

Transportation transformation: TEXRail to DFW a game-changer

BY THE STAR-TELEGRAM EDITORIAL BOARD

No one had a better Christmas than Paul Ballard and Bob Baulsir. They got a shiny new train set.

Not a toy one, either.

Ballard and Baulsir, the heads of the Trinity Metro transit agency, this week are rolling out the highly anticipated new TEXRail train from downtown Fort Worth to DFW Airport. The rollout begins with a special VIP trip for area leaders Monday, followed by the start of public service on Saturday, Jan. 5.

Ballard, Trinity's outgoing president and CEO, and Baulsir, the incoming one and current senior vice president, believe TEXRail will do nothing less than usher in a new day in Texas transportation .

If all goes well, it may be the game-changer they predict.

It's the first rail service from Tarrant County to what is one of the busiest airports in the world. It will take much of the stress out of going there — and most of the cost: After providing service totally free of charge for the rest of January, TEXRail fares will then be but \$2.50 each way.

It's not just for flyers. Commuters, diners and tourists at one stop in Grapevine and two in North Richland Hills will have a new way to get to downtown Fort Worth and back — and there are some 62,000 jobs at DFW to get to, as well. One car will be designated as a quiet car — no yakking on the phone — for those commuters immersed in reading and work.

TEXRail trains are also reputedly state-of-the-art. The train cars are “articulated” to afford riders effortless passage among them. Stadler Rail of Bussnang, Switzerland, is said to have made the trains, and many others like them in Europe, to feel like streetcars with smooth rides, but with level-entry requiring no steps.

Trinity Metro did choose to trade out the ski racks for bike racks, which is probably the best choice for this climate.

Baulsir predicts TEXRail will become the new model for rail in Texas and beyond — as evidenced by the fact that transportation officials from across the country have already been here to see it for themselves.

“They're just completely impressed,” Baulsir says. “I really think this is what everybody else in Texas is going to want to do.”

Initially trains will board at their two terminals — Fort Worth's T&P Station and DFW's Terminal B — every hour. Eventually, weekday rush hour departures will be 30 minutes apart. The ride from Fort Worth's ITC Station to DFW will take about 48 minutes.

TEXRail, four years in the making, cost \$1.034 billion, \$500 million of which is federal funding. The service will feature five trains to start, and ultimately a total of eight of the trains, which are assembled in Utah out of 72 percent domestic content.

If Trinity Metro officials are right about how metamorphic TEXRail will be — and we sincerely hope they are — then this will be as much about transformation as transportation.

Since most crossings on the line will be federally designated quiet zones, TEXRail won't have to blow its horn much.

From all signs, it won't have to. Passengers may do that plenty.