DFW HIGH-SPEED UPDATE

2024 NEWSLETTER, ISSUE #1

We're in NEPA (see pg. 10)

High-speed rail, new convention centers to boost regional tourism.

High-speed between Dallas, Arlington, and Fort Worth would connect the region's major new convention centers.

Construction is underway on Fort Worth Convention Center's expansion, a $95 million project long overdue, city leaders agree.

"Fort Worth's visitor economy generates over $3 billion annually and employs over 30,000 people," said Mike Crum, Fort Worth's Director of Public Events.

"Our expansion, expected to be complete in early 2026, delivers an elevated experience to our guests and ensures we remain competitive with other Texas cities."

See Convention Centers, pg. 2

Fort Worth Convention Center rendering

Curious?

A 200+ MPH train ride across Texas?

Yes, it's possible! (pg. 4)

Take classes, teach at A&M?

Ride high-speed rail between Fort Worth and College Station. (pg. 6)

Underground, at-grade, or elevated tracks?

Where and why each design works. (pg. 7)

High-speed rail on the TRE corridor?

Unfortunately not, says project team. (pg. 9)

NEPA (environmental assessment) kicks off.

Quality of life, safety always first! (pg. 10)

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Convention Centers (cont.)

Arlington Convention Center open now!

"Sporting events, theme parks, great food, and live entertainment—our new convention center and hotel puts visitors right in the heart of everything our vibrant Entertainment District offers," emphasizes Arlington Mayor Jim Ross.

Located between Globe Life Field and AT&T Stadium, the new Loews Arlington Hotel and Convention Center is owned and operated by Loews Hotels & Co., a subsidiary of Loews Corp. headquartered in New York.

"Unlike cities currently attracting major conventions and regional tourism, we've not been able to accommodate tourists and our own residents moving across the Metroplex.

"High-speed rail will allow those in Arlington to go west to Fort Worth and east to Dallas in a timely manner. And, of course, we welcome all folks to come our way too," Ross said.Fort Worth moving quickly.

New Dallas Convention Center to open in 2029.

The new Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center will offer 8,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, 430,000 sq. ft. of breakout space, a 105,000 sq. ft. ballroom, and a walkable entertainment district.

"The new convention center, slated to open in late 2029, is an unprecedented investment in our city's future. It will serve as an incredible economic development driver for Dallas," says Rosa Fleming, Director of Convention and Event Services for the City of Dallas.

During construction, the existing convention center will remain open.

