

LOCAL NEWS

The right track

12:15 AM CST on Monday, January 2, 2012

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

Denton County is still on the list of the fastest growing counties in the country, which makes transportation a key issue for area officials.

This past year saw the Denton County Transportation Authority and county commissioners making large strides to ensure transportation projects are moving forward.



DRC file photo/David Minton

One of the Denton County Transportation Authority's A-trains departs from the Downtown Denton Transit Center June 24. DCTA officials say they plan to improve the rail service this year.

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A-train rolls out

After years of plotting, planning and finally construction, DCTA's long awaited A-train took to the rails in June, giving commuters an alternative to traversing the often-congested Interstate 35E on weekdays. The agency is also in the midst of a trial run of Friday night and Saturday service, with the future of this option up for continuing internal debate.

The A-train's launch was not without a few bumps, in the form of a number of accidents along the rail line — the first on June 23, a mere three days after the start service for the rail line. Those accidents included the Nov. 11 death of a 23-year-old Denton man.

The agency has not been blamed for any of the accidents. Following each of the accidents, DCTA spokeswoman Dee Leggett has stressed to the public that it needs to be aware of the fact that trains are running along the rail corridor from Denton to Carrollton.

“Only cross at designated train crossings and obey all warning devices,” Leggett advised following the fatality accident. “The safety of the public, our crew and passengers is very important to us.”

The rail service has seen in excess of 160,000 riders from June through November. Agency officials said they have been relatively satisfied with ridership numbers so far and plan to improve service in 2012.

Changes will include the further tweaking of the rail schedule as well as the addition of new Swiss-made rail cars. Officials say the cars, the first of which was received late last year, include more amenities, are more efficient and will make the service smoother once the agency rolls out the full fleet this year.



DRC file photo/David Minton

Legislation was passed in 2011 to help expand and relieve congestion along Interstate 35E. The 1420 Committee is working to bring the project to fruition despite a lack of funding.

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I-35E expansion

The longevity of the A-train will be important once the Texas Department of Transportation begins expansion work on I-35E.

One of the steps was to get legislation passed to allow public-private partnerships — a tool that officials have said is the only feasible way the expansion project could be done.

Part of that legislation — which had the support of Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, Rep. Tan Parker, R-Flower Mound, and Rep. Myra Crownover, R-Denton — was to create a committee that would determine how to proceed with the expansion of the highway.

The committee met for the first time Nov. 11 and revealed there was not enough funding for the project to provide the roads promised numerous times by transportation officials.

The current highway has four to six regular lanes and four lanes of frontage roads. The proposed project would expand the highway from Interstate 635 in Dallas to U.S. Highway 380 in Denton, creating a total of eight regular lanes, four tolled HOV lanes and four to six frontage lanes, at a cost of nearly \$4.8 billion.

Late in the year, TxDOT officials scaled down the project's scope based on what they felt they can accomplish sooner rather than later, as well as to satisfy the county's desire to see free lanes included in any expansion plan.

Denton County road projects

According to County Commissioner Andy Eads, a number of county road projects were either finished and or started in 2011.

The list includes:

* State Highway 114 rural — Work will continue on this in 2012. All right of way has been acquired and utilities are being relocated.

* State Highway 114/FM156 interchange — This project is fully funded at \$38 million and has been redesigned to allow GE Transportation's future Fort Worth locomotive plant the use of an abandoned BNSF Railway line. The redesign also minimizes any impacts to the Northwest school district.

* Copper Canyon Road reconstruction — This project was awarded to Lane Construction at a cost of \$6.4 million in December 2011. Construction is anticipated to begin mid-January, with completion expected in June 2013.

* Litsey Road — The road and bridge reopened to traffic on Oct. 28.

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What Do You Think?

AmandaCooksey

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mjc76202 Score: 0 Reply
9:12 AM on 1/3/2012
I'd use the train to get places except there is a void of service in the middle of the day or it would leave me stranded in Carrollton early in the evening. Transit should run 24/7 in my opinion, like in real world class metropolitan areas. That way I could abandon my car at my house or a Denton park and ride. I will agree w/ Nom de Plume to an extent, grade level crossings are troublesome. The WMATA Metrorail in suburban Maryland runs elevated above ground in places much like a stretch of the DART green line in Carrollton from about Trinity Mills to NW Highway. Ridership and therefore cost per rider should drop as more people use a service so long as it is reliable throughout the day.
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Nom de Plume Score: -3 Reply
6:53 PM on 1/2/2012
"DCTA spokeswoman Dee Leggett has stressed to the public that it needs to be aware of the fact that trains are running along the rail corridor from Denton to Carrollton."
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She could have fooled me. Killing people and demolishing cars and

trucks seems to be their stated mission.

I wonder if she knows whether or not the train runs along the rail corridor from Carrollton to Denton? Her choice of words leaves as much to be desired as DCTA.

Don't forget to ask Dee what the cost per passenger per mile is for DCTA. Then ask TxDot the cost per passenger (using one person per auto) per mile. We'll figure in gas cost later for running up and down IH-35.

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[citycouncildrunkspending](#)

Score: -1

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3:28 PM on 1/2/2012

For the hundred million a year it costs to subsidize this white elephant - providing helicopter service for the 10 riders each day trying to avoid I-35 would be far cheaper.

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[kittenfessall](#)

Score: 2

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12:20 PM on 1/2/2012

I believe the A-train will be a valuable asset to the Denton Community, especially once the I35 construction expansion begins. Thanks DCTA for completing a project close to the timeline and giving us tangible options for transportation.

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Name withheld

Score: 0

12:01 PM on 1/2/2012

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