

*Dallas Morning News*

## **Editorial: Finish the job on the Orange Line**

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[Dallas/Fort Worth International](#) Airport and the expanding [DART](#) light-rail system are two of the region's best transportation assets. Linking them must be a top priority.

That's why it was disappointing and frustrating to hear DART Chief Financial Officer David Leininger insist last week that the mass transit agency cannot afford to borrow the \$275 million needed to complete the Orange Line extension to the airport by the 2013 deadline. He says that with restrained spending, things will start to look better by 2025.

This newspaper recognizes that DART is in a difficult position, but that's too long to wait for the connection.

Fortunately, DART board members vow to do everything possible to keep the project on track. Board chairman William Velasco of Dallas said: "We can't just leave it unfinished to the airport. We're going to have to find a way to do it."

That resolve is a hopeful sign, though the follow-through won't be easy. It may mean cuts to bus service. It may mean longer waits for trains and buses on routes that survive the budget ax. It probably also means job cuts.

But the Orange Line extension is too important not to fully explore these options. The project connects substantial dots on the North Texas map and will be an asset to the entire region. Plus, [Irving](#) has been a faithful partner in mass transit since 1983, contributing \$803 million in sales tax. The city retained its commitment to DART even when it meant losing the chance to house a new stadium for its beloved [Dallas Cowboys](#).

In the past 10 years, city officials and multiple mayors have struggled to keep the Orange Line on track. They have worked with developers to create award-winning land-use plans in anticipation of the coming rail service. Some of their efforts will pay off when the train arrives in [Las Colinas](#) in 2012, but the airport link is a vital part of the plan.

This goes even beyond the fairness argument. Other suburban cities viewing Irving's struggle may be less willing to support mass transit if they fear they will face similar delays.

So what to do? Texas legislators must finally deliver on a way to fund regional rail initiatives without relying on traditional sales taxes. DART officials must look for other savings. And North Texas' congressional leaders must fight for a meaningful transportation funding bill and continue their bipartisan support of DART's applications for federal grants.

Unprecedented regional cooperation and sacrifice built D/FW Airport. It will take more of the same to connect it to DART's expanding rail service.