



## 🔗 DART Orange Line to Irving turns 1; extension to D/FW Airport is coming next year



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One year after DART's Orange Line to Irving opened, the rail line is on track, transit officials say.

First-year ridership figures have met expectations, according to DART. And plans to extend the Orange Line to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport by December 2014 are on schedule.

The line's 2,300 daily riders confirm that Dallas Area Rapid Transit has become more than just a way to get around downtown Dallas, said Todd Plesko, DART's vice president of planning and development. He and others said that once the line extends to D/FW Airport, those ridership numbers should jump.

"The real success of the Orange Line should be gauged once you link up to the international gateway to the world," said John Danish, an Irving City Council member who is chairman of DART's board of directors.

Irving's desire for public transit was a source of controversy in the city for years. In 1996, Irving voters refused to eliminate the 1 percent sales tax contribution to DART so that money could possibly go instead to renovate Texas Stadium. The Dallas Cowboys abandoned Texas Stadium and moved to Arlington after the 2008 season.

Irving also paid \$60 million to realign the Orange Line so it would pass through the Las Colinas Urban Center on its way to D/FW. Danish said that investment was worthwhile.

When the line opened a year ago, it had only three stations. There are now five: University of Dallas, Las Colinas Urban Center, Irving Convention Center, North Lake College and Belt Line.

The projected daily ridership by this summer was about 2,000. With the D/FW extension just around the corner, Irving should see a substantial economic boost from DART, Plesko and Danish said.

Razzio Thomas, a 43-year-old commuter, said he takes the Orange Line about twice a week from downtown Dallas to his job at Nieman Printing, near the Irving city limits.

"The only complaint I have is that they didn't do it earlier," he said.

Thomas said he'd like to see a shuttle at the Irving Convention Center Station. Passengers who get off at that station now have to walk across a street to get to the convention center.

The Convention Center station seems isolated and remote. It brings in the second-fewest riders of Irving's five stations. Plesko said developments — apartments and other commercial properties — will eventually be drawn to the area around the station.

Jose Guerra, 44, lives in Irving and rides the DART train almost every day. He said he often takes the train visit his girlfriend, who works near the Irving Convention Center. He said he likes the dependability of the schedule, with trains arriving about every 15 minutes.

Danish said he hopes to convene a "transportation summit" of representatives from throughout North Texas to explore ways to boost the use of mass transit even further.

"We need to figure out how to keep moving people by passenger rail," he said.

**MONDAY**