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Plano plans to pledge \$12.3 million dollars to DART over the next several years, in addition to its existing obligations, in an attempt to accelerate an alternative development of the Cotton Belt Line from east Plano to DF/W. This would be a **single-track** rail line with two proposed stations in east Plano at Shiloh and 14th, and 12th street at Avenue K. The line would travel about 2 miles in east Plano, before turning southwest to travel through Richardson, Addison and Carrollton on the way to DF/W Airport. The \$12.3 million would come from Plano property taxes which would be in addition to the \$75 million per year Plano already sends DART in sales tax revenues. This would also increase Plano's future commitments as a result of DART incurring an additional \$1 billion plus in debt to construct the line.

Carrollton Mayor Matthew Marchant opposes plans to fast track rail service on the Cotton Belt Line because the proposed line would come with significant restrictions that mean the service would be limited and slow. Even though Carrollton would be the biggest beneficiary of the Cotton Belt Line, Marchant prefers bus rapid transit in the corridor because it could be much more frequent, faster and accomplished for far less cost. See additional discussion of these issues below. There is much disagreement in DART country about whether the Cotton Belt should get built.

In the August 10th DMN article "Building Two Rail Lines at Same Time Raises Questions" (<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODN/DallasMorningNews/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=DMN%2F2016%2F08%2F10&entity=Ar02203&sk=D05AE9D5>) "Four Dallas Area Rapid Transit board members Tuesday criticized and questioned the agency's planned approaches to building two new controversial rail lines — one through downtown Dallas [long planned] and the other through northern suburbs [Cotton Belt line]. "I have some concerns about being able to do both at the same time," said board member Paul Wageman, who represents Plano." The amount of public money for everyone's new DART lines is finite, yet some won't admit that.

In fiscal year 2015-2016, Plano will send over \$75 million dollars to support DART, primarily for the benefits of the light-rail line from the Parker Road and -15th Street stations to Downtown Dallas. According to former Plano mayor Phil Dyer, in an early March 2012 letter to the editor in the Dallas Morning News: "more than 50% of the DART commuters boarding at the Parker Road Station **reside outside** the DART service area." In total, Plano has already contributed **over \$1.2 billion dollars** since beginning its contract with DART, which spends \$6.50 in cash operating expense for every dollar it collects in fares. That loss on fares is before considering \$185 million in annual interest expense, or repayment of over \$3.5 billion in current DART debt. But never mind, some in DART want to take on another \$1.5 billion in debt to pay for the Cotton Belt and for a southern loop around Downtown Dallas. So should Plano sign on to a plan to put DART further in debt and to commit future property tax revenues to DART?

How many in Plano actually use DART Light Rail on a daily basis?

According to Rodger Jones in the June 23rd 2014 Transportation Blog in the Dallas Morning News (<http://transportationblog.dallasnews.com/2014/06/since-readers-ask-here-are-dart-rail-ridership-stats.html/>), the ridership is about 2800 at Parker Road, **down** from approximately 3100 in 2006. However, according to statements of former Mayor Phil Dyer, over half of the riders at the Parker Road

station are actually from Allen, McKinney and other points outside of DART's service area. At the Downtown/15th street station ridership is about 650 **people daily**. That means fewer than 2,000 riders, or less than 1% of Plano's citizens, ride DART on an average day. Is this a wise spend of Plano citizens' \$75 million a year of tax dollars? Over \$1.2 billion so far? That is \$600,000 for each of the 2,000 daily light rail riders from Plano. How cost effective is that?

Plano city officials credit DART as the impetus for the growth of the expanded and exciting downtown area: "I'm excited to see this happening," LaRosiliere said. "You can look at DART on 15th street and the energy it's created." We all love the new and exciting downtown Plano, but do the numbers really point to DART as being the reason for this resurgence? Or is it the tens of millions of citizens' tax dollars the City of Plano has invested in incentive payments to apartment builders, in Arts and Theater buildings and parks and other landscape and street improvements? The paltry number of light rail riders from downtown Plano seems to suggest that it's the latter.

The \$12 million of property taxes proposed to commit to DART is just the beginning. It is clear that the city also intends to devote a significant portion of future property tax revenues to providing more incentives to developers to build more apartments around the proposed new stations. Is this a great return on investment for our tax dollars spent on DART? Do we need to spend more for the future Cotton Belt line when it doesn't serve most of Plano residents?

Public transportation is an admirable public service that many cities benefit from and New York, Chicago and Boston immediately come to mind. Yet their elevated, subway and trains offer many more frequent trains and cars and carry many more people on a daily basis, going almost everywhere in shorter timeframes, than what the rail line to DF/W will struggle to offer.

Carrollton Mayor Marchant's concerns about the proposal are well founded. Dart had said for years that the Cotton Belt Line would cost \$2.9 billion and considering DART's existing debt load, the line could not be built for 20 years. Based on heavy pressure from Addison and Plano, DART is considering a "modified project" for around \$1 billion. Marchant points out that the problem with this proposal is that it only contemplates a single track over most of the line. That means east bound trains have to be scheduled so they aren't on the track at the same time as a west bound train and inevitably, there are times where a train in one direction will need to stop and wait for an opposing train to pass. And if there is a mechanical problem with a train, traffic in both directions will cease. With only one rail, traversing from east Plano to DF/W can be expected to take an hour and service will not be frequent. If you're in central or west Plano, how much additional time will it take to drive to a station in east Plano in rush hour, find a place to park, walk to the station and wait for a train? Of course, this would be an improvement over the current hour and fifty minutes it takes for the Orange Line to travel from the Parker Road station to DFW via downtown Dallas. While we all like to be able to brag we have train service, the time issue helps explain why ridership is so low.

