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## DART balancing light rail expansion with possible service cuts, layoffs

With a projected $23.7 million decline in sales tax collections, DART is considering significant administrative cutbacks, an additional one-year delay in the light rail expansion program, and ridership-based bus and rail service reductions. The Board has made no final decisions on the budget, which is scheduled for approval in September.

Sales taxes represent 88 percent of DART's income, and the agency already has cut more than $12 million from its fiscal 2003 budget and $4 billion from its 20-year financial plan. Board Chairman Robert Pope said DART must identify another $48 million in savings for the fiscal year beginning October 1.

In spite of three consecutive years of sales tax declines, DART has achieved a number of successes including the doubling of its light rail system ahead of schedule and under budget, the rollout of a clean-fuel bus fleet, new High Occupancy Vehicle lanes and the completion of the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) linking Dallas and Fort Worth by passenger rail for the first time in more than 60 years.

"Our seamless, multi-modal, regional transit system is working," Pope said. "Every budget reduction we're exploring, while painful in the short-term, is designed to maintain services at acceptable levels and to strengthen our agency as we build for the future."

DART is considering reducing service on 100 bus routes, decreasing the frequency of off-peak trains on DART Rail and the TRE serving Fort Worth, and delaying light rail extensions to Deep Ellum, Fair Park, Pleasant Grove, Carrollton, Farmers Branch, North Irving and DFW Airport an additional year beyond the already approved two-year delay. This would delay the extensions by at least three years. The cost-saving scenarios could involve the elimination of more than 400 jobs agency-wide.

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