



North Texas is Angling for a Light Rail Manufacturing Plant (Translation: Jobs!)

By Eric Nicholson

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DCTA

Denton rolled out its new, Swiss-made light rail vehicles this summer.

When the Denton County Transportation Authority was shopping for rail cars for its A-train commuter line in 2009, it settled on 11 diesel-electric vehicles manufactured in Europe by Stadler, a company based in Switzerland. The cars are quieter, more fuel efficient and more spacious than the light rail cars on a typical commuter line.

"It's built to an amazingly sophisticated crash-worthiness capacity," said Michael Morris, transportation director for the North Central Texas Council of Governments. "It's a vehicle I think will have a lot of national and international interest."

That said, Morris would just as soon have the vehicles built here than on the other side of the Atlantic. And with a projected need for dozens of new street cars and light rail vehicles in the region in the not-too-distant future (think of projects like the Cotton Belt), Morris thinks that can happen.

The idea is pretty simple. If local transit agencies can come up with a large enough pool of money, and if they can trigger the "Buy American" clause that applies to the expenditure of federal funds, then they can convince a company like Stadler to build a vehicle manufacturing plant somewhere in North Texas. The magic number is about \$200 million, or roughly 40 vehicles, something Morris thinks the region can easily achieve.

First, though, everyone has to be on the same page. Morris said the Regional Transportation Council is in discussions with the governor's office and the secretary of state and is close to getting the state's commitment to chip in some of its transit funds. He's hoping local agencies like DART, DCTA, and The T will also come on board. And it's all happening pretty quickly.

"We hope to issue a purchase request this fall," Morris said.

At which point a manufacturer will (theoretically, anyway) set up shop in DFW, pour a lot of money into the local economy, create a lot of jobs, and offer cheaper transit vehicles. Three birds, one stone.

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