

A moving experience: Passengers jump on board new TEXRail line

BY THE STAR-TELEGRAM EDITORIAL BOARD

Since its birth in the early 1800s, the Iron Horse has long inspired songs, movies, books and tall tales, Grapevine Mayor William D. Tate noted recently.

This month, a futuristic incarnation of the train is being rolled out in the form of TEXRail passenger service from Fort Worth to DFW and points between. And in just its first few weeks, this commuter rail appears to be inspiring all over again.

On its first weekend alone following its Jan. 10 launch, more than 11,000 curious travelers of all ages packed TEXRail's European-designed coaches to experience — for free until the end of January — what has been imagined, drawn, built, tested and talked about for years.

It was conceived largely as a cheap and easy passageway to DFW Airport, from which you can go about anywhere in the world — and from where conference-goers and other visitors would like an effortless ride into Fort Worth. But commuters, tourists and residents alike are already finding TEXRail a convenient conduit to regional work, shopping, dining and entertainment.

On one of the train's trips last Sunday, a group of Japanese tourists exited at Fort Worth's North Side Station in search of the Historic Stockyards. Among those jumping on the train, some planned a trial run to DFW and then lunch on the way back. Others went straight to Grapevine's Main Street Station or one of the two stops in North Richland Hills.

It was often standing room only.

TEXRail passenger traffic on Grapevine's Main Street, with its restaurants and stores, has been steady since TEXRail started running, one restaurant owner said, adding that he likely will add hours and even an extra day to his operation.

"We've heard a little of that," Grapevine Chamber of Commerce CEO RaDonna Hessel says.

Grapevine's Mayor Tate, the city council and others were among the first to hop on board with Fort Worth for the planned rail line. Aside from contributing sales tax revenue to the multi-government project, Grapevine also has earmarked a portion of sales tax funds for shuttle service from the TEXRail station to points of interest in the area.

But like the train itself, the benefits will go both ways, Hessel said, noting that plenty of people will ride to Fort Worth to work and play. This is what happens when people are connected by easy, affordable mass transportation: advantages all around.

Even after the free rides end this month, fares will be but \$2.50 per trip. A \$5 round trip will, for many, replace airport parking charges or the cost of other ground transportation, as well as the stress of driving. Several travelers last Sunday were excited about the prospects of vacations beginning and ending with a walk to one of the three Fort Worth stops.

Local travel and tourism officials also are buoyant at TEXRail's potential, as one more modern convenience, to help attract conventions.

In fact, says Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price, not having TEXRail the past four years while Dallas' DART has served DFW has hurt Fort Worth. "It was making a difference on our tourism and conventions," she says. "We just knew it had to be done."

It may not inspire songs. But TEXRail is already moving people.