

Dallas Business Journal
Nicholas Sakelaris
October 9, 2013

Long-delayed TEX Rail could be rolling by 2017

Rail service from downtown Fort Worth to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport could be ready with eight stations by 2017.

The Fort Worth Transportation Authority (The T) estimates the TEX Rail project will have 10,000 riders a day.

Construction could start in 2014.

TEX Rail would follow the existing Cottonbelt Railroad tracks that it would share with freight trains. The commuter train would start at the existing T&P Station in downtown Fort Worth with stops in Haltom City, Grapevine and D/FW Airport.

The proposed 2017 opening date would be 11 years after Grapevine voters approved a sales tax hike to join The T and start funding the project. Cities must pass a sales tax election to join The T and have a stop along the TEX Rail. Colleyville residents have protested and city leaders have said no to a station.

The initial plan for the TEX Rail included a southern leg that extended to Interstate 20 in southwest Fort Worth. The T Board of Directors opted to build the project in phases because it's more cost effective.

Additional stations are planned in North Richland Hills in future phases.

The long-term plan is to extend the commuter rail east to Richardson and Plano where it would connect to DART's existing Red Line, said Tom Shelton, senior program manager for the North Central Texas Council of Governments. That section of the Cottonbelt line stalled for lack of funding. Ultimately the Cottonbelt commuter line will be 62 miles long.

Earlier this year, rail planners proposed creating a special taxing district along the rail corridor, which passes through 22 cities. The proposal needed legislative approval and the bills died in the Texas Legislature in the spring, Shelton said.

"We're back to square one on what to do with that," Shelton said. "Everyone is in agreement that the project is needed, and desperately needed for a variety of reasons."

It provides a direct connection to DFW Airport while also relieving congested east-west highways, Shelton said.

"That's where all the population is really growing in the northern tier of our region," Shelton said.

The eastern connection would also provide rail access to Addison, the only original DART member city that has no rail service, Shelton said.

The Cottonbelt would use regional diesel-powered trains rather than the electric-powered light rail that DART uses.

The plan is to use more modern diesel-powered units that are smaller and more closely resemble DART's light rail but can still run on freight-worthy train tracks. They would not be as big as the locomotives and railcars used by the Trinity Railway Express.

The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) will open the Orange Line extension into D/FW Airport in December 2014. It will feature a station right outside Terminal A.

The TEX Rail Station at Terminal B and the DART Station at Terminal A will allow riders to transfer seamlessly between The T's TEX Rail and the DART system.

DART's tracks on the northern section of the airport have been purposely designed so a switch and turnout can be added to connect to the future TEX Rail station.