



## DART gives conditional OK to Arlington commuter bus line

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Dallas Area Rapid Transit's board conditionally agreed Tuesday to operate a commuter bus line in Arlington, marking what could be a major step for a city that's long shrugged off mass transportation.

But before buses hit the streets in August, DART and Arlington must address who will administer the two-year contract. That means Arlington must agree with DART's desire to transfer the operation to the agency's local government corporation.

"I don't know that we have a hesitation," said Jim Parajon, Arlington's community development and planning director. "We just have to take a look at it and talk to the [City] Council."

The potential hang-up arose Tuesday, as DART board members hammered out the final details on the proposed bus line between the College Park District in Arlington's downtown and the Trinity Railway Express' CentrePort station in Fort Worth.

DART board members made it clear they want to transfer the Arlington contract to a local government corporation, as the agency did with its Mesquite bus service. It wouldn't change the operation's fundamentals, but it would allow the agency to better track the project's cash flow.

DART's board approved the Arlington contract on the condition that it's administered in that fashion. The only problem is that DART's local government corporation must first be modified, and Arlington officials don't want to agree to the setup sight unseen.

So there's now a time crunch to get everything sorted out for an August launch, especially because the contract must receive final approval from Arlington and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority.

But officials with both DART and Arlington said they're still enthusiastic about the project.

"We all want to deal with Arlington, and we want to do it with alacrity," said DART board member Mark Enoch, who represents Garland, Rowlett and Glenn Heights.

### Delicate process

The contractual wrangling is the latest speed bump in what's been a delicate process to get the commuter bus service up and running. Arlington leaders have stressed that the project isn't a precursor to a citywide transit system.

The line would run only on weekdays, and its schedule would sync with the TRE. The standard fare would cost \$5, and the service's \$700,000 annual cost would be covered by Arlington, the University of Texas at Arlington and the city's business community.

All parties involved have said the commuter bus line is a chance to give Arlington residents a taste of mass transit. And DART's new guidelines require contracting cities to make a preliminary commitment to joining the agency within two years.

Some board members grumbled at a recent meeting that the Arlington contract only nodded at that policy. Others complained about ambiguity over possible extra stops on the express route and DART's branding on the buses.

But the service contract was revised to quell those concerns.

The contract is now explicit that the Arlington service is subject to DART's new member policy. It says Arlington can request only one additional stop — and only if it doesn't increase costs. And the agreement clarifies how the buses will be branded.

"It's satisfactory, as far as I'm concerned," said Enoch, who highlighted many of those issues.

### Dallas shuttle

DART's board postponed final action on a plan to operate a tourist-oriented shuttle system that would link downtown Dallas to north Oak Cliff, the Cedars

entertainment district and the Stemmons Corridor.

DART officials said the project would likely be considered at a board meeting next month, as the shuttle's fare structure and other details are sorted out.

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