Arlington Convention Center rendering

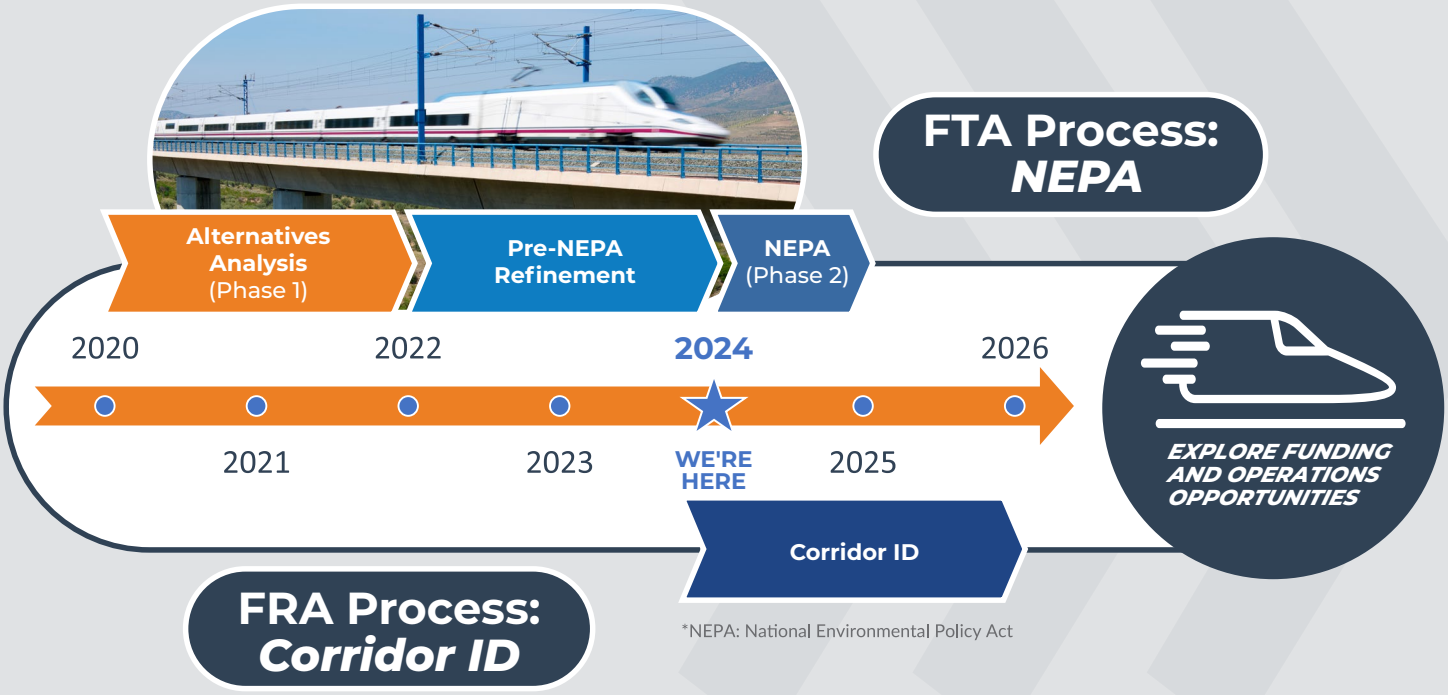
HOTEL

Texas' Future Farmers of America (FFA) Convention returns to Fort Worth in 2026, adding an estimated $19 million to the economy and filling over 30 hotels.

To date, Visit Dallas has already booked more than 40 contracted conventions for the new center, resulting in over $1 billion in total economic impact.

Dallas Convention Center rendering

NCTCOG partners with FTA and FRA, moving project forward expeditiously.



"High-speed rail is full steam ahead in North Texas," says Michael Morris, P.E., North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) Transportation Director. "We have taken innovative steps to partner with two federal agencies to prepare the project for implementation."

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will oversee and provide guidance for completion of the Dallas-Fort Worth High-Speed Rail Study's assessment of the project's effects on the environment and local communities. This action is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and is expected to conclude in March 2025.

After receiving environmental clearance, the project can pursue public-private partnerships to develop funding and operational plans. Partnerships with Amtrak, local governments, and the private sector are on the table for full discussion. (Read more about NEPA on pg. 10.)

Concurrently, NCTCOG received a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program, which supports the development of existing or proposed rail corridors. This nationwide intercity passenger rail planning and development program creates a pipeline of projects ready for implementation.

The $500,000 Corridor ID grant will fund the first step in realizing a "one-seat ride" between the Dallas-to-Fort Worth and Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail projects. This includes creating a scope, schedule, and cost estimate for forming a Service Development Plan (SDP).

"By concurrently undergoing NEPA and the Corridor ID Program, we are expanding our opportunities to implement Dallas-to-Fort Worth high-speed rail. This two-pronged approach paves the way for both federal and private partnerships, helping make high-speed rail in North Texas a reality," concluded Morris.

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High-speed rail offers one-seat ride across Texas.

Traveling at speeds above 200 miles per hour, high-speed rail is the transportation mode that can seamlessly link major metropolitan areas throughout Texas and beyond. Key to realizing these connections is the "one-seat ride" concept, making high-speed rail travel the transportation mode of choice for the masses in Europe and Asia, notes Andy Byford, Amtrak Vice President of High-Speed Rail Development Programs.

As the former London Commissioner of Transport, Byford is one of the foremost global experts in seeing high-speed rail projects to completion. He currently leads the Amtrak partnership with Texas Central to build a one-stop high-speed train connecting Dallas and Houston.

Separate, but harmonious projects.

In a recent presentation to Dallas City Council, Byford joined Michael Morris, P.E., NCTCOG Director of Transportation, to provide an update on both projects. Both the connection between Dallas and Fort Worth and the further-advanced, environmentally approved Dallas-to-Houston line were accepted into the Federal Rail Administration Corridor Identification and Development Program (Corridor ID Program).

The projects are positioned to receive federal funding. "Although these are separate, we are working together precisely because it would just be foolish not to achieve a really seamless one-seat ride between Fort Worth, Dallas, and then on to Houston," Byford told the Council.

