

Housing is booming along TEXRail commuter line



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Pilot Matthew Ward waits for a TEXRail train to arrive at Iron Horse Station in North Richland Hills so he can ride to work at DFW Airport. Ward is among a growing number of people who are choosing to live near the commuter rail line.

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NORTH RICHLAND HILLS

Matthew Ward steps out of his two-bedroom town home, looking sharp in his dark blue pilot's uniform and with his roller luggage in tow.

He walks seven minutes to the TEXRail Iron Horse Station in North Richland Hills and buys a \$2.50 one-way ticket to

DFW Airport, where in a couple of hours he will be at the controls of an Embraer 175 aircraft bound for Albuquerque.

Ward is among a growing number of people who are not only using the fledgling TEXRail line to get to work, but also making a decision to live a short walk or bike ride to the tracks. Last year he bought a home in the neighborhood specifically because he knew it would give him an easy, stress-

free commute to work.

Although ridership has only gradually increased since TEXRail opened in 2019 — and the COVID-19 pandemic kept many passengers away for much of last year — officials in cities along the line such as Fort Worth, North Richland Hills and Grapevine say their longer-term plans to build transit-oriented neighborhoods around the stations are continuing full steam ahead.

“I think for a while TEXRail was kind of a hidden gem,” Ward said. “I think there’s a lot of people that aren’t utilizing it that definitely could.”

IRON HORSE & SMITHFIELD STATIONS

The two stations in North Richland Hills in particular are drawing intense interest from developers. Residents are gob-

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TEXRAIL

bling up the houses and town homes that are for sale, and pre-leasing the well-appointed apartments that are under construction nearby.

The city's leadership began working on transit-oriented development concepts in the early 2000s, knowing that decades of effort would be needed to complete the projects, Mayor Oscar Trevino said.

"These stations are not built for today. They're built for 10 to 15 years down the line," Trevino said during a recent presentation to the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition.

At the city's Iron Horse Station, in a once-industrial and warehouse area just north of Loop 820, 158 acres of transit-oriented development are underway.

A development dubbed Iron Horse Commons includes construction of 49 single-family homes and 115 town homes built by CB Jeni. Prices on the homes, all of which are a five- to 10-minute walk to the train station, range from \$275,000 to \$400,000, and the area is 85% built out.

Across the street from TEXRail, a four-story, 300-unit apartment complex known as Cavelli at Iron Horse Station is under construction. It will feature amenities such as a resort-style pool and dog park, and is expected to open later this year.

Also later this year, construction is expected to begin on another four-story apartment complex — this one adjacent to the TEXRail station — called Iron Horse Villas. It will include 291 units, and 11,000 square feet of commercial space, where shops will be able to serve the needs of TEXRail

passengers.

North Richland Hills also is encouraging development of 260 acres surrounding Smithfield Station. Four builders are selling homes in the \$260,000 to \$400,000 range at Urban Trails, a new neighborhood along Mid-Cities Boulevard a short walk to the station. Also, a new Keyworth Brewery is expected to open a few blocks from the station on nearly Davis Boulevard, and the Birdville school district is building a new Smithfield Elementary School that is expected to open in August.

With TEXRail expected to connect to Dallas Area Rapid Transit's new Silver Line in three years, TEXRail riders will have easy access to jobs and entertainment sites in Dallas and Collin counties, Trevino noted. The agency that operates TEXRail, Trinity Metro, recently reached an agreement with DART to connect the two rail lines at a shared station outside DFW Airport's Terminal B.

"A lot of people coming into this area will be more than likely using that station to get to DFW Airport, Grapevine and Addison. We'll have created opportunities for people going to Richardson, Plano," he said. "This is a start. This isn't the end-all project."

GRAPEVINE

When TEXRail opened in 2019, the agency operating the rail line, Trinity Metro, found that it wasn't just drawing riders during the usual weekday rush hours. One of the busiest ridership periods each week was on Saturdays, and the favorite destination of many travelers was the Grapevine Main Station.



Matthew Ward walks seven minutes from his town home to the Iron Horse Station in North Richland Hills so he can ride TEXRail to DFW Airport.



Matthew Ward checks out the sights on his ride to DFW Airport. "I think for a while TEXRail was kind of a hidden gem," he says.

The city on the north end of DFW Airport has been a tourism draw for decades, with its historical Main Street shopping area and its many resorts such as the Gaylord Texan and Great Wolf Lodge. But the opening of the TEXRail station in the city's downtown area has created a new wave of development.

"We did some intercept surveys and found that a good number of people riding the trains were Tarrant County people but had not been to Grapevine before," P.W. McCallum, Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau executive

director, said during a Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition meeting. He added that it's also common for travelers with a long layover at DFW Airport to take the short train ride to Grapevine to visit for a few hours, and that these visitors can often be seen in shops and restaurants with their luggage in tow.

This week the city is celebrating the grand opening of Main Station, a multimillion-dollar development featuring a European style Harvest Hall with seven kitchens, a 150-foot observation tow-

er and a 38,000-square-foot Peace Plaza.

Also adjacent to the station is Hotel Vin. The six-story Marriott Autograph Collection hotel opened late last year.

McCallum said Grapevine also promotes TEXRail as an option for conventioners to get to his city.

"In today's world, when you're promoting events, people want to reduce their carbon footprint," he said. "The idea that you can fly into DFW and then from DFW to Grapevine you can ride TEXRail, you're able to tell your attendees and delegates that you've been responsible."

MORE DEVELOPMENT ON THE WAY

Word is spreading about

how easy it is to use TEXRail, especially among those who work in aviation and need quick access to DFW Airport.

As Ward was boarding the train at Iron Horse Station on a recent early afternoon, a woman in a flight attendant's uniform also arrived at the station. Seconds later, a woman in a TSA uniform arrived, presumably on her way to work as well.

None of them seemed to know each other, but they all bought tickets for the same 1:07 p.m. train.

"I know a couple of pilots and flight attendants who live here and do the same thing," said Ward, who originally is from Nebraska and moved to North Richland Hills a little more than a year ago.

He plans to stay at least five years, and he is eager to see the area develop with more shops. He also would like more frequent service on TEXRail, which operates every half-hour during peak morning and afternoon periods, but only hourly during mid-days and at night.

"I see all these town home developments going up everywhere. It's like they're taking every little piece of land they can and building it out for either apartments, student housing or town homes or developments like this," he said. "I can definitely see a lot more of that."

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