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DCTA showcases new rail facility and vehicles

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On Friday, the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) showcased its new rail vehicles, which will result in greater operating efficiency.

The new Stadler GTW 2-6 Diesel Multiple Unit rail vehicles can seat 104 passengers and has a total capacity of 200. The new vehicles also include luggage racks, bike racks and space for wheelchairs. The vehicle is 70 percent low floor, meaning level boarding is provided.

"These new vehicles will allow DCTA to provide greater operating efficiency. The trains will leave the stations every 20 minutes instead of every 25 minutes. The vehicles will also improve DCTA's fuel economy," said Dee Leggett, vice president of communications and planning for DCTA. "These are the vehicles we have been planning on implementing since the beginning."

DCTA plans to run two coupled vehicles on 20-minute headways during peak service. Globally, there are more than 430 GTW rail vehicles in operation. DCTA has spent the last two years working with Stadler and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to modify the vehicle to comply with American safety standards and to eventually operate concurrent with FRA compliant equipment through an Alternate Vehicle Technology (AVT) crashworthiness waiver. Modifications include changes to the fuel tank design, emergency exits and passenger and operator seats. Other advanced safety features include braking and crash energy management systems.

Leggett said DCTA hopes to have the new vehicles in service by early summer, but they are waiting on an approval for a waiver from the FRA. Currently, DCTA has four of the new vehicles, but it must have eight trains to run service.

"We're waiting on a waiver to use the new vehicles with the current ones we're using," Leggett said. "We've ordered 11 of the new vehicles, but we won't get all of them until summer."

Leggett said while it waits, DCTA is testing its new vehicles.

"Stadler is known world-wide for the quality of their products. We are excited to be able to deliver a premium rail car for our customers," Jim Cline, president of DCTA said. "Our efforts to make this vehicle meet FRA's standards will greatly expand the regional rail opportunities in North Texas and the United States."

Also on Friday, DCTA hosted an open house for its new 47,000-square-foot rail operations and maintenance facility. The new facility, located at 640 State Highway 121, is home to more than 30 employees including DCTA rail operations staff and the maintenance and operations staff of DCTA's operations contractor Herzog Transit Services, Inc. A regional dispatch center was also built within the facility to serve as dispatch for the A-train and back-up dispatch for the Trinity Railway Express, which runs between Dallas and Fort Worth.

"This new facility means DCTA now has a facility that will handle all maintenance on site," Leggett said. "In the past, before the facility was built, some of our heavier maintenance had to be done in Irving. Having this new facility will save time and fuel."

The opening of the \$17 million rail facility is the last remaining component of the A-train construction project. The A-train opened for revenue service in June 2011 and has already carried over 200,000 passengers.

"DCTA just adopted its long-range service plan, which lays out short term recommendations and long term planning," Leggett said. "In the short term, our focus will be on our current investments. In the long term, we're looking at other corridors and getting other cities to participate in the rail service."

Leggett said Flower Mound is major town and has tremendous growth, and DCTA thinks it could be a part of the residents commute.

"We'd be happy to sit down with Flower Mound officials to discuss options for service," Leggett said.

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