

Monday, October 16, 2006

State agency defends Caltrans

Prepared statement from Secretary of the California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, Sunne Wright McPeak. Caltrans reports to this state agency.

"Upon our appointments, Caltrans Director Will Kempton and I both were disappointed with the Department's track record on land management practices. We have worked hard to improve that record during the past three years. As a result, we are now seeing timely Caltrans inspections of properties, diligent repair and maintenance, as well as timely response to tenants.

Specifically, the Department has established an Excess Lands Process Review Team to better integrate the clearance process, for which results have been positive. For an example, under the Schwarzenegger Administration, Caltrans has sold 674 parcels totaling \$105.6 million. A Property Management Functional Council also has been convened to improve the statewide practice of following established right-of-way processes and procedures.

In addition, an action plan has been developed to implement Best Property Management Practices. Caltrans also has established, through the California Transportation Commission, a real estate advisory panel to serve as a strike team on surplus property issues, which now allows Caltrans to aggressively dispose of those properties.

The bottom line is that Caltrans acquires property for the purpose of building highways and roads.

As part of this process, Caltrans moves quickly to relocate tenants, to demolish the structures and clear the land. Often times the Department is prevented from addressing property management issues in a timely manner. For example, the Los Angeles 710 Corridor and the Alameda 238 Corridor projects faced consent decrees and local disagreements. Moreover, court approval was required to tear down structures on the Alameda 238 corridor.

In one particular instance, securing the court's approval to demolish a burnt structure took approximately nine months.

Caltrans Director Will Kempton and I both are proud of the progress the Department has made during the past three years.

The Department has responded very well, and (the fact that it) was recently named by well-respected professionals in the architecture, engineering and construction industries as "Best Public Owner in California" confirms the success of that progress.

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