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Debate over Arlington commuter bus line highlights ongoing rift about DART's new member policy



By Tom Benning

tbenning@dallasnews.com
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Ongoing deliberations about Dallas Area Rapid Transit's [plan to operate a commuter bus line in Arlington](#) are highlighting a lingering rift in the agency's board on how to best attract new member cities.

DART's committee-of-the-whole [gave preliminary approval Tuesday](#) to a contract with Arlington and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority to run the service between the city's downtown and the Trinity Railway Express' CentrePort station.

But the proposal, which still needs a final OK later this month, passed by only a two-vote margin. And multiple DART board members ripped the contract for not emphasizing the agency's [recently updated policy for bringing new cities into its fold](#).

"If Arlington doesn't like ... Dallas Area Rapid Transit, doesn't want a DART logo ... and they don't want to consider joining the DART system in four years time, ... then perhaps we shouldn't do this transaction," said board member Paul Wageman, who represents Plano. "Maybe they're better off finding their own."

Arlington leaders have stressed that the two-year commuter bus project isn't a precursor to a citywide transit system, especially since residents have repeatedly voted down mass transportation.

That's even though DART's new policy requires contracting cities to make a preliminary commitment to joining the agency within two years and the fact that Arlington officials have expressed interest in someday having passenger rail.

So most everyone involved agrees that the Arlington commuter bus, slated to launch in August, should be aimed at giving residents a taste of mass transit. The question for several weeks now has been how to take the next step.

DART board chairman John Danish – no fan of DART's revised new member policy – said the agency's guidelines have been made crystal clear and that there's no need to belabor the point in this contract.

Using a protracted religion analogy, Danish said DART needs to introduce a good service and that the rest will take care of itself.

"I want to go as a missionary to Arlington and show them why the citizens of Arlington have been robbed by not having mass transit system, why they will be better served by a new mass transit system, why they will say someday to their leaders, "Why can't we have a mass transit system?" said Danish, who represents Irving.

"If you don't believe in your religion, then don't be a missionary."

But other board members said they were simply trying to protect DART's interests.

"I object to you trying to hurry it through, simply because it's as you want it to be," board member Mark Enoch, who represents Garland, Rowlett and Glenn Heights, said to Danish. "It ought to be as the DART board wants it to be. We might agree with you or we might not."

Opponents raised questions about the option for Arlington to ask for additional stops on the express route; a provision that would possibly minimize the DART logo's presence on the buses; and the lack of a more explicit reference to DART's new member policy.

DART's staff tried to allay those concerns.

They said Arlington could seek only one additional stop – and only if the city covered the extra costs. They said DART would have to approve the commuter buses' designs. And they said DART's policy has been made clear to Arlington leaders.

The contract then received preliminary approval from DART's committee-of-the-whole by a 7-5 vote, with one board member abstaining. But both supporters and opponents promised a more thorough discussion at the next DART board meeting on May 28.

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Alex 27 minutes ago

I don't get the objections to this service. Yes, the price of entry is much smaller than the 1% sales tax the member cities get. But the service is also much smaller than full DART service. No rail stops, no opportunities for TOD, no bus service. Just a commuter bus stop at one location mornings and afternoons M-F. I agree it could be an effective way to introduce Arlington (and Mesquite for that matter) to public transit, maybe the political winds will shift in the future and they can become full members...

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