Both are independent projects, yet together they would offer a one-seat ride spanning a 271-mile dedicated system corridor linking the Texas cities of Fort Worth, Arlington, Dallas, Roans Prairie (linking to Texas A&M University), and Houston. People traveling between these two metropolitan areas overload our existing transportation networks.

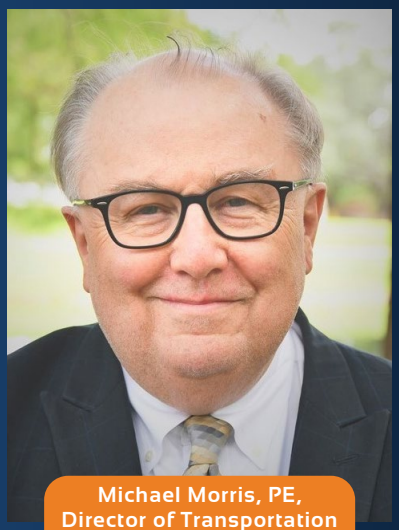
"We must take action on ensuring a better, safer way to keep people moving throughout Texas. Bolstering existing highways between Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston is simply not an option due to high construction costs and a lack of available land. High-speed rail offers the safest and most cost-effective choice for Texas," said Morris.

Implementing high-speed rail would help decrease safety incidents and crashes caused by vehicular traffic. An independent ridership and revenue forecast conducted by Texas Central estimates high-speed rail between Dallas and Houston would transport approximately 7.2 million passengers annually by 2040, resulting in a 26 percent shift from vehicles to high-speed rail and a two percent shift from air to high-speed rail.

See One-Seat Ride, pg. 5

Two high-speed rail advocates are firmly aligned in transit planning.

Andy Byford, Sr. VP of High-Speed Rail Development Programs, Amtrak



Michael Morris, PE, Director of Transportation NCTCOG

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High-speed rail a winning option for super commuters across Texas.

High-speed rail between DFW and Houston is a winning option with estimated 21–25-minute travel times between Fort Worth and Dallas and 90 minutes between Dallas and Houston, Morris and Byford agree.

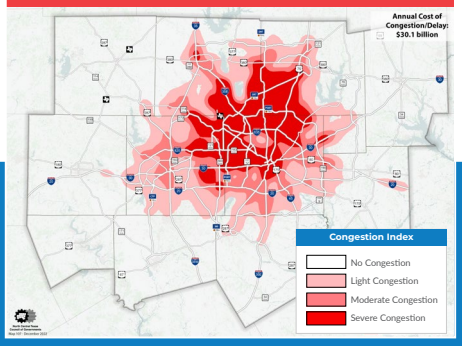
Building a one-seat ride on high-speed rail has been deemed “this generation’s Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport” by Morris and others. “We have seen high-speed rail transform economies and travel in general across the world,” said Morris, pointing to examples in Japan, France, and Germany. “Now is the time to change the game here in the U.S.”

High-speed rail also addresses spiraling congestion in these corridors. The "super commuter" workforce trend is growing, resulting in a large number of people traveling long distances daily or between home and work. In recent years, Harris (Houston) and Dallas counties ranked first and second, respectively, as top U.S. counties for super-commuting.

