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# Caltrans property management gets hearing

## Lawmakers will listen to department's reform plans today and hear from people who say they've been harmed by state department.

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the orange county register

Republican state lawmakers and an Orange County supervisor will ask highway officials today to explain why they have failed to keep decades of promises to become better landlords, sell unused land and improve tracking of properties.

The three-hour public hearing will be held in Santa Ana with Assemblyman Todd Spitzer, R-Orange, leading the inquiry.

The hearing was called in response to an Orange County Register investigation into the California Department of Transportation's property management problems. The story ran in October.

Spitzer said he is searching for ways to force Caltrans to fix its practice of holding onto land and then neglecting it. He also said he remains skeptical of new reform promises made by Director Will Kempton.

"The fundamental question I have is, after decades of promises and nothing happening, after decades of dragging their feet, why should I think this is any different?" Spitzer said.

Caltrans' spokesman Mark DeSio said, "There have been many examples of insufficient past actions on the part of Caltrans. ... During the discussion, Director Kempton hopes to focus on the improvements Caltrans is and has been taking to correct these problems."

Spitzer is threatening to hold up Caltrans' budget if he does not quickly see improvements. The state budget will come up for a vote in the Legislature in six months. To pass, it needs six Republican votes.

"I think my caucus will have no problem supporting this kind of disciplinary action," Spitzer said. "It's the power we have and I think it's time to exercise it."

The hearing will start with a presentation by Kempton and Sunne McPeak, secretary of the Business, Housing and Transportation Agency, which oversees Caltrans.

The schedule then calls for other local and state officials to testify, followed by over a dozen people who are Caltrans' tenants, who live next to Caltrans properties or have sold property to Caltrans under eminent domain.

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