MASS TRANSIT

Cowtown, **DFW** get a rail link

Sleek TEXRail trains start running in a week, and for a while the rides will be free

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FORT WORTH - TEXRail, the \$1 billion investment in Tarrant County jobs, commuter destinations for North Texans and improved international connectedness with downtown Fort Worth is only a week away.

The 27-mile commuter rail hookup from downtown to DFW International Airport, an evolutionary step for the Trinity Metro transit agency and its many destinations, debuts Jan. 5.

TEXRail arrives with a distinctively Euro feel. The cars being test-run on the tracks in Fort Worth match about 1,200 cars being used overseas. They are built by Swiss-based Stadler, the aluminum shells are from Hungary, and the diesel engines are German.

In the U.S., the TEXRail cars are debuting in a region deeply invested in the belief that new modes of transportation can help change habits in a car-dependent land of urban sprawl.

"It's an educational process, and people will only be educated at the rate they choose to be educated," said Paul Ballard, Trinity Metro president and chief executive.

To jump-start ridership, Trinity Metro will not charge fares in January. "We'll market that heavily to get people to give it a try," Ballard said.

The airport, with its many users from cities where trains are more commonplace, has added several international destinations over the last five years.

"When people visit North Texas from an international location, being Europe, Asia, Latin America or even

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New rail line to connect Fort Worth, DFW Airport

Canada, the expectation is you can get off your airplane and onto some kind of rail trans-portation," said Sean Donohue, the airport's chief executive. 'And in our case, we're now go ing to be able to offer it to both of our cities."

Today, four years after it opened, Dallas Area Rapid Transit's DFW Airport Station draws about 900 riders a day via the agency's Orange Line into downtown Dallas and be-yond. When DART's Cotton Belt line is added to the formula in 2022, officials say, the airport will be the site of about a million annual train board-

Train-centric airport

The airport has spent about \$40 million to become train-centric. DFW is the largest car-bon-neutral airport in the world, so rail fits into its strategy from a sustainability per-spective, Donohue said.

"The region is demanding transportation choices," said DART president and chief executive Gary Thomas. "Not everybody wants to get in their car. Not everybody has a car. But being able to get on the Or-ange Line to get to the airport or to TEXRail is significant.

Every day, 21 TEXRail trains, with a capacity of 488 riders each, will arrive at the airport's Terminal B hourly from 4:17 a.m. to 12:17 a.m. nearly all day long. Trains will leave the airport every hour from 4:55 a.m. to 12:55 a.m.

Eventually, a commuter line combining the Cotton Belt and TEXRail will run from Plano to Fort Worth and connect at the airport, Ballard said. DART has said the Cotton Belt cars will be similar to TEXRail's.

"It's a cool car." Thomas said of the European product. "It's crisp, it's clean, it has that newtrain smell, and it really does set the tone for expectations as we move into the future of transportation.

Not just for Fort Worth

Among TEXRail's nine train stops will be two new sta-tions on Fort Worth's north side and first-ever depots for the cities of Grapevine and North Richland Hills, which have a combined \$2.2 billion stake in TEXRail over the next 50 years.

"It's an exciting day for the region, not just Fort Worth," said Gary Fickes, a Tarrant County commissioner and chairman of the Regional Transportation Council. "This will open the entire region to the system, Tarrant County to

Sales taxes, federal funds and fares will support TEX-Rail's \$12 million to \$13 million annual operating cost. Starting Feb. 1, customers will pay \$2.50 for a one-way ticket. A \$5 day pass will be good for all rail and bus transit in Tarrant

About \$336 million in tran-



Eventually, a commuter route combining Dallas Area Rapid Transit's planned Cotton Belt line and TEXRail will run from Plano to Fort Worth and connect at DFW International Airport, says Paul Ballard, Trinity Metro's president and chief executive.

gy, ADA-compliant bathrooms and a conductor on each train. While it co-owns the Trinity

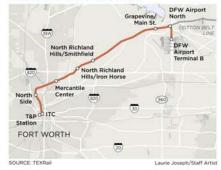
Railway Express with DART, Trinity Metro opened its first-ever rail home base early this year as part of TEXRail. Since March, that has been the base for test runs. But it's also a permanent place for daily fueling, washing and inspections, in-cluding below-rail and mezzanine-level observation bays within the massive indoor service area.

It was a legacy project for Ballard, who after spearhead-ing the startup of the Music City Star commuter line in Tennessee was specifically re-cruited in 2013 to do the same for TEXRail. It is not a coincidence that he recently announced his retirement. Robert Baulsir, current senior vice president, will lead Trinity Metro starting April 15, when Ballard's retirement begins.

"My commitment to Fort Worth was to get it done," Bal-lard said. "This doesn't just happen. Every person involved is invested in it. They care personally for its success

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TEXRail route and stations





Trinity Metro's home base includes facilities for fueling. washing, inspections and maintenance, including below-