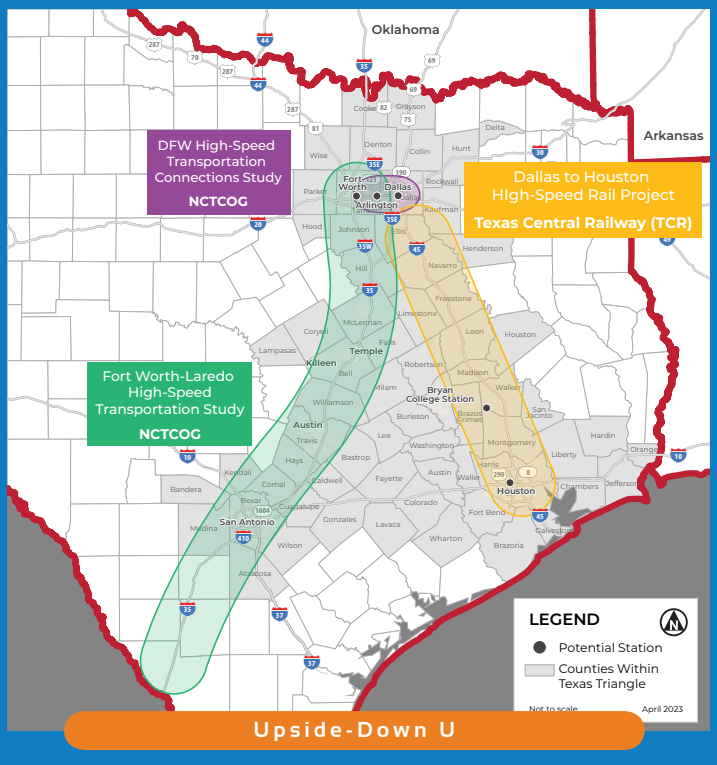
While flight time between Dallas and Houston is 60 to 75 minutes, the overall trip duration nearly doubles when considering travel to and from the airport and airport prearrival requirements.

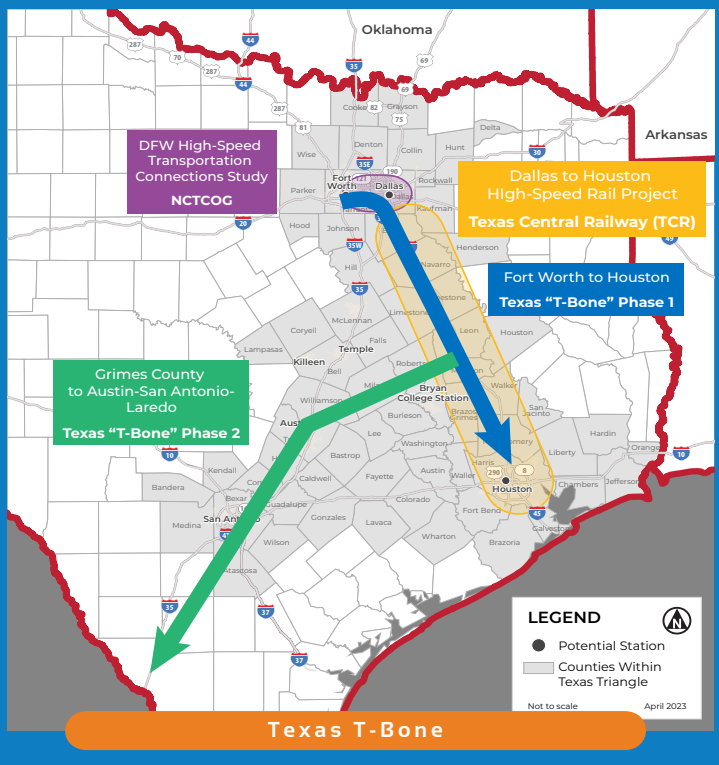
“Super-commuters riding in one seat from Houston to Dallas and Fort Worth exemplify the more interconnected state economy high-speed rail is designed to support,” said Morris. Vehicle travel between Fort Worth and Houston takes a minimum of 4.5 hours, increasing to 5.5 to 6 hours during peak travel times.

