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DART Officials Work to Rein in Costs for Future Irving/Rowlett Rail Lines

Citing escalating costs of construction materials and services worldwide, officials of Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) are going back to the drawing board this week to trim up to \$900 million in projected costs for future light rail extensions to North Irving, DFW International Airport and Rowlett.

The \$900-million figure is a "preliminary" target identified during a project update at the 10% design stage -- an early point in the cost estimation of DART's rail projects. Additional project updates are performed as planners and engineers complete 30%, 65% and 90% levels of design in preparation for actual construction.

Currently, DART's 20-Year Financial Plan includes \$988 million for the Irving/Rowlett rail extensions, and the \$900 million escalation would bring the actual cost closer to \$1.9 billion, officials said.

"Fortunately, our process allows us to anticipate significant challenges very early," said DART President/Executive Director Gary Thomas. "This affords us an opportunity to examine the projects from multiple perspectives and mitigate thoughtfully."

Thomas added that staff would look for cost reductions in all of the agency's programmed capital projects, not just those associated with expanding the rail system from its current 45 miles to 93 miles in 2018. They also will examine financing options, the potential for public/private partnerships and other sources of revenue.

Thomas said the Irving/Rowlett review would not affect DART's \$1.7 billion, 28-mile Green Line, which begins opening with service to Fair Park in September 2009. The Green Line will stretch from Pleasant Grove in Southeast Dallas, through Deep Ellum and downtown Dallas, to the Medical/Market District, Love Field Airport, Farmers Branch and Carrollton.

Beyond cost factors for the Irving/Rowlett extensions, officials will consider conservative changes in projected opening dates. A preliminary analysis shows the first leg of the 14-mile North Irving line -- a 5.1-mile segment from Bachman Lake to Las Colinas Urban Center -- may be delayed up to one year, opening in 2012 simultaneously with another 4.1-mile segment to Belt Line Road. However, Thomas said he has directed staff to look for opportunities to recapture the original schedule.

DART's current Financial Plan calls for completion of the North Irving Line to DFW International Airport in 2013. The 5-mile Rowlett line is scheduled to open in 2012.

"Obviously, we want to get these new lines open as quickly as possible," Thomas said. "There's a lot of excitement and a lot of development potential around future rail stations in both Irving and Rowlett."

DART officials plan to complete the cost review and update its Financial Plan for the Irving and Rowlett extensions in early 2008.