



## Pre-DART investment separates Irving, Rowlett development pace



By RAY LESZCZYNSKI and AVI SELK

Staff Writers

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The anniversary of a dual Dallas Area Rapid Transit rail rollout is evidence of a contrast in dice previously cast in northwestern and northeastern Dallas County.

Transit-oriented housing developments are happening in Irving, where the city spent tens of millions extra to route the Orange Line through an urban center.

It's a longer path to development in downtown Rowlett, one that has seen rezoning and partnerships, but no ground broken.

"I have no doubt Rowlett's downtown will develop, just as Garland has, as Plano has and Irving has going now on its line," said 30-year Rowlett resident Mark Enoch, the city's DART board member and its former mayor. "It may be a different residential-commercial split. But it will happen."

Riders, meanwhile, have taken more immediate advantage of the broadened service. There are about 1,000 boardings each weekday at the newest Blue Line station.

Rowlett's 700 parking spaces are typically more than half full, with an estimated 40 percent of the traffic coming from Rockwall and other points outside DART's service area.

### Las Colinas

Nearly 13,000 riders a month use Irving's five stations. Three residential developments along its rail corridor have sprung up in the last two years. And construction is under way on two others.

If all goes as planned, even more projects are set to break ground next year in Las Colinas — including a \$150 million entertainment center and a mixed-use project called Northshore.

At the moment, Northshore is a 30-acre field that passengers who get off the train at Convention Center Station must slog past to reach the convention center.

But when developers bought the field in the mid-2000s, they were envisioning that station's possibilities.

"We had the great insight to buy it about one year before the crash," joked Rob Harper, a project manager for one of Northshore's development companies, Unity Hunt.

With the market swinging back and the Orange Line set to connect to an ultimate DART destination — Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport — late next year, Harper believes Northshore will be part of a rail-related boom in Las Colinas.

He compared the area to Dallas' popular but traffic-clogged Uptown area.

"Once all the projects are under way, I'm really curious to see how the gridlock's going to go in Uptown," he said.

In contrast, Harper imagined travelers hopping off DART to grab a meal or drink in a transformed Las Colinas — with "an urban vibe

but a suburban location.”

### Going forward

However, not every city has a Las Colinas as a starting point. In Rowlett, the challenge is to link its Main Street of businesses and city offices along the rail to the highway designed decades ago to bypass downtown.

DART rail and the Bush Turnpike have been seen as the bearers of economic relief to the city on the western shore of Lake Ray Hubbard. As transportation has arrived, however, officials are talking about a bond election and/or tax increase.

Not to mention the what-ifs of how Rowlett might have otherwise benefited from the \$80 million invested in DART over the last three decades.

As its new city manager, Brian Funderburk can only steer the fates going forward.

“We’re partnering with a master developer for downtown” on the heels of rezoning, he said. “We’re actively interviewing and looking for the kind of partners that will make a difference in this city. That will capture our vision.”

The timeline will more likely be similar to downtown Garland than to Las Colinas. The previous end of the Blue Line, Garland’s station, opened in 2002. Its first phase of development came half a decade later, and ground has only recently broken on Phase II.

Garland boardings have not decreased significantly in the year since Rowlett’s rail debut. DART officials believe that’s a good sign for both downtowns.

“I think it’ll come,” Enoch said. “Rowlett’s a wonderful story along the lake. There’s lots of things we have going for us.”

rleszcynski@dallasnews.com, aselk@dallasnews.com

### AT A GLANCE

#### 2012 DART rail rollouts

**July 30** — 5.4 miles on the Orange Line from Bachman Station to Irving Convention Center Station

**Dec. 3** — 4.5 miles on the Blue Line from downtown Garland to downtown Rowlett

**Dec. 3** — 3.9 miles on the Orange Line to North Lake College and Belt Line Road stations

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