

# Interagency Transportation Report RTC / TxDOT / NTTA / DART / DRMC / DFW Airport / HSR January 2018

## Regional Transportation Council (RTC)

Federal Agencies Certify North Texas Transportation Planning. The federal government recognizes three urbanized areas within the North Texas Region – (1) Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, (2) Lewisville-Denton and (3) McKinney – for the purpose of conducting transportation planning activities. The RTC (policy) and NCTCOG (staff) oversee the planning process for all three areas. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) conducted their once-every-four-years review and have certified that our region meets federal transportation planning requirements.

Equitable Transit Access. The RTC committed up to \$1 million to study and fund a program to support affordable transit fares for citizens who are least able to afford transportation services – e.g., low income, elderly, and disabled. This would be a region-wide effort with partners that would include cities, counties, transit agencies, and social service agencies. The \$1 million commitment is intended to show that the RTC is serious about addressing this issue and wants to partner with other agencies. The specific source of the funding has not been identified and would be dependent on how the program is structured. This project is not directly related to Dr. Hamidi's (University of Texas at Arlington) work on transportation equity that was done in conjunction with the City's "Resilient Dallas" effort. However, it presents an opportunity for the City of Dallas to help shape the program so that it enhances equitable transportation access.

General Motors and the Modern People Mover. NCTCOG has been developing the concept of a "modern people movers" over the past 2-3 years as a transportation mode to enhance access and circulation for urban activity centers in the region. The RTC endorsed, in concept, a proposal to use the General Motors assembly plant in Arlington as a potential test track that could show proof of concept for a modern people mover while also serving a specific transportation need, i.e., connecting the GM plant with their shipping railhead which are on opposite sides of SH 360. Project specifics, including funding, would require additional RTC approvals. The two areas in the City of Dallas that are currently identified as potential locations for future people mover projects are the Midtown project in the Galleria/Valley View area, and the Medical District area.

STBG Funding Program: Federal / Local Funding Exchanges. The RTC approved a Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funding program designed to swap "federal funding" for a project in exchange for "local funding" from the implementing agency. Since the RTC does not generate local funding on its own, this is a way for the RTC to accumulate local funds that can be used to implement NCTCOG projects and/or programs without the additional requirements that come with the use of federal funding. This round of Federal / Local Exchanges did not involve any projects in the City of Dallas.

## Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

Update on TTC "Big Projects" Initiative and IH 635 LBJ East Project. Now that the Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) has taken a step back from their "Big Projects" initiative by rejecting the use of toll managed lanes as a mechanism to help fund large projects, local attention has become focused on working with the Commission to keep the IH 635 LBJ East

project moving. The use of toll managed lanes on the LBJ East project are strongly supported by the North Texas community and are needed to adequately fund the project. The Commission is being encouraged to approve the design-build procurement for LBJ East as soon as possible so that the design can proceed while the funding issues continue to be worked out. Local transportation leaders, including City of Dallas representatives, are planning to attend the January 25th TTC meeting in Austin to voice their support for the project as well as the need to include toll managed lanes as a funding mechanism. At the time this report was compiled, the TTC had not posted their agenda for the January meeting.

Southern Gateway Construction. The \$666 million reconstruction of IH 35E and US 67 from downtown to IH 20 is ready to get underway. TxDOT and the City of Dallas are coordinating on a date in late February or early March for a ceremony to commemorate the start of construction.

#### North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA)

Roadside Assistance – Call #999. The NTTA has initiated a new way to call for roadside assistance on any toll facility in the region. The agency receives over 40,000 calls per year for motorist assistance, debris in the roadway, and abandoned cars. Drivers can dial #999 on their mobile phone, and be connected directly to the NTTA Safety Operations Center which can dispatch NTTA Roadside Safety Services crews or DPS Troopers. The NTTA is in the process of installing new signs along their roadways advising drivers of the new, easy-to-remember number.

Annual NTTA Board Retreat. The NTTA Board held its annual retreat on January 19th and 20th at Beaumont Ranch in Grandview, Texas. The agenda included a review of 2017 achievements, department-by-department updates on 2018 priorities, and a discussion of agency strategic goals and objectives.

#### Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)

Transit Fare Structure and Increases. The Board had an extended discussion at their retreat on January 5th about proposed revisions to DART's fare structure and price increases. According to Board policy, the agency reexamines fares every five years. Some of the key points from the staff recommendation and board discussion were:

- Across-the-board 20% price increase except Mid-day pass increase of 14%, change to AM/PM passes from two-hour, and paratransit increase from \$3 to \$3.50.
- Retain current ratios: monthly pass = 16 day passes; annual pass = 10 monthly passes; annual corporate pass = 75% of annual pass; regional pass = 2 times a local pass – except regional reduced fares will remain ½ the local fare.
- Reintroduce a single-ride fare for bus service at \$2.50 – the price of the two-hour pass today.
- Reduced fare for high school students would be expanded from Monday through Friday to the full week.
- Trade school students would remain in the reduced fare program.
- Mid-day pass availability would be extended to weekends.
- Reduced fares remain regional passes.

A new payment system will be introduced using contactless payment cards available at retail locations throughout the service area. The payment cards will reduce the number of cash

transactions, improve ridership counting, and allow single payment riders to take advantage of lower monthly pass prices through fare-capping. It was also noted that DART currently offers a reduced fare for individuals and families who qualify as low income under the State's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The Board indicated that they want to have further discussion about reduced fares for low income persons as part of the 2019 Budget and 20-Year Financial Plan work this summer.

### Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition (DRMC)

Texas Transportation Commissioner (TTC) Victor Vandergriff was the speaker for the Friday, January 5th DRMC meeting. Mr. Vandergriff represents the interests of North Texas on the Commission. He was appointed by former Governor Rick Perry and is nearing the end of his term. Mr. Vandergriff's appearance was timely because of the TTC's recent position against the use of toll managed lanes on new projects and its effect on the implementation of the IH 635 LBJ East and Skillman/Audelia bridge projects. He spoke candidly to the DRMC about the difficulty of getting TTC approval for projects that have any toll component because of the political climate at the state level. He advised local transportation leaders to continue to make the case for additional transportation funding and financing tools, encouraged representatives to have a strong presence at the January 25th TTC meeting in Austin, and indicated the need to aggressively mobilize citizen voters that support transportation projects like the LBJ East project.

The City of Dallas has four positions on the DRMC Executive Board. Council member Casey Thomas will be joining the DRMC as the City's fourth representative, joining Lee Kleinman, Sandy Greyson, and Adam McGough. Mr. Kleinman currently serves as co-chair.

### Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport (DFW Airport)

Federal Grant Funds for Runway Rehabilitation. DFW Airport will rebuild and install new technology on one of its busiest runways thanks in part to federal grant funds. DFW has received two grants for airfield improvement from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) totaling over \$52 Million. The bulk of the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants, about \$49.5 Million, will be used for refurbishment of Runway 17-Center/35-Center and associated taxiway improvements. In addition, \$2.6 Million will help fund a lighting upgrade for the terminal ramp areas. The rehabilitation project is scheduled to take place in mid-2018. The runway will close for about four months, but DFW's six additional runways will allow a full schedule of flight operations. Customers should not see significant air traffic delays due to the closure.

New Duty-Free Center Opens. DFW Airport recently opened its new, two-story, duty-free center in Terminal D. This state-of-the-art center is being recognized as the biggest duty-free shopping space in the Americas and will provide a transformative customer experience for all travelers who come through DFW. The duty-free center will feature name brands such as Dior, Chanel, Armani, and locally-made TX Whiskey. The duty-free center is the latest initiative by the airport to improve the customer experience.

### High Speed Rail (HSR)

FRA Releases Dallas-Houston HSR DEIS. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail (HSR) project. The FRA is the lead federal agency for the environmental review process; Texas Central Railway (TCR) is the private entity that would construct and operate the system.

The report identifies a single preferred route between North Texas and Houston, with a midway stop in the Brazos Valley. Written comments concerning the DEIS must be provided to the FRA on or before February 20, 2018. The FRA will conduct a series of public hearings in ten counties along the route between January 29th and February 6th. The Dallas County meeting will be held on Monday, January 29, 2018, 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Wilmer-Hutchins High School, 5520 Langdon Road. The meeting will begin with an open house where the public can interact with FRA and TCR staff, followed by a formal presentation and comment period that begins at 6 p.m.