



Appendix E

Cotton Belt Corridor Regional Rail Project
Preferred Alternative

**Appendix E:
Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)
Cotton Belt Regional Rail Corridor Project
Preferred Alternative**

Introduction

This report has been prepared to inform the public, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and other interested parties of the local decision on the Preferred Alternative for the Cotton Belt Regional Rail Corridor Project (Hereafter “the Project”).

The Build Alternative alignment that is advancing through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is the Preferred Alternative for the Project. The Preferred Alternative extends north from DFW Airport Terminal B on alignment shared with Fort Worth Transportation Authority’s (FWTA) TEXRail project to the DART-owned Cotton Belt railroad right-of-way. At this point, the alignment turns east on the Cotton Belt railroad right-of-way and continues east to Shiloh Road in Plano. The Preferred Alternative diverts from the existing railroad corridor at Cypress Waters in Dallas, and at CityLine in Richardson/Plano. Twelve stations are included in the Preferred Alternative.

Project Background

Rail service in the Cotton Belt corridor has been included in both regional and local transportation plans since 1983, when a passenger rail corridor concept from the DART Red Line in the Richardson/Plano area to the Green Line in Carrollton was included in the original DART Service Plan. In 1989, the DART Transit System Plan recommended the purchase and preservation of the Cotton Belt Corridor right-of-way from north Fort Worth to Wylie. DART purchased the 52-mile corridor in 1990. During the development of the 1995 DART Transit System Plan, this corridor was combined with others as an alternative for further study to serve an expanded North Crosstown Corridor. DART conducted a high-level alternatives analysis and existing conditions report on the North Crosstown Corridor as part of its 2030 Transit System Plan (TSP), adopted in 2006. The 2030 TSP indicated that rail service on the Cotton Belt corridor (from DFW Airport to the DART Red Line), was the most cost-effective and direct route to serve this east-west crosstown corridor. The DART Board adopted the Cotton Belt Corridor as part of the 2030 Transit System Plan.

On a regional level, the Cotton Belt corridor has been included in the metropolitan transportation plan since 1986. This includes the Fort Worth Transportation Authority’s (FWTA) TEXRail project on the western section of the Cotton Belt from DFW Airport to Fort Worth, currently under construction. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Dallas-Fort Worth Region, initiated the *Cotton Belt Corridor Conceptual Engineering and Funding Study* for the eastern portion of Cotton Belt Corridor from DFW Airport to Plano in the fourth quarter of 2008. The primary purpose of the study was to support the early implementation of passenger rail service in the corridor. NCTCOG coordinated the effort with DART, conducted outreach with key stakeholders, met with individual cities along the corridor, and promoted an open forum to identify key issues, identify station locations and examine alignment options.

The *Cotton Belt Corridor Conceptual Engineering and Funding Study*, completed in April 2010, established an alignment extending from DFW Airport Terminal B to the Red Line on existing railroad right-of-way with the two potential diversions from the existing railroad corridor (Cypress Waters and CityLine) as the primary route of the Project. Several different termini options were

identified including 12th Street, City/Line/Bush Station, or continuing north towards Parker Road or McKinney. The report also identified the currently proposed station locations between DFW Airport and the Red Line.

On May 11, 2010, the DART Board of Directors authorized the President/Executive Director to execute the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DART and the Regional Transportation Council (RTC) concerning the identification of funding sources to implement rail service on the Cotton Belt Corridor. The MOU established DART's role to advance the preliminary engineering and conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Project and NCTCOG was to develop a financial plan sufficient to design, build, and implement regional rail service on the Cotton Belt Corridor. In July 2010, DART published the Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a Draft EIS and initiated NEPA Scoping based on the alignment established in the NCTCOG report.

The RTC/NCTCOG efforts to identify funding did not result in any financial proposals and the state legislature did not take any action on a proposed bill to finance the project. The MOU expired on September 30, 2012 without a substantive financial plan. Because of uncertain funding, DART suspended the NEPA process in late 2012 and prepared the Cotton Belt Regional Rail Corridor *Alternatives and Environmental Considerations Report (AECR)*, April 2014. This report developed a preliminary engineering 5% design for the project and documented the environmental analyses conducted to date for the project.

