
Tarrant County commissioners want high-speed rail to go to DFW

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By Steve Campbell

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FORT WORTH — Concerned about being left behind at the bullet train station, Tarrant County commissioners passed a resolution Tuesday supporting the development of a high-speed passenger rail alignment along the State Highway 360 corridor that would connect directly to the terminal areas of DFW Airport.

"I think this is one of the most important decisions that we as a court will make. It's a decision that will affect transportation and mobility, not just for the North Texas area but really throughout the state of Texas for the next 100 years," said Commissioner Gary Fickes.

The resolution comes in reaction to reports from the Regional Transportation Council that a private group that includes Central Japan Railway is proposing bullet train service between Houston and Dallas with possibly a terminal in southeast Dallas.

The group, operating as Texas Central High Speed Railway Llc. and working with Central Japan Railway on the technology it wants to use, has proposed to start service between Houston and Dallas by 2020 and to build the line without using public funds.

RTC officials told the Star-Telegram earlier this month that the group wants to lower its costs by having terminals in the suburbs of the two cities instead of linking their downtown districts where the costs of development would be much higher. The suburban terminals would also allow the group to control parking and station-related development.

But county commissioners are pushing for a centralized station location at DFW Airport.

"We think if you are coming into the Metroplex, the place that would best serve the 6.5 million residents, 8 million by the time this is built, that the best way to do that is to come into DFW which is right in the middle of everything," said Fickes, chairman of the advocacy group Texas High Speed Rail and Transportation Corp.

"DFW is the sweet spot that connects to everything. To me, that's a no-brainer. That's what this resolution is about," he said.

"We're trying to create connectivity with all other forms of transportation so if you come into this point you can tie into regional rail, tie into highways, buses, rental car facilities and go wherever you want to go in the Metroplex. It's not just about Dallas or Fort Worth, it's about the region," Fickes said after the commission meeting.

The resolution states that with rapid growth burdening the Texas transportation system, high-speed rail with speeds in excess of 220 mph is needed to connect the state's major population centers of North Texas, Houston, College Station, Austin and San Antonio.

It also notes that neither the state nor federal government have mechanisms in place to fund such a rail system, which will have to be built through public-private partnerships that will rely on private sector financing. With funding options limited, station placement must be maximized from a regional perspective, making DFW Airport the logical terminal choice for North Texas, the resolution says.

One route option under study by the private group is known as the Teague Line, owned by Fort Worth-based BNSF Railway Co. The line roughly parallels Interstate 45 from Houston through southeast Dallas.

Tarrant County's resolution recommends that route studies for North Texas focus exclusively on the State Highway 360

Corridor which splits north from Highway 287 southeast of Mansfield and then goes through Arlington directly to DFW Airport.

Travis Kelly, Texas Central High Speed Railway director, told the *Star-Telegram* earlier this month that his group isn't ready to disclose details of its plan. He said the group wants to find locations that are acceptable to business and elected officials.

A federal environmental review of the Dallas-to-Houston route is underway. Officials with the private group have said they were seeking up to \$10 billion in investments to build the high-speed rail line.

This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archive.

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