

# East West Link authority set to acquire 100 homes and businesses

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The authority for the East West Link is due to take ownership on Thursday of more than 100 homes and business premises that are being compulsorily acquired to make way for the toll road.

The acquisitions will proceed this week despite the intense political uncertainty that surrounds the \$6.8 billion project, which Labor has vowed to scrap should it win November's state election.

Letters will be sent to 102 property owners from next week informing them that the Linking Melbourne Authority has acquired their home or place of business. The letter will include a first offer of compensation for the property.

From Thursday the authority will effectively become the landlord of those 102 properties and has pledged to charge a "peppercorn rent" of \$1 a month until it takes full possession, likely in August or September next year when construction is planned to commence.

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Clifton Hill resident Gillian Tuxworth and her family live just off Alexandra Parade in a house that is to be compulsorily acquired. She said the notice would give her family no certainty about their home because of the political stand-off over the project.

"It's a really difficult one. They own our property from Thursday but we've been contacted by our local member, Richard Wynne, who said if Labor win government they'll sell us back our property," Ms Tuxworth said.

But lawyer Anton Dunhill of Hunt and Hunt, which is acting for some property owners who face acquisition, said reacquiring properties would not be simple should the project be scrapped.

"Generally the authority must sell the land back to the original owner within 18 months, but it is discretionary outside that time frame," Mr Dunhill said. "After 18 months they are not restricted in what they could do. They could sell it, lease it or bulldoze it."

Mr Wynne, Labor MP for Richmond, said the Napthine government should delay the acquisition process until after the November 29 poll.

"This is a vicious and unnecessary act by this government to disrupt people's lives less than 50 days before an election," Mr Wynne said.

Authority spokesman Matt Phelan said property owners would be given time to engage their own valuers and negotiate a sale price and would be charged no rent for three months from the date of acquisition, as is required under law.

"Like on every other project involving acquisition, the state meets a wide range of costs for owners including valuers, solicitors, stamp duty on the purchase of a replacement property and removalists," Mr Phelan said.