

40th Street blight also bothers state transit panel

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The California Transportation Commission wants to know if there is a quicker way to get rid of abandoned structures bought by the state along future rights of way for new freeways.

Meeting in San Diego yesterday, the commission voted unanimously to direct the state Department of Transportation to review existing procedures after hearing reports of crime and vandalism plaguing the 40th Street corridor in City Heights .

"There should be a quicker way to get rid of these houses and avoid these problems," said commission chairman Bill Leonard.

An aide to state Sen. Lucy Killea, D-San Diego, told commissioners that houses purchased by Caltrans on 40th Street have been vandalized and occupied by transients and drug dealers.

"There has been a lot of concern for over a year and a half because these homes have been allowed to remain abandoned and not torn down or moved," said Steve Hill, assistant to Killea.

State transportation officials said the delay in some cases is caused by a shortage of inspectors used to check such structures for asbestos before they can be moved. The delays add several months to any planned demolition.

City Heights residents last month, led by San Diego City Councilman John Hartley, held a protest over the delays in what eventually will be the extension of Interstate 15 through Mid-City.

Hartley was joined by others who said that homes and buildings bought by the state for right of way along 40th Street from Adams to Myrtle avenues are not being moved fast enough and have been scenes of recent fires and crimes.

Caltrans hopes to get \$55 million to buy and remove about 100 remaining properties in the project corridor.

The freeway, planned for more than 20 years, has been delayed because of funding shortages.

The San Diego City Council on Tuesday approved a pilot crime-fighting program for the troubled neighborhood.

The plan calls for a coordinated effort by several city departments, including more police presence, expanded neighborhood watch groups and creation of an after-school recreation program in an effort to draw children away from drug and gangs in the neighborhood.

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