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North Texas transit is great model for car-happy cities



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By [THERESE MCMILLAN](#)

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Beginning today, the trip between D/FW Airport and downtown Dallas gets a little easier with the opening of a new airport station on DART's Orange Line.

It's remarkable to think that less than 20 years after its first mile of track was laid, DART's light-rail system has grown to become the longest in the country, with more than 90 miles of rail. Together with the Trinity Railway Express and DART's bus system, that's a lot of miles in North Texas that are covered by a public transportation network carrying more than 220,000 people every weekday.

A transit system, though, is about much more than miles of concrete and steel; it's about people, their ability to connect to opportunity, and communities that are looking to control their own growth, not be controlled by it.

Dallas has been an inspiration in this regard, for places like Charlotte, N.C., and Phoenix, where the relationship with cars and trucks looks a lot more like Dallas than Manhattan — and where, like Dallas, transit was just a blip on the radar a generation ago. In such places, I'm often asked, "Will people really get out of their cars and trucks to try transit?" My response is simple: "Just look at North Texas."

Like Dallas, these cities are discovering that the key to managing congestion, growth and sprawl is a balanced approach — not being forced to choose driving *or* public transit, but empowering communities to offer both and tying them together as seamlessly as possible. Sure, you can drive to D/FW Airport if you want to — but now you don't have to.

I also often hold up North Texas as a business case study, highlighting the return on investment from well-planned public transportation. Research by the University of North Texas confirms what many locals can see for themselves: In the last decade, the \$4.7 billion that local, state and federal partners have invested in expanding DART's light-rail system, including about \$1.3 billion from the Federal Transit Administration, has generated \$7.4 billion in economic activity, created tens of thousands of local jobs and supported over \$3 billion in salaries, wages and benefits.

There's no question that communities across America can learn a great deal from North Texas about building a dynamic public transportation network. Among the most important of those lessons is that it takes vision, commitment and partnership at all levels of government.

In 1984, local voters approved a 1-cent sales tax to launch DART. Back then, it must have been difficult to foresee how that initial support would lead to the substantial economic development over the last two decades and widespread access to jobs and opportunities that followed.

Those things exist today not only because of North Texans' vision, but also because you sought the partnership of a federal government that was willing and able to provide its support. The Federal Transit Administration was at the table in 1993, helping fund the south Oak Cliff light-rail project. And we've been at the table, as your partner, ever since.

We'd like to see that partnership continue. That's why we'll continue calling on Congress to pass a multiyear transportation bill to fund the transportation infrastructure that the economies of Texas and the nation depend on.

Together, we've come a long way over the last 20 years. As the population of North Texas grows, we must go even farther. That will take planning — and funding — for the future.

After all, if we are only building for the present, then we're just building for the past.

Therese McMillan is the acting administrator of the Federal Transit Administration in the U.S. Department of Transportation. She may be contacted through fta.dot.gov.

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Freddy

6 hours ago

I'll take mass transit when they start putting a policeman on every bus and train car.

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Bushwood Smithie

7 hours ago

Therese, please explain why any other city would want to use the least financially efficient fare-based transit system in the world as a model. Please note that this is not an opinion, but a mathematical fact -- DART has the lowest farebox recovery ratio of any major system, meaning it has the highest taxpayer subsidies. Simply stated, we get the least bang for the buck of anyone.

You should also consider that all the billions spent has n't resulted in any new riders. Light rail ridership has been 100% offset by the decrease in bus riders. Billions of dollars spent and DART services a smaller share of the population than at inception. Again, a fact not an opinion, and not a role model I would want to emulate.

Perhaps you meant that we stand out as an example of how not responsibly build a system?

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Dunch_1310

7 hours ago

Not certain I would use North Texas as a good example of forward thinking in the transportation department.

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Tony Sanches

9 hours ago

Over subsidized money loser...yep....a "great model"!!

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