

Fort Worth Star-Telegram Honkin' mad

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Progress on the Cotton Belt rail line



Updated at 7:55 p.m. to clarify that the firm is not based in Richardson, although that was its registered address on Texas Secretary of State documents, and to correct the figures regarding how much the firm will be paid. - G.

A firm with Fort Worth and Austin ties has been selected to come up with a financing plan for the proposed Cotton Belt rail line, a 62-mile corridor stretching from Fort Worth's Stockyards to Wylie northeast of Dallas.

Partnership for Livable Communities LLC, a group that includes Fort Worth and Austin influences, was selected for the project this week by the The North Central Texas Council of Governments executive board.



Partnership for Livable Communities includes Scott Polikov, president of Fort Worth's Gateway Planning Group,



and former state Rep. Mike Krusee, now a full-time transportation consultant in the Austin area.

For Tarrant County residents, the effort to find outside financing for the Cotton Belt line can be a bit confusing. The council of governments' effort to find new funding sources for the Cotton Belt line comes at the same time the Fort Worth Transportation Authority is pursuing federal funding for a portion of the line between the Stockyards and Grapevine.

While the T is several years into that \$500 million project, east of Grapevine funding for the Cotton Belt in cities such as Coppell, Plano and Wylie is not expected to be available for at least 20 years. That's why a new way of thinking about rail funding is needed, said Michael Morris, transportation director for the council of governments.

The consultant may find new funding sources, such as capturing increased property values at train stations, on both the west and east sides of the rail line, Morris



said.

"They will help the west in identifying additional revenue sources to ensure the southwest-to-northeast project gets built, and try to advance the Cotton Belt in the east at least 18 years," Morris said. "We're going to, for the first time, address a classic transportation problem. Everywhere we go (with new road or rail projects) we have a huge increase in the value of property, and we never get to internalize that. This is the first study to try to actually program some of those funds."

Partnership for Livable Communities, which was selected from among 10 firms competing for the contract, will be paid up to \$1.298 million -- including a \$390,000 bonus if their plan is successful in bringing in new dough.

-- Gordon Dickson.

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