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## Arlington council says no to joining DART

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ARLINGTON -- Arlington officials say they have no plans to join Dallas Area Rapid Transit as part of its effort to launch a pilot bus service from CentrePort to the University of Texas at Arlington next year.

DART's board on Tuesday night approved guidelines for nonmember cities wishing to contract with DART for transit services.

The guidelines call for cities to commit to taking steps to join DART within two years after the service starts. The cities would also have to commit to holding an election asking voters to join DART and pay a 1-cent sales tax -- or to raise an equivalent amount of revenue through other means -- within four years.

Arlington wants to run the pilot bus program on a contract basis but has no interest in joining DART as a full member, Mayor Robert Cluck and others said. Arlington also doesn't plan to join the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, known as the T, which along with DART is making a pitch to jointly operate Arlington's pilot bus service.

"We cannot join either board. We are not joining DART," Cluck said.

### Protecting investment

The DART board's action comes as board members seek to protect the investment that the agency's charter cities have made during the past 30 years -- spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a light-rail system that now covers more than 90 miles in the Dallas area. In addition to the light-rail network, DART and the T also co-own the Trinity Railway Express, a commuter rail line that runs from downtown Fort Worth to Dallas.

TRE has several stops in Tarrant County, including CentrePort just south of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, making it possible for residents of cities that don't belong to a transit agency to gain relatively easy access to the transit network.

"DART is not going to provide a la carte services beyond two years without a commitment to at least have an election to join DART," DART board member Mark Enoch of Rowlett said Wednesday. "Arlington residents need to consider the long-term benefits of transit. They need the ability to move people around, whether it's to sporting events or to neighborhoods."

In Arlington, officials are hoping to launch the pilot bus program by August. It's expected to cost about \$700,000 a year to operate and will be funded by financial pledges from the business community and UT Arlington.

Supporters hope the buses will carry about 300 to 600 riders a day.

### Penny unavailable

But even if the pilot project proves successful, it's unclear what Arlington will do next. The city has held three unsuccessful elections since 1980 asking voters to raise the sales tax for transit -- the most recent in 2002.

If city leaders decide they want to continue the shuttle service beyond the two-year test, Cluck said, Arlington "will negotiate and find a way to pay for our share of the service."

The 1-cent sales tax allocation that DART seeks would generate about \$50 million annually, Arlington Budget Manager Mike Finley said. Arlington's sales tax rate is 8 cents per dollar, including the half-cent tax for Cowboys Stadium and a quarter-cent tax for street maintenance. The state maximum is 8.25 cents per dollar.

"We can't give them a penny in sales tax. We don't have it," Cluck said, adding that the city only has a quarter-cent available to designate for something like transportation.

Cluck also said member cities have been paying into DART for years, and Arlington doesn't have the money to address that inequality.

"There is no way we can make up. We cannot become a DART member," Cluck said.

"We can become a city that is served by DART, for which we will pay them for that service."

Staff writer Susan Schrock contributed to this report.

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