

# **DART, Fort Worth's The T want to partner with private firms to build rail line to airport**

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DART and Fort Worth's The T want to partner with private companies to build a 68-mile passenger rail line that would stretch from Fort Worth to D/FW Airport to Addison to Plano and on to Richardson, with service beginning as soon as 2013.

The unusual partnership with private firms would speed up the long-planned project known as the Cotton Belt Rail Line. DART has planned to build portions of the Cotton Belt for years, but its current financial plans allocate no money to do so until 2027.

Agency officials said Friday that private firms' involvement could speed construction by more than a decade and that some services on the new line could open within four years.

"This is new territory for us and for a lot of people," Lyons said. "So we wanted to send this request out to see who is interested."

Public-private partnerships have become more common in Texas in recent years, as Gov. Rick Perry has pushed their involvement as a way to fast-track the building of toll roads throughout the state. Private companies are set to rebuild LBJ Freeway and the Southwest Parkway in Fort Worth, for instance.

But that approach has only rarely been used for other types of major transportation infrastructure – and all but nonexistent among American transit agencies.

Still, DART has been studying the approach for more than a year and is using a watered-down version of public-private partnership to hasten the completion of the Orange Line to Irving.

That approach, called a design-build agreement, allows a private company to bid on both the design and construction phases of a contract at once, with the result that the project can be completed more quickly but with less oversight by the public entity.

But what the agencies have in mind for the Cotton Belt is far more aggressive and would involve private firms investing in, and operating at least for a time, rail lines in a way that remains extraordinarily rare in this country. That's partly because unlike toll roads, rail lines aren't profitable without enormous public subsidies.

In general, DART is hoping that a private firm will agree to build and operate the rail line between now and 2027, when DART and The T would have their own money to take over both capital and operations cost. One idea for compensating the private companies –

in addition to giving them fare revenue – is to share some of the property tax revenue generated by the development expected along the line.

An open house on the project has been scheduled for 9 a.m. June 12 at DART's Union Station in Dallas.