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Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail review set to begin following feds' OK today



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As expected, the Federal Railroad Administration has given the thumbs-up to an environmental impact statement concerning a long-proposed Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail line. The FRA, in conjunction with the Texas Department of Transportation, will conduct the EIS on behalf of the privately operated Texas Central Railway, which promises a 90-minute trek from Dallas to Houston (by 2021, give or take).

The EIS will study various route alignments, including “shared corridors with other existing linear infrastructure corridors such as railroads, roads, and electric utility lines.” Also, says the FRA, it will “analyze the potential impacts of stations, power facilities, and maintenance facilities to support HSR operations.” The review could take some time — several months, say transportation officials, and possibly longer than a year.



The public notice comes as no surprise: Back in January U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx gave his blessing to the project, which has been around since the 1980s — when Southwest Airlines crashed a proposal from what was then known as Texas TGV. But this line’s looking more and more like ... well, if not a reality, then something less pipe-dreamy.

From the FRA’s notice today, which announces a public-comment period, a little background for those who dismissed this as never-gonna-happen:

TCR is a Texas-based company formed in 2009 to bring HSR to Texas as a private-sector venture. Working closely with Central Japan Railway Company (JRC), TCR is proposing the deployment of JRC’s N700-I Bullet System based on the world’s safest, most reliable, lowest emission, electric-powered, HSR systems, the Tokaido Shinkansen System. Developed and operated by JRC and the former Japan National Railways, the Tokaido Shinkansen has operated safely for almost 50 years and carries over 400,000 daily passengers. The most current generation Shinkansen train, the Series N700, runs at speeds up to 186 miles per hour.

In other words, Dallas may not have a great deli. But it won’t take forever to get to Houston’s any more.

TCR reps were in D.C. just last week drumming up bipartisan support for high-speed rail. Richard Lawless, chairman and CEO of Texas Central Railway, says today's announcement "marks another step forward for the transformational high-speed rail project that will span the 240 miles between Dallas and Houston."

Tom Schieffer, the former Texas Rangers president-turned-U.S. ambassador working with TCR as a senior advisor, says in a statement sent to *The Dallas Morning News* that "transforming the way Texans move around the state starts with bringing our infrastructure into the 21st century. Texas can blaze the trail for a new America by being the first to demonstrate the value of letting the private sector lead the way on high-speed rail."

We're awaiting comment from the FRA.

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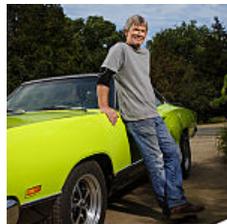
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This could be great if it begins and ends at Dallas Union Station. If it originates/terminates at some random spot in middle of nowhere south Dallas or some suburb with no public transit connectivity, it will fail before it starts.