With the FWTA TEXRail project scheduled to open by late 2018, on March 10, 2016, the RTC adopted a policy position as part of their metropolitan transportation plan *Mobility 2040* approval that DART explore possibilities in expediting rail service in the eastern side of the corridor in a timeframe that closer matches the investment in the western side of the corridor. TEXRail celebrated its groundbreaking in August 2016.

On October 25, 2016, the DART Board of Directors approved the FY 2017 Twenty-Year Financial Plan, which included funding for the Cotton Belt Corridor project with a 2022 service date. In December 2016, DART reestablished project coordination with FTA, FAA and FRA. It was agreed that the project could be reinitiated and the NEPA process would continue from the point at which it was suspended under the original July 2010 NOI.

The Preferred Alternative

The Build Alternative for the Project is based on concepts developed the high-level alternatives analysis conducted during the system planning effort and subsequently refined through various planning efforts. Through an extensive regional coordination effort, the Cotton Belt Corridor *Conceptual Engineering and Funding Study* established an alignment and station locations for the Project that was advanced into the NEPA phase of the project. The July 8, 2010 NOI also addressed the potential to extend the project east to terminate at a Shiloh Road Station. Through Scoping and subsequent regional coordination efforts the ultimate project definition of the Build Alternative included the CityLine alignment that would provide regional rail stations at both CityLine/Bush and 12th Street before terminating at Shiloh Road, and incorporates the Cypress Waters alignment to serve this city of Dallas development.

Since its approval in the 2030 Transit System Plan adopted in 2006, multiple DART Board of Directors actions support the current Build Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for the Project:

- October 13, 2006: Resolution No. 060177 approved the DART 2030 Transit System Plan which includes regional rail along the Cotton Belt from DFW Airport to the Red Line.
- August 12, 2008: Resolution No. 080114 authorized a resolution to preserve Cotton Belt Corridor for transit use. The resolution also specified the vehicle type for the Project.
- March 23, 2010: Resolution No. 100039 approved a resolution allowing DART to work with the RTC to pursue funding sources to implement passenger rail service on the Cotton Belt Corridor
- May 11, 2010: Resolution No. 100065 authorized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DART and RTC that established a collaborative effort to advance the Project. The RTC would pursue funding sources for project implementation; DART would advance the preliminary engineering and the environmental review process.
- September 28, 2010: Resolution No. 100130 approved the FY 2011 Twenty-Year Financial Plan, which deferred all 2030 rail corridors, including the construction of the Cotton Belt.
- May 8, 2012: Resolution No. 120064 extended the MOU with RTC to September 30, 2012.
- May 22, 2012: Resolution No. 120065 authorized a resolution to negotiate use of the western portion of the Cotton Belt Corridor by FUTA/TEXRail. Resolution also specifies vehicle compatibility across the corridor.
- September 16, 2014: Resolution No. 140101 approved the FY 2015 Twenty-Year Financial Plan, which included funding for the Cotton Belt Corridor project with a 2035 service date.
- October 25, 2016: Resolution No. 160109 approved the FY 2017 Twenty-Year Financial Plan, which included funding for the Cotton Belt Corridor project with a 2022 service date.
- September 12, 2017: Resolution No. 170093 approved a debt parameters resolution for the Cotton Belt Regional Rail Corridor Project.
- September 26, 2017: Resolution No. 170105 approved the FY 2018 Annual Budget and the FY 2018 Twenty-Year Financial Plan which includes the Cotton Belt Regional Rail Corridor.

