

TEX Rail's delayed DFW arrival hurts

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It was no surprise Wednesday when officials of the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, the T, announced that the southern portion of the planned TEX Rail commuter rail line would be postponed.

They've been talking about that for at least six months.

The bigger disappointment was that the northern portion, from downtown Fort Worth through Grapevine to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, won't be complete until late 2017 at the earliest. That's a year later than planned.

City officials, most notably Mayor Betsy Price, have pushed the T hard to get the link to DFW done on time. Besides the convenience factor for Tarrant County residents, it's a matter of competition with Dallas for visitors and their money.

Dallas Area Rapid Transit's Orange Line light rail service currently extends through downtown Dallas to Belt Line Road in Irving. A 4.7-mile extension to DFW's Terminals A and B is scheduled to open in December of 2014.

The fear — and it's a reasonable one — is that the more visitors to North Texas get used to flying into DFW and taking convenient light rail transit to Irving and Dallas, the harder it will be to get them to change their habits once TEX Rail provides transportation to Grapevine and Fort Worth.

And every day there is no convenient rail transportation from DFW to the Tarrant County side of the Metroplex could mean real money lost for local hotels, restaurants and other attractions. That's a problem.

The delay on the southern extension of TEX Rail, from downtown Fort Worth to the medical district, Texas Christian University and existing and planned developments on the city's southwest side, also is disheartening.

Officials of the T say it comes because of the need to focus on the northern extension, and it will increase the chance of federal funding for the route from downtown to DFW.

Just because it's no surprise doesn't mean it's OK. TEX Rail to southwest Fort Worth is a good idea and must remain a top priority for the T.

So far, officials are not saying when it will happen. They must not let this one get away.

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