

# DART North Crosstown Corridor

## Frequently Asked Questions regarding the Cotton Belt Railroad Line and the DART 2030 Transit System Plan Update

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1. How will a new rail line help to ease traffic congestion? Is easing traffic a consideration in evaluating rail in the LBJ corridor, which is very congested?
  - A light rail line can provide the ability to move as many people as two or three freeway lanes of traffic during the rush hour. Given the large roadway capacity deficit in the North Crosstown Corridor, traffic will certainly continue to be an issue in the foreseeable future.
  - This added capacity, along with ridership potential, is considered for all alternatives. The next evaluation phase will also look at how alternatives reduce vehicle miles of travel (VMT) - lower VMT can translate into lower congestion.
  - Transit is part of the solution to enhance mobility and can provide a reliable, scheduled, well-connected choice for people to use as an alternative to congested roadways.
  
2. Has there been any environmental studies done regarding diesel trains through residential neighborhoods?
  - DART has not conducted any environmental studies regarding diesel trains through residential neighborhoods. A full environmental analysis of those issues is conducted when project and vehicle details are known.
  - The environmental analysis is done in compliance with DART policy, which follows local, state and federal environmental regulations.
  - Rail vehicle manufacturers are continually developing and marketing new technologies with reduced emissions to comply with stricter state and national standards.
  
3. How will property values be affected?
  - Property values are affected by many factors, including access to transportation.
  - Two studies (1999 and 2003) by the University of North Texas (UNT) assessed the impacts of DART light rail on property values. The studies found that rail access (proximity to a rail station) had a positive impact on property value, including single family residential areas.
  - Various studies throughout the United States generally show either positive or no impacts on adjacent neighborhoods along rail lines.
  
4. How would rail on the Cotton Belt affect traffic, and how does DART decide which streets to cross at-grade and which to grade separate?
  - During the system plan phase, potential traffic issues are highlighted but no traffic analyses are completed. These detailed traffic analyses are done during subsequent studies.
  - At an at-grade crossing, traffic would be stopped by gates in each direction for a short period of time to allow a train to pass (about 45 seconds total). If train

service were every 10 minutes in each direction, then gates would come down on average every 5 minutes for 12 trains an hour (6 in each direction). If train service were every 20 minutes, gates would lower every 10 minutes on average for 6 trains per hour (3 in each direction). This is more infrequent than regular traffic lights.

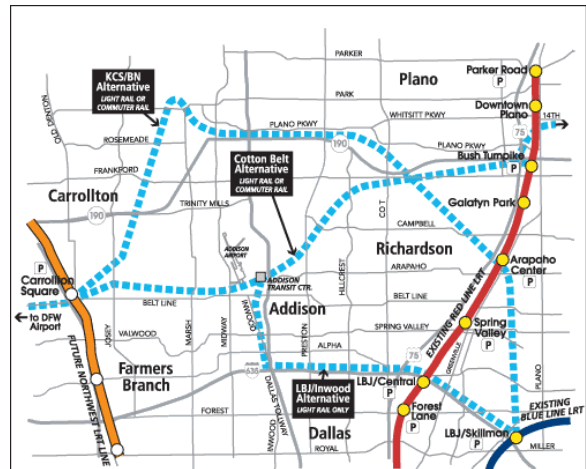
- Each street crossing would be analyzed individually working with the affected City. Grade separations are typically recommended when no other mitigation is feasible or available (such as adding a travel lane, adding a turn lane, signal modifications, etc.) to address a traffic issue.

5. How will children safely cross the rail corridor to get to/from school?

- Just as traffic lights control automobile traffic and pedestrian movements at intersections, the DART rail system has safety features and signals to control both automobile traffic and pedestrian movements.
- DART also has an extensive education outreach program with schools to teach children about safety.

6. What North Crosstown alternatives are being examined in the 2030 TSP?

- Three rail alternatives are being examined: 1) the Cotton Belt Railroad Alternative, 2) the LBJ/Inwood Alternative, and 3) a KCS/BN Railroad Alternative.
- DART evaluated a more frequent “Rapid” type of service in all three of these corridors. “Rapid” has more stations and assumes 10-minute peak (rush hour) and 20-minute off peak service. A less frequent “Express” type of service was also evaluated for the Cotton Belt and KCS/BN Alternatives. “Express” has fewer stations, typically serves longer trips, and assumes 20-minute peak and 60-minute off-peak service.
- In addition to rail alternatives, DART is examining bus options on Belt Line Road, President George Bush Turnpike, or LBJ freeway as methods to add capacity and meet future travel demands.



