

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM YOUR COMMUTE

Texas' top rail official warns that building high-speed rail is a marathon, not a sprint

Posted Wednesday, May. 05, 2010

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Building a high-speed rail network in Texas will be a long process, and those who wish to someday zoom cross the state in rail cars traveling 150 to 220 mph should not expect instant success, the state's top rail official warned.

Rail supporters have expressed excitement in recent weeks that Texas -- which was all but passed over earlier this year when the Obama administration pledged \$8 billion for high-speed rail development -- is finally getting serious in its efforts to reconnect cities by rail and perhaps qualify for the next round of available funds.

But Bill Glavin, appointed late last year as the Texas Department of Transportation's first rail director, told the Tarrant Regional Mobility Coalition Wednesday that years of careful planning lie ahead.

"The plan we produce this fall will not have lines on a map. We're not there yet," Glavin said. "We will have a list of potential improvements, public and private, freight and passenger rail, and we can begin to lay out the costs and the expected revenues."

This summer, Glavin's rail division plans to hold meetings across Texas to talk with residents about the prospects of connecting Dallas-Fort Worth to places such as San Antonio, Oklahoma City and Houston by the next generation of passenger rail.

Information from those meetings -- dates have not yet been announced -- will be used to create Texas' first official state rail plan, a document that advocates say will dramatically help the state qualify for federal high-speed rail funding.

Glavin cautioned the coalition that the first edition of the state rail plan will talk about high-speed rail corridors only in the broadest sense -- and will not even identify which rail lines may be used.

The state's initial effort will focus on development of a handful of corridors identified by the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University as candidates for high-speed rail:

The Interstate 35 corridor, including Fort Worth and connecting Oklahoma City and San Antonio.

Dallas-Fort Worth to Houston, with potential extensions to Marshall, Little Rock, Ark. and Shreveport, La.

The Austin-Houston corridor, roughly along U.S. 290.

About \$50 million in federal funds is available for states to study high-speed rail corridors, and Texas is working with neighboring states to qualify for those funds, Glavin said.

Officials from Tarrant, Dallas and other counties are already debating the best places in the region to make a high-speed rail connection.

Opinions vary about whether it's better to connect the downtowns of Fort Worth and Dallas, or to bring the trains to a more centralized location such as Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. From there, riders could catch local commuter rail or some other form of public transit to their final destination.

North Richland Hills Mayor Oscar Trevino noted that Glavin repeatedly referred to the North Texas region as "Dallas" when talking about high-speed rail corridors.

"We'd be happy if you called it Dallas-Fort Worth," Trevino said.

Glavin, who has lived in Southlake for many years, apologized and explained that he had gotten in the habit of calling the region Dallas as a form of "shorthand."

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