

# Star-Telegram

## Fort Worth officials want a T executive with rail experience

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FORT WORTH - City leaders say they want to bring in an executive with railroad experience to help run the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, a move they say will prevent further delays in building a proposed TEX Rail commuter rail project.

The move could mean an early departure - or at least a reduction in responsibilities -- for President Dick Ruddell, who has overseen the transit agency, also known as the T, since February 2003. Ruddell is under contract with the T through January 2015.

"Someone with rail expertise is needed somewhere in the management structure, be it on the board or in the day-to-day management of the T," said Councilman Dennis Shingleton. "It stands to reason that we need someone with that rail expertise."

The City Council and the T are scheduled to hold a joint meeting Feb. 20, Mayor Betsy Price said.

"I expect that the message at that meeting will be that we hope they'll bring in a top-notch rail executive," she said.

The T is responsible for day-to-day bus service in Fort Worth and Richland Hills, as well as long-term transit planning for all of Tarrant County and the western side of Dallas Fort Worth.

The move to bring in new executive management is the latest attempt by city leaders to revamp the agency, which is often blamed for a lack of public transportation on the western side of the Metroplex.

Today, the Fort Worth City Council is scheduled to make its T board appointments, and several current T board members have already said they were notified they would be replaced.

Fort Worth officials say they're tired of delays on the proposed TEX Rail line, a 37-mile commuter train service planned from southwest Fort Worth to Grapevine and Dallas Fort Worth Airport.

The T took years longer than expected to initiate an application for a federal transit grant to pay for up to half the nearly \$1 billion in start-up costs for TEX Rail, and now the project's opening date has been pushed back to 2016 at the earliest.

On Monday, Shingleton, Mayor Betsy Price and Councilman Danny Scarth stopped short of saying they would push for Ruddell to be replaced during a meeting with the *Star-Telegram* editorial board. But they agreed that someone with rail experience needed to be brought in.

"There may have just developed over time a dynamic between the existing board and this executive team that they may have lost a little bit of urgency, [about the rail project]," Scarth said.

"At some point, you've got to say, 'I'm done with that. We've got to put some serious pressure on people.'"

Reached by phone Monday afternoon, Ruddell said he was unaware of the council's interest in bringing in an executive with rail experience.

"I'll work with the city and the new board to accomplish that and assist in any way I can," he said.

The final decision about T management would be made by the new T board. Eight of the nine board members are appointed by the council and the ninth -- often a Richland Hills resident -- is appointed by Tarrant County.

Price said it is possible that the new board would ask Ruddell to remain on board to "run the whole operation and they could bring in a rail executive under him."

The most recent example of delays on the TEX Rail project involve a Feb. 20 deadline for submitting a final environmental impact statement to federal offices.

The Feb. 20 deadline was put in place internally, Ruddell said, to ensure that the project could get environmental clearance by this summer -- a crucial step in ensuring at least some of the trains could be rolling by 2016.

But in December, at the request of Dallas Area Rapid Transit and the North Central Texas Council of Governments, the T board agreed to use a more modern style of rail car for the line than previously planned.

That move required the T to go back and rewrite some of its environmental documents, which meant that some of the work wouldn't be ready by the Feb. 20 deadline.

The T still expects the final environmental impact statement to be completed by mid- to late March, Ruddell said.

The T, DART and the council of governments are working on a plan known as the Cotton Belt initiative, which calls for expanding TEX Rail much farther northeast of DFW Airport to capture riders in the Carrollton-Plano area.

In cooperating with DART and the council of governments, the T agreed to change the type of rail car it expected to use on the TEX Rail line.

A private developer is expected to submit a proposal to pay for some of the Cotton Belt project with outside funds.

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