Perini / Zachry / Parsons, at (559) 385-7025 or contactCP1@TPZPJV.com.

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