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DART planning to replace deteriorating rails downtown



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DART's main route through downtown Dallas is deteriorating much faster than expected and soon will need its rails replaced.

The transit agency is preparing to spend about \$50 million to replace outmoded track that is to blame for damage to the 1.25-mile stretch of light rail on Pacific Avenue and Bryan Street.

Another reason for the wear and tear is Dallas Area Rapid Transit's success. Serving 95,000 passenger trips a day, the corridor has exceeded capacity projections as a hub for all four of the agency's light-rail lines.

DART officials emphasized that the rail, which is showing significant deterioration a decade ahead of schedule, is still safe for passengers.

If left alone, the track wouldn't need to be re-evaluated until June. Even then, officials would consider only whether train speeds should be lowered on some segments.

Tentative plans call for work to begin in the spring. The 18-month project would affect DART service and downtown traffic, but officials say limiting the hassle to commuters will be a priority. They've reduced problems on other rail-replacement projects by working through nights and holidays.

"Yes, it is a logistical challenge but not insurmountable," said Mike Hubbell, DART's vice president of maintenance.

The project also may signal a shift for the transit agency, which just celebrated its 30th year. Now that DART has built most of its rail system, its focus is likely to be on maintenance.

"Capital projects are not always about system additions or expansions," executive director Gary Thomas wrote in the agency's latest proposed business plan. "As DART has significantly increased light-rail assets, we have also increased our state of good repair ... obligations."

The budget committee of DART's board of directors gave its initial blessing to the rebuilding project Tuesday as part of a proposed \$1.04 billion budget for the next fiscal year. The full board is scheduled to vote on the broader financial plan next month.

Officials determined late last year that the rail in downtown Dallas — part of the first few miles of track the agency opened in 1996 — needed attention.

Most of the light-rail system uses "T" rail, which has a relatively large section on top that has been hardened to withstand stress. But the original planners chose a different — now obsolete — girder rail for the downtown stretch. That kind of rail has a different shape and a much smaller hardened area, making it more susceptible to damage.

Hubbell said industry standards of the time called for that type of rail on transitway malls like the one on Pacific Avenue and Bryan Street.

"Part of it is that in the early '90s, DART had no rail experience as an entity," he said.

As DART ridership grew, the agency started looking for ways to increase capacity through the downtown bottleneck. One way to do that was to add more cars to trains. That added more wheels and more weight, which meant faster deterioration.

"It's basically a third more wear on the track for each train, which was not anticipated," Hubbell said.

Workers won't be able to easily replace the old girder rail, because the new "T" rail won't align perfectly with it. To make the new tracks flush, crews will have to adjust the troughs they sit in by a few centimeters. That will have to be done four times to account for each set of rail.

DART hasn't picked a contractor, and part of that competition will evaluate the best ways to prevent commuter delays. The agency is planning a construction schedule that would avoid disruptions around major events such as the State Fair of Texas and St. Patrick's Day.

Officials hope the overhaul will improve service — especially if the agency gets federal money to enhance train-switching facilities on that stretch.

The agency has applied for a \$16 million grant through the U.S. Transportation Department's Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program. The money would allow DART to add spots downtown where trains could be switched to one side of the tracks to avoid automobile accidents and other problems that block traffic.

"These switching facilities would greatly assist in minimizing service disruptions within downtown," Thomas wrote.

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 **mr_lakewood** 42 minutes ago
Time for the second rail line (D2) through downtown.

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 **4tifiedOne** 49 minutes ago
I'm still waiting for them to solve the overcrowding issue on the Red Line. When I'm leaving downtown during rush hour The Green Line goes by and it's maybe half full, the Blue Line goes by and it's 70-80% full or whatever but definitely everyone has a seat and then the Red Line will be standing room only (if you're lucky). I've been calling them for years and every time I do the customer service person acts like they have no idea what I'm talking about. Maybe it's a logistics thing but it sure seems like they could alleviate some of the problem by moving a few cars around.

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 **dukeisduke** 2 hours ago
The freight railroads replace rail sections all the time, and I seriously doubt it takes them this long.

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In general though, they have space to build parallel rails as a temporary detour. DART doesn't have that luxury. Plus, they do one-for-one swaps, not changing rail types.

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You are referring to cars and highways, right? Public transit options like DART provide freedom and choices from car only regions.

look at recent TxDOT news about how the state is dumping off it's liabilities on established cities to continue building new highways further out for examples of how cars raise your taxes far more than transit.

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More people use their cars everyday than use transit. Additionally, those that use cars