7. Hasn't TxDOT reserved right-of-way for DART light rail?

- TxDOT is not building a tunnel that DART could use for rail, but are building managed HOV lanes that could be used for DART buses.
- The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has identified an area under its westbound IH 635 frontage road between Preston Road and the Dallas North Tollway where a rail tunnel could potentially be constructed for DART light rail.

8. Would there be a station in the residential areas?

- Possibly. Station locations are generally determined during subsequent, more detailed studies. This allows DART to work closely with the City and the

community to find the best locations and to define their function (parking, no parking, passenger drop-off, bus service, etc).

**9. Would DART have to use diesel locomotives?**

- Not necessarily. In the Cotton Belt corridor, DART is still examining both a more frequent "Rapid" service and a less frequent commuter-type "Express" service. Several types of light rail or heavy rail vehicles can be used depending on the service needs.
- A key difference between light rail and heavy rail vehicles is that light rail vehicles cannot share track with freight unless they operate at completely different times of day. Heavy rail vehicles can share freight track and coordinate schedules during common time periods. The Trinity Railway Express (TRE) between Dallas and Fort Worth uses both locomotives with bi-level coach cars, and self-propelled diesel vehicles.
- Given the long-range nature of the 2030 TSP and emerging technologies, the focus is on finding the best service strategy based on the needs in a corridor and then working with the community to help determine the most appropriate technology.

**10. Will freight continue to operate?**

- Yes, most likely. Whether DART owns the corridor or not, customers with freight service have a Federal right to maintain that freight service.
- Within the North Crosstown Corridor, the KCS, BNSF and Cotton Belt Railroads have active freight service.

**11. How will the noise compare to current freight service?**

- Passenger rail is generally quieter than freight due to a higher quality track. In addition, smaller vehicles (compared to freight locomotives) can be used, and they have smaller engines or use overhead electrical wires for power.
- There is also an opportunity to establish "quiet zones", which means there are railroad crossing intersection improvements (four gates, median barriers, etc.) that can eliminate the need for trains to blow their horns.

**12. Isn't putting light rail in the LBJ corridor more practical from an economic development standpoint?**

- All alternatives under consideration have areas of economic development potential within each City through which they pass. These opportunities are greatest around stations.
- In the LBJ corridor, there is a lot of existing commercial, office and retail auto-oriented development, and probably redevelopment opportunities. This corridor may need to be in a tunnel between US 75 and the Dallas North Tollway, so there could be opportunities to integrate tunnel stations into existing or future uses.

**13. How does DART develop ridership numbers?**

- All ridership information is generated using the official Regional Travel Demand Model, developed and maintained by the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

- The model uses approved demographic projections for Year 2030. Each city in the region worked with NCTCOG on the demographic projections and suggested where growth and development will occur based on land use and economic development plans.
- Previous studies for the North Crosstown Corridor also used the official NCTCOG model, but used demographic forecasts for the Year 2020. Thus, this effort is looking at an additional 10 years of growth in the region.

**14. How will cost-effectiveness of the alternatives be determined?**

- DART is using “Annualized Capital Cost per Annual Rider” to determine cost-effectiveness of alternatives.
- Two key components go into this cost-effectiveness measure:
  - *Estimated capital cost* of the project - since no design has been done on any of the TSP alternatives, these are order of magnitude estimates that use an average cost per mile comparable to existing DART services.
  - *Estimated future ridership* from the approved regional travel demand model.
- This factor has been used in previous studies and allows DART to directly compare cost-effectiveness of potential new rail lines to those lines that DART has already decided to invest in. Thus, if a potential project can match the cost-effectiveness of our existing services, it is worth looking at in more detail for potential inclusion in the 2030 TSP. It may also indicate that a project could be competitive for Federal funding.

**15. What is the timeframe for a new rail line?**

- While some of the detailed studies can be done in the near-term, DART’s long-range financial plan shows that a major new project is not affordable until after the year 2020, unless the economy changes significantly or additional funding sources are found. More affordable projects can likely be implemented sooner than more costly, complex projects.
- The TSP is updated every few years to reflect changes in financial and demographic conditions. Project schedules are adjusted as appropriate.

**16. Once a recommendation is made in the 2030 Transit System Plan, what happens?**

- Additional studies are done to define the project in detail, including an Alternative Analysis, preliminary engineering, and environmental document.
- These additional studies can take several years to complete and incorporate extensive community and city staff involvement.
- Construction typically takes 3 years to complete for a major rail project. Thus, this entire planning, design and construction process can take up to 10 years to complete. Less time is needed for less costly, less complex projects.