

DCTA gets go-ahead to use Stadler cars

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

Published: 05 June 2012 11:56 PM

The Denton County Transportation Authority has cleared the last hurdle to get its new fleet of A-train rail cars up and running.

The Federal Railroad Administration announced this week that DCTA had been granted its request for an alternate vehicle technology waiver to operate its Swiss-made Stadler rail cars on the same tracks as freight trains. It was the first such waiver the FRA has granted.

DCTA officials say the waiver will allow the new rail cars to be used on the A-train and increase possible expansion options for the A-train and transportation agencies across the county.

"It gives us the potential to run those cars on other corridors, allowing greater opportunities to expand regional rail in the area," said Dee Leggett, DCTA vice president of communications and planning.

In the interim, though, DCTA president Jim Cline said the waiver helps with two things. It allows the agency to operate its newer cars with the older cars leased from Dallas Area Rapid Transit and allows the agency to keep those cars as an option if it needs to expand service or if there is a need to have spares. The other part is that it allows the new cars to operate on other parts of the regional rail system due to the safety measures factored into their construction.

"It provides a lot of options, particularly in an area where a community is not real crazy about having full-up locomotives and large rail cars," Cline said. "This is more people-scale. It's very positive."

Leggett said some of the new rail cars' safety features affect the absorption of energy in a crash. Previous rail cars distributed the energy and force of an impact across all the cars, which can cause secondary injuries to passengers and operators. Each of the Stadler cars will absorb the energy, thus minimizing the impact to the passengers and operators.

Leggett hopes the agency will be able to get the Stadler cars into service in the next four to five weeks.

The granting of the waiver opens the door for other agencies to apply for it, too.

Kevin F. Thompson, spokesman for the Federal Railroad Administration, said the process will be unique to each applicant and will look at how the rail project performs.

"Every applicant for such a waiver would have to be judged on an individual basis," he said. "It doesn't mean what will work in Denton will work in other places, but it does open the door for performance-based application."

Freelance writer Tim Blackwell contributed to this report.

BJ LEWIS can be reached at 940-566-6875. His e-mail address is blewis@dentonrc.com.