Yes, some will argue there are intangible benefits to having light rail and they are willing to contribute to it. Having a rail line that goes to the airport sounds wonderful. That's fine – we can debate whether that is the right choice for Plano, but city officials will use these "future Cotton Belt stations" as the reason to commit to adding thousands of high-density apartments right around them and throughout the city to justify the Cotton Belt line. Based on the existing Line, we can expect they will then pay the developers to build the apartments. Everybody, they say, will be walking or taking public

transportation! Is this really true when it's 100 degrees or it's raining cats and dogs? (Think back to last spring - it'll happen again.) But let's not start with the fairy tale that it is not costing our citizens anything as the city manager has stated.

We also object to the chosen route planned for the Cotton Belt line. The line would not serve the majority of Plano. Clearly the Legacy Business Park, where there are coming high concentrations of workers, hotels and leisure travelers is an area of great need and demand. The city's solution to this? More bus service from Legacy to the Parker Road station. Will a business traveler really take a 25-minute bus ride from Legacy to the Parker Road station, wait for a train to take her to the 12th Street station and then wait to transfer to a Cotton Belt Line train for an hour long ride to DFW? (sounds like at least two hours total). Will you want to drive to one of these bus stops?

(<https://c4c5h4b3jv11qg3kf399hf3c-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/PLN-07-16-DART.pdf>)

In the view of some experts, the most fundamental problem with DART is its lack of frequent service. The problem is that DART has invested so much in infrastructure and taken on so much debt, that it cannot afford to provide frequent service. Other cities, including Houston, that have focused on frequent bus service actually have much higher ridership, much less debt and lower costs. That is a point that should not be lost before taking on more debt that will make it even more difficult to find the funds to provide frequent service.

And will you say goodbye to your car? Has DART reduced our need for improved street infrastructure? The answer is no, as Collin County officials, in their recent presentation to the Plano City Council, said **more highways are needed** and Preston Road and Custer Road are both seeing a daily demand beyond their capacities. We're still driving! There are no plans for any DART north-south transportation to alleviate this congestion. (http://starlocalmedia.com/planocourier/more-highways-needed/article_af1673d4-59ba-11e6-9ed8-6f05ffc37849.html)

Collin County's highway and road system, which is already stressed in some corridors, is "totally inadequate" to handle the expected growth. And they are sounding that alarm as they scramble to contain what some see as a traffic time bomb that many people aren't aware is about to explode. Plano is the only Collin County city that's paying into DART. Why don't the other cities want to help? (See DMN Article at <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/transportation/20160812-collin-county-growth-creating-traffic-time-bomb-officials-say-we-have-to-get-moving-on-it.ece>)

A June 2016 article in the Dallas Observer had two key observations. Regarding DART ridership it noted that in spite of exploding population over the last 26 years, ridership has declined and that people living in transit oriented communities like Mockingbird Station and Downtown Plano did not use DART that much. Here are the quotes,

"More telling, light-rail hasn't moved the needle on commuting behavior. Packed rush-hour trains notwithstanding, there's no evidence to show that more people are using transit now than 20 years ago. In fact, census data show the opposite. In 1990, about 40,000 working adults in Dallas County relied on public transit — all buses — to commute to work. By 2000, with 20 miles of track in operation, the number had dipped to 36,925. The most recent data, from 2014, showed a further decline to 32,368....

“A 2011 paper from researchers at the University of North Texas, the University of Texas at Arlington and elsewhere captures some of the stubbornness of automobile culture in an examination of the impact of transit-oriented development in Dallas. The authors surveyed and interviewed residents of three such developments — Mockingbird Station, downtown Plano and Southside on Lamar – on their travel behavior. Though the residents were more likely than other Dallasites to use transit, the likelihood was still low even though they lived in places supposedly built for transit use. “Cars are much faster than trains,” said one member of a focus group....” (article at <http://www.dallasobserver.com/news/dart-has-spent-5-billion-on-light-rail-is-it-worth-it-8380338>)

So we come back to the question: Is another \$12.3 million worth it for Plano to support and rally for a future Cotton Belt line when it doesn't even serve most of Plano residents? And now Plano city officials are suggesting Spring Creek Parkway and 75 for another future DART light-rail station! Why build another Plano DART station if Allen and McKinney won't contribute to DART operations further north in their cities? Do Allen and McKinney officials not believe that giving their citizens' tax dollars to DART will be beneficial to their communities? It appears that the primary motivation for these extensions is so developers can justify more high-density apartments surrounding these proposed stations. When will Plano's mayor and city manager look at the nuts and bolts on the return on investment of citizens' tax dollars? When will citizens say ... enough is enough?

Elections for four city council seats, including mayor, are next May 2017. You have a say in how your tax dollars are spent.

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