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The 2015-16 legislative session started with the usual sturm and drang around California Environmental Quality Act legislation, which largely petered out by September when the regular session adjourned for the year. What's unusual this fall, however, is the transportation special session called by Governor Jerry Brown and the continuing opportunity it provides for CEQA opponents.

*In this first of two articles, we review the year's regular session bills. Our next edition will cover the CEQA exemptions adopted in the 2015-16 budget and the ongoing debate occurring in the special session on transportation.*

Sixteen Republican and Democratic legislators introduced bills earlier this year to modify CEQA ([to see the list click here](#)). PCL supported one of them, Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson's SB 122. Jackson and joint author Senator Jerry Hill crafted the bill based on consensus suggestions from a wide range of stakeholders. It requires a lead agency to prepare a record of proceedings concurrently with the environmental review, if requested by the project applicant. This would reduce project delays in litigated cases. Additionally, the bill requires electronic posting of all notices and environmental documents in a state database. The cost of the state database hung up SB 122 in Assembly Appropriations Committee, but it could be revisited next year.

Two noncontroversial, minor CEQA changes flew through the legislature and Brown signed them this summer. AB 323 (Olsen) extends to 2020 the sunset on a road repair exemption negotiated between PCL and the author in 2012. Similarly, SB 348 (Galgiani) extends until 2019 the exemption for closure of a railroad grade crossing that presents a threat to public safety. PCL remained neutral on both narrowly-drawn measures.

We took an "oppose unless amended" position on Assemblymember Medina's AB 291, which stalled in Senate Environmental Quality Committee due to the chair's opposition. The bill's objectionable provision

starts the 30-day statute of limitations for multi-county projects when the state receives a copy of the notice of determination rather than when the counties post the notice. This provision could shave days off the already-tight timeframe for community members to review and, if warranted, challenge the decision. We hope to work with Medina over the fall to resolve our concern.

The remaining 12 bills never progressed beyond their first policy committee: AB 956 (Mathis), AB 1068 (Allen), AB 1268 (Steinorth), AB 1298 (Gipson), AB 1398 (Wilk), AB 1473 (Salas), AB 1500 (Maienschein), SB 127 (Vidak), SB 154 (Huff), SB 240 (Stone), SB 487 (Nielsen), and SB 584 (Nguyen). In an interesting twist, the two measures championed by Republican Assemblymembers Marc Steinorth and Brian Maienschein expand CEQA exemptions for housing developments affordable to lower income households. Both bills were rumored to be part of a deal to gain Republican votes on Assembly Speaker Toni Atkin's housing funding measure, AB 1335, but an agreement never materialized.

All 12 of these measures must move out of their house of origin by the end of January 2016 in order to remain alive.

*In our next issue: How Republicans – and Governor Brown – are attempting to leverage road maintenance funding for CEQA changes.*

*Text, analyses, and vote records on all legislation can be found at [www.legislature.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.legislature.leginfo.ca.gov).*

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