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## Funding identified to extend downtown-to-Oak Cliff streetcar line

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Weeks before work begins on a streetcar line connecting downtown and Oak Cliff, project leaders are looking to expand the route and link the Bishop Arts District and Dallas Convention Center.

On Thursday, the Regional Transportation Council will consider reallocating \$30.87 million in state funds previously set aside for a rail connector system at Love Field. The money would buy two streetcars and extend the line from its currently planned terminus at Colorado Boulevard and Beckley Avenue on to Zang Boulevard and Davis Street near Bishop Arts.

It also would provide funding to continue the line downtown from Union Station to near the convention center.

"The project keeps getting better," said Jay Kline, streetcar program director for Dallas Area Rapid Transit, which will operate the city-owned system.

Construction of the line's 1.5-mile first phase, between Union Station and Methodist Dallas Medical Center via the Houston Street bridge, is expected to be under way by early March, said Keith Manoy, the city's chief transportation planner. That work, funded in part with federal stimulus grants, will close the Houston bridge.

The federal government has imposed an October 2014 deadline for completing the initial route. The 0.7-mile extension would continue with the same construction contractor into 2015.

Manoy said several details about the addition remain unclear: a completion time frame, location of stops along the way, an operations schedule and the track layout itself. But he said late-night service to and from Bishop Arts — with its restaurants, bars and shops — will likely be needed. And a system turnaround at Davis may call for tracks running with traffic in both directions on Zang, he said.

Operating and maintenance funding for the extension is also uncertain for now, but that hurdle won't derail the project, Manoy said.

"It's a done deal," he said. "We've found real money."

The Regional Transportation Council oversees area transportation planning and allocates federal and state funding for such projects. On Thursday, the group will consider a proposal from the North Central Texas Council of Governments staff to redirect money received in 2004 for a connection between DART's Green Line and Love Field. While a linking of the rail line and airport is still being discussed, a fear that state officials could reclaim the funding prompted its move to the streetcar project.

DART last year reallocated \$22.4 million from the Love Field connector to the streetcar project at the city's request, Kline said.

Even without the connector money, a direct link between DART service and the airport will be established, Manoy said. "It's just a matter of what. A lot of it will have to do with demand."

As now proposed, the \$30.87 million would provide \$8 million for two additional streetcars, \$15 million for the Oak Cliff addition and almost \$8 million toward the cost of extending the tracks from Union Station east along Young Street to the convention center, said Manoy and Tom Shelton, a council of governments transportation planner.

Planning will begin in the coming months for that downtown leg, Manoy said. It will require additional funding and in time will be part of a long-envisioned inner-city circulator system, he said. Connections to the McKinney Avenue trolley service, which is being expanded, would provide another mass transit link between Uptown, downtown and Bishop Arts.

"This is just a start. I'm thrilled," said City Council member Linda Koop, chairwoman of the council's Transportation and Environment Committee and a Regional Transportation Council member.

Extending the streetcar line to the Bishop Arts District, and on to Jefferson Boulevard, has been a goal of Oak Cliff leaders since the first \$23 million federal grant for the project was announced almost three years ago. Since then, an additional \$25 million in federal and local funding has been directed to the project's first phase.

"It's a huge move for stabilizing the future of Bishop Arts," said Bob Stimson, president of the Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce, recalling the past rise and decline of areas such as Lower Greenville Avenue and Deep Ellum.

City Council member Delia Jasso, who has worked to extend the line through her district, agrees. "We've got a great opportunity here," she said. "This is great news for workers and restaurants."

Council member Scott Griggs, who helped with the application for the initial stimulus program grant, said the extension is "wonderful news for Oak Cliff and downtown Dallas."

"This connects jobs and people and will mean a greater quality of life," he said. "The goal has been to develop a streetcar system that will succeed."

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