ANTICIPATED 2045 LEVELS OF CONGESTION/DELAY



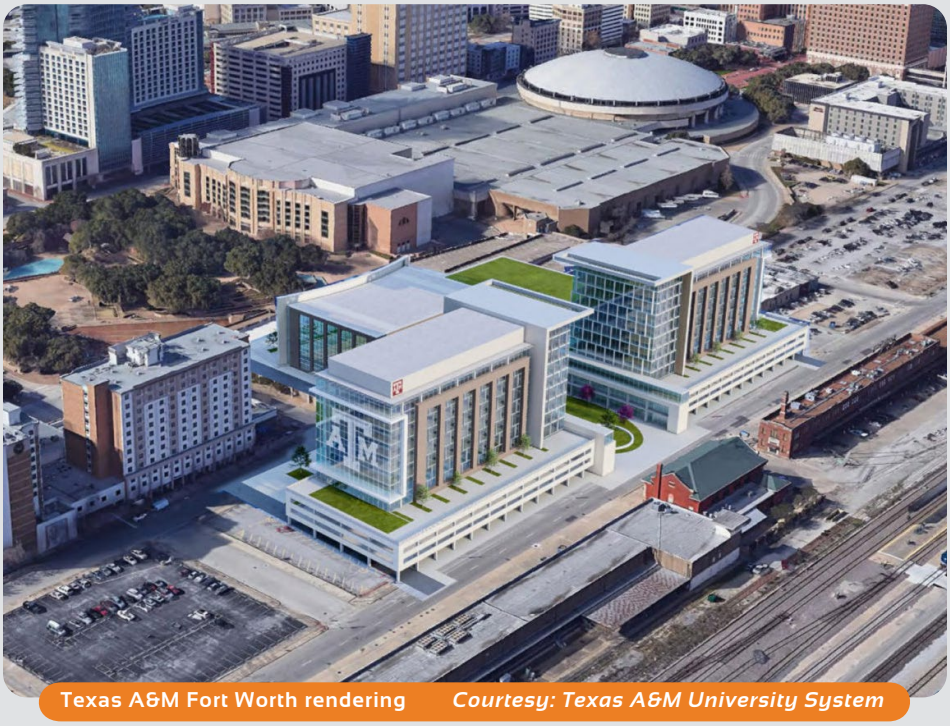
The “Texas Triangle” megaregion contains approximately 75% of the state’s population and GDP. Proposed high-speed rail networks like the “Upside-Down U” or “Texas T-Bone” (below) could seamlessly connect the state’s urban anchors.





High-speed rail delivers state-of-the-art education.

A&M campus under construction in Fort Worth.



Texas A&M Fort Worth rendering *Courtesy: Texas A&M University System*

Texas A&M University (TAMU) in College Station is the largest university campus in Texas, boasting a student population of nearly 75,000 students. Now its focus is on Fort Worth and the growing metropolitan area.

TAMU broke ground on the eight-story, $150 million Law and Education Building last year, and the satellite campus will soon begin construction on a Research and Innovation Center and Gateway Conference Center.

"Hundreds of miles apart, talent pools in Dallas-Fort Worth and College Station require lengthy car rides or logistically awkward flights between campuses," pointed out Sandy Wesch, P.E., AICP, NCTCOG Project Engineer and TAMU former student, class of 1987.

Just down the street from the satellite campus is the Fort Worth Central Station area with access to the high-speed rail line.

Students, faculty, and visitors will be able to conveniently hop on high-speed rail and head south to Grimes County, the midpoint station in the Dallas to Houston high-speed rail project. After getting off in Grimes County, passengers will quickly access other transportation modes connecting them to College Station and the primary TAMU campus.

"Imagine the thousands of students who could conveniently make day trips between Fort Worth and College Station on high-speed rail to pursue higher education," continued Wesch.

"The connection between TAMU campuses is obvious, but this extends to other universities, too. Houston residents could take in-person classes at the University of Texas at Arlington, or Fort Worth residents could take classes at Dallas College or the University of Houston. Options really are endless."

Once built, the TAMU Fort Worth campus will consist of three towers occupying four city blocks. This is part of a multi-billion-dollar investment in the southeast side of downtown Fort Worth, joined by other notable projects such as the ongoing renovation of the Fort Worth Convention Center. (see Convention Centers, pg. 2).

According to an article titled "The Most Deadly Roads in Every Country," released by insurance company Budget Direct at the end of 2021, Interstate 45 ranked as the "deadliest" roadway/ highway in America.