Relevant System Planning Activities

The Cotton Belt Corridor has been studied and included in numerous transportation improvement plans since 1983. The following plans have included the Cotton Belt Corridor:

- **DART Final Service Plan, 1983** – DART Service Plan included an at-grade passenger rail service from downtown Carrollton to North Central Corridor (the existing Red Line).
- **Mobility 2000 – The Regional Transportation Plan for North Central Texas, May 1986** – This plan recommended the right-of-way preservation for the Cotton Belt Corridor from downtown Fort Worth to Plano.
- **DART Transit System Plan, June 1989** – The plan recommended the Cotton Belt Corridor right-of-way preservation and purchase. The purchase of 52 miles of right-of-way from Wylie, Texas to north Fort Worth was completed in 1990.
- **2010 DART Transit System Plan, November 1995** – This plan identified the North Crosstown Corridor which included the Cotton Belt, Kansas City Southern (KCS), and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad corridor alignments as alternatives.

- **Mobility 2020 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, December 1996** – This plan included commuter rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from Parker Road or Addison Transit Center to DFW Airport and light rail from Addison Transit Center to IH 635/US 75.
- **Mobility 2025 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, January 2000** – This plan identified several options for the North Crosstown Study area including passenger rail along Santa Fe and Burlington Northern lines, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from Parker Road to DFW Airport, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from the Addison Transit Center to DFW Airport, and light rail from the Addison Transit Center to IH 635/US 75.
- **Mobility 2025 Update – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, May 2001** – The regional transportation plan was updated in 2001. The options for the North Crosstown Study area remained the same and included, passenger rail along Santa Fe and Burlington Northern lines, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from Parker Road to DFW Airport, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from the Addison Transit Center to DFW Airport, and light rail from the Addison Transit Center to IH 635/US 75.
- **Mobility 2025 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan – 2004 Update, January 2004** – The updated regional transportation plan included options for the North Crosstown Study area. The options included, passenger rail along Santa Fe and Burlington Northern lines, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from Parker Road to DFW Airport, passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from the Addison Transit Center to DFW Airport, and light rail from the Addison Transit Center to Forest Lane Station on the DART Red Line.
- **Mobility 2025 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan – April 2005 Amendment, April 2005** – The updated regional transportation plan included modified options for the North Crosstown Study area. The options included passenger rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from Parker Road to DFW Airport, passenger rail service along BNSF and KCS Corridors from Carrollton to Richardson and light rail from the Addison Transit Center to Forest Lane Station on the DART Red Line.
- **DART 2030 Transit System Plan, October 2006** – The DART system plan included express rail on the Cotton Belt Corridor from the DART Red Line to DFW Airport. As part of this plan, a high-level alternatives analysis and existing conditions report was completed. This report concluded that express passenger rail service from DFW Airport to the DART Red Line along the Cotton Belt Corridor was the most direct and cost-effective route.
- **Mobility 2030 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, June 2007** – The regional transportation plan included light rail/new technology for the Cotton Belt Corridor with the alignment from DFW Airport to downtown Plano or Bush Turnpike Station.
- **Mobility 2030 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan – 2009 Amendment, April 2009** – The amended plan included an option for the Cotton Belt Corridor with light rail/new technology and the alignment from DFW Airport to downtown Plano or Bush Turnpike Station.
- **Cotton Belt Corridor Conceptual Engineering and Funding Study, April 2010** – This study completed by the NCTCOG provided background information on the existing environment, and compared various combinations of interlining with the western portion of the Corridor, Red Line termini, minor alignment deviations, and station locations on the Cotton Belt Corridor.

- **Mobility 2035 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, March 2011** – The regional transportation plan included light rail/new technology for the Cotton Belt Corridor with the alignment from DFW Airport to Shiloh Road.
- **DART Cotton Belt Region Rail Corridor Project: Alternatives and Environmental Considerations Report (AECR), April 2014** – Consolidation of engineering and environmental efforts to date for the Project.
- **Mobility 2040 – The Metropolitan Transportation Plan, March 2016** – The regional transportation plan included light rail/new technology for the Cotton Belt Corridor with the alignment from DFW Airport to Shiloh Road.
- **DART 2040 Transit System Plan, in development** – The DART 2040 transit system planning effort will include regional rail service on the Cotton Belt Corridor from DFW Airport to Shiloh Road consistent with the approved FY2018 DART 20-Year Financial Plan.