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April 17, 2013

Texas rail director stepping down



Texas' first rail director is stepping down, nearly four years after state officials created the position to get the state up to speed with other regions of the United States in terms of passenger rail services.

Bill Glavin, who lives in Southlake but has spent most of his time residing in Austin since he took the rail director position in December 2009, confirmed Wednesday that he will be leaving the Texas Department of Transportation at the end of June.

Before entering public service, Glavin had decades of history with freight railroads, including Burlington Northern Railroad and North American RailNet.

"I turned 60. I qualify for railroad retirement," Glavin told the Star-Telegram in a phone interview, when asked why he is leaving the job. "Half my pay goes toward commuting between here and Austin and having ... to do all the things to make that work. (Retirement) just seems to make sense."

Glavin played a major role in preparing Texas for better passenger rail services that could be built in the next few years, including improved Amtrak service and a proposed high-speed rail line with 220 mph service from Houston to Dallas, rail supporters said.

"We've gone light years ahead in the past couple of years, compared to where we were the past couple of decades before that," said Peter LeCody, president of Texas Rail Advocates.

Under Glavin's watch, the state has made progress in a proposal to move Amtrak onto the Trinity Railway Express line in Dallas-Fort Worth, LeCody said. Also, a study of higher speed rail service from Oklahoma to Fort Worth and South Texas is under way.

State officials, the Union Pacific Railroad and Fort Worth-based BNSF Railway Co. also are working on a plan to improve massive freight congestion at the Tower 55, a notoriously busy rail intersection just southeast of downtown Fort Worth.

The state-owned South Orient Railroad corridor between Brownwood and San Angelo also has been improved, resulting in a dramatic increase in shipments in that corridor.

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