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## Bullet Train Plan Sparks Turf War in Dallas-Fort Worth

by [Aman Batheja](#) | June 5, 2013 | [17 Comments](#)

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photo by: Norihiro Kataoka

The JR Central N700 Series (700系?) is a Japanese Shinkansen bullet train developed by two railway companies in Japan. One of those companies, JR Central, is the lead investor in a firm developing a high-speed rail line between Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth that would use the same type of trains.

and regulatory issues have stymied previous efforts, Texas Central High-Speed Railway has silenced naysayers largely through the pedigree of its lead investor, Central Japan Railway Company, which already runs profitable bullet train lines in Japan. The company has also increased interest by vowing to develop the multibillion-dollar project without public subsidies.

“They have the investors behind them. They have the financing behind them. They have the technology. They can clearly build this,” said Tom Shelton, senior program manager for the North Central Texas Council of Governments. “The missing piece here is, what are they going to propose

It’s been just over a year since a Japanese-backed firm announced plans to [build a 205 mph bullet train between Houston and North Texas](#), and elected officials and advocates are anxiously waiting for more details.

That’s especially true in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where the region’s decades-old turf war has been reignited by the prospects of where [Texas Central High-Speed Railway](#) plans to build its first North Texas station.

That local officials are focusing so much attention on a proposal that is at least six years away from implementation shows how seriously they are taking this latest plan to make passenger rail work in highway-loving Texas. While logistical, financial

and is everybody going to be supportive of that?”

Texas Central High-Speed Railway expects to release an environmental impact statement later this year that includes station locations and other details of its plan to transport passengers between the state's two largest metropolitan regions in 90 minutes. The release of the report will be followed by a public comment period that could take two years.



Robert Eckels, the company's president and a former Harris County judge, noted that the locations of both the Houston and North Texas stations have yet to be decided.

“Houston is easy,” Eckels said. “There are various options within Houston, but there’s not the political volatility that you have between the Dallas and Fort Worth regions.”

A regional transportation council made up of North Texas officials has endorsed a “three-station concept” for high-speed rail with a western station in downtown Fort Worth and an eastern one in downtown Dallas. The third station would be somewhere in between, either in the city of Arlington or at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Eckels said his firm wants to eventually serve both sides of the Metroplex. The immediate issue is where to build the first station.

Reports that the firm was interested in a station in Southeast Dallas, where land is cheaper and the company might have more control over adjacent development, [sparked a backlash](#) in Tarrant County, where many officials have said a station near or at DFW Airport makes the most sense.

“The easiest way to serve the Metroplex, 7 million people, is to bring it right up the middle,” said Tarrant County Commissioner Gary Fickes, who also chairs an advocacy group, the Texas High Speed Rail and Transportation Corp. A station at the airport would also easily connect travelers to other public transit options as well as several major highways, he said.

Some Fort Worth-area officials have expressed concern that a Dallas station might never properly connect to the rest of the region and would represent a missed opportunity.

“It has been the city of Fort Worth’s position that there needs to be a Fort Worth component, a way to make it viable for the people on this side of the Metroplex to use,” Fort Worth spokesman Bill Begley said.

Dallas may have more clout in the final decision, as its city council appoints seven of the members on the airport’s 12-member board of directors.

Dallas Councilwoman Linda Koop said the city supports the Regional Transportation Council’s “three-station concept,” but she declined to say if she or the city has a preference as to where the first station would be built.

“We’re perfectly willing to wait to see what the private sector has to say,” Koop said.

Eckels said his firm wants to hew to the three-station approach as closely as it can while still building a rail network that is profitable.

“We are not a public entity,” Eckels said. “We have to integrate within the region’s plans, but fundamentally, we are a private project that has to have a return on investment.”

It’s that private financing aspect of the venture that could determine how public officials respond once the company reveals its intentions later this year, Shelton said.

“It is, at the moment, considered to be a 100 percent privately financed venture, so in some respects, we may be limited to what our authority is,” Shelton said.

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