

MASS TRANSIT

Cowtown, DFW get a rail link

Sleek TEXRail trains start running in a week, and for a while the rides will be free

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FORT WORTH — TEXRail, the \$1 billion investment in Tarrant County jobs, commuter destinations for North Texans and improved international connectedness with downtown Fort Worth is only a week away.

The 27-mile commuter rail hookup from downtown to DFW International Airport, an evolutionary step for the Trinity Metro transit agency and its many destinations, debuts Jan. 5.

TEXRail arrives with a distinctively Euro feel. The cars being test-run on the tracks in Fort Worth match about 1,200 cars being used overseas. They are built by Swiss-based Stadler, the aluminum shells are from Hungary, and the diesel engines are German.

In the U.S., the TEXRail cars are debuting in a region deeply invested in the belief that new modes of transportation can help change habits in a car-dependent land of urban sprawl.

“It’s an educational process, and people will only be educated at the rate they choose to be educated,” said Paul Ballard, Trinity Metro president and chief executive.

To jump-start ridership, Trinity Metro will not charge fares in January. “We’ll market that heavily to get people to give it a try,” Ballard said.

The airport, with its many users from cities where trains are more commonplace, has added several international destinations over the last five years.

“When people visit North Texas from an international location, being Europe, Asia, Latin America or even

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New rail line to connect Fort Worth, DFW Airport

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Canada, the expectation is you can get off your airplane and onto some kind of rail transportation," said Sean Donohue, the airport's chief executive. "And in our case, we're now going to be able to offer it to both of our cities."

Today, four years after it opened, Dallas Area Rapid Transit's DFW Airport Station draws about 900 riders a day via the agency's Orange Line into downtown Dallas and beyond. When DART's Cotton Belt line is added to the formula in 2022, officials say, the airport will be the site of about a million annual train boardings.

Train-centric airport

The airport has spent about \$40 million to become train-centric. DFW is the largest carbon-neutral airport in the world, so rail fits into its strategy from a sustainability perspective, Donohue said.

"The region is demanding transportation choices," said DART president and chief executive Gary Thomas. "Not everybody wants to get in their car. Not everybody has a car. But being able to get on the Orange Line to get to the airport or to TEXRail is significant."

Every day, 21 TEXRail trains, with a capacity of 488 riders each, will arrive at the airport's Terminal B hourly from 4:17 a.m. to 12:17 a.m. — nearly all day long. Trains will leave the airport every hour from 4:55 a.m. to 12:55 a.m.

Eventually, a commuter line combining the Cotton Belt and TEXRail will run from Plano to Fort Worth and connect at the airport, Ballard said. DART has said the Cotton Belt cars will be similar to TEXRail's.

"It's a cool car," Thomas said of the European product. "It's crisp, it's clean, it has that new-train smell, and it really does set the tone for expectations as we move into the future of transportation."

Not just for Fort Worth

Among TEXRail's nine train stops will be two new stations on Fort Worth's north side and first-ever depots for the cities of Grapevine and North Richland Hills, which have a combined \$2.2 billion stake in TEXRail over the next 50 years.

"It's an exciting day for the region, not just Fort Worth," said Gary Fickes, a Tarrant County commissioner and chairman of the Regional Transportation Council. "This will open the entire region to the system, Tarrant County to Dallas."

Sales taxes, federal funds and fares will support TEXRail's \$12 million to \$13 million annual operating cost. Starting Feb. 1, customers will pay \$2.50 for a one-way ticket. A \$5 day pass will be good for all rail and bus transit in Tarrant County.

About \$336 million in tran-



Photos by Robert W. Hart/Special Contributor

Eventually, a commuter route combining Dallas Area Rapid Transit's planned Cotton Belt line and TEXRail will run from Plano to Fort Worth and connect at DFW International Airport, says Paul Ballard, Trinity Metro's president and chief executive.

TEXRail route and stations



SOURCE: TEXRail

Laurie Joseph/Staff Artist



Trinity Metro's home base includes facilities for fueling, washing, inspections and maintenance, including below-rail and mezzanine-level observation bays.

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