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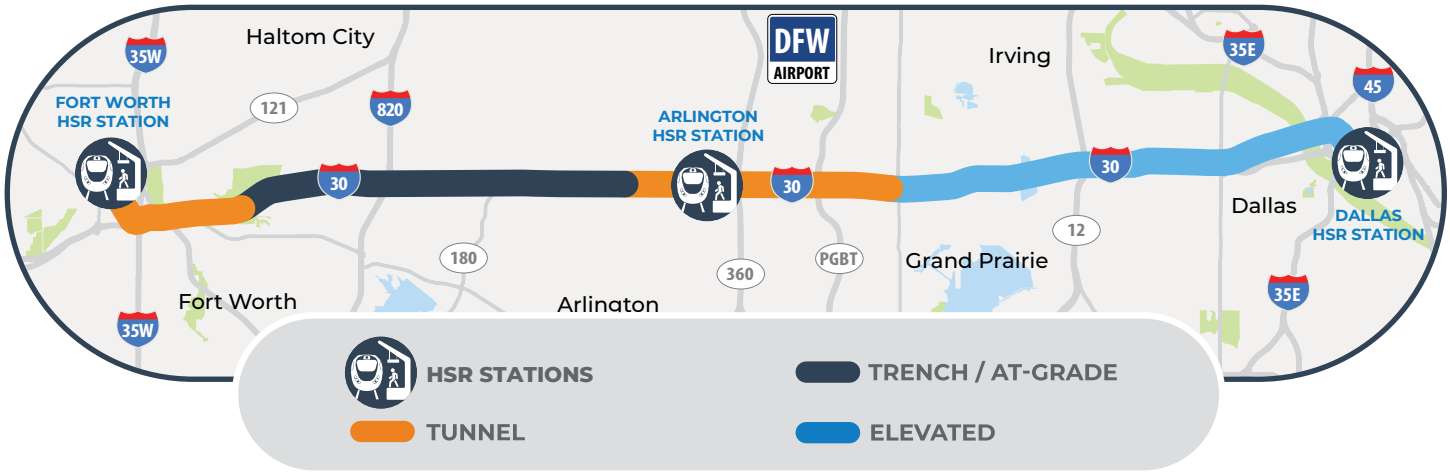
Alignment reduces costs and construction times.

The high-speed rail alignment connecting Dallas and Fort Worth has geological, engineering, and safety constraints that require the track to have varying elevations according to the project team's exhaustive study. **Forty-three alignments were studied in Phase 1, and the I-30 corridor proved to be the optimal route.**

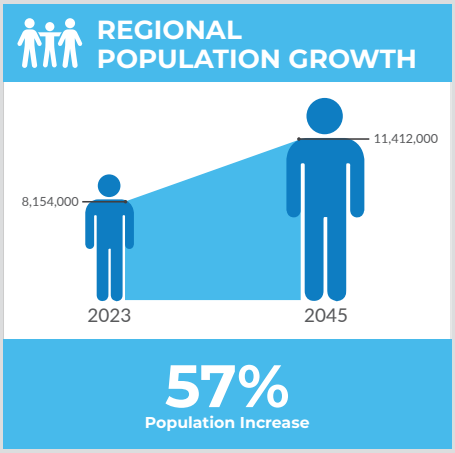
Tunneled sections will be completely underground to avoid conflicts with major highway interchanges. Trenched sections will be adjacent to the roadway but grade-separated, eliminating intersections with vehicles. Elevated sections are proposed to accommodate the topography in West and downtown Dallas and to avoid conflicts with existing transportation infrastructure.

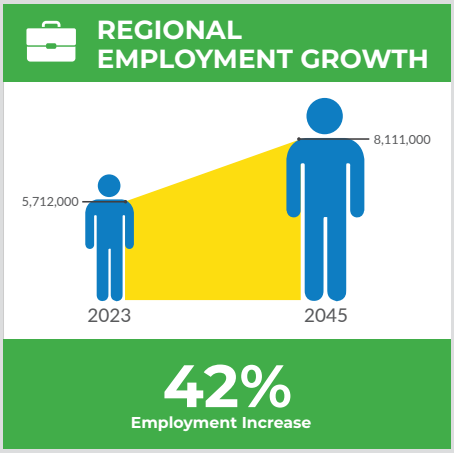
Predominantly within the existing I-30 right-of-way, this alignment minimizes impact to private property owners. **Approximately 85 percent of the alignment is within the I-30 right-of-way, and an additional 5 percent is on other public land.** "The I-30 alignment allows the project team to work closely with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), now redesigning the interstate between Fort Worth and Arlington," said Ian Bryant, AICP, HNTB Project Manager.

By concurrently designing and constructing this section of I-30 for vehicles and high-speed rail, costs and completion times will be reduced. Tunneling or trenching the western section avoids conflicts with major I-30 interchanges, such as President George Bush Turnpike (PGBT), SH 360, I-820, and US 287.



Traffic congestion is highly influenced by accidents, work zones, rush hour, inclement weather, and more. High-speed rail is comparatively insulated from these factors and can run uninterrupted regardless of the time of day, weather, or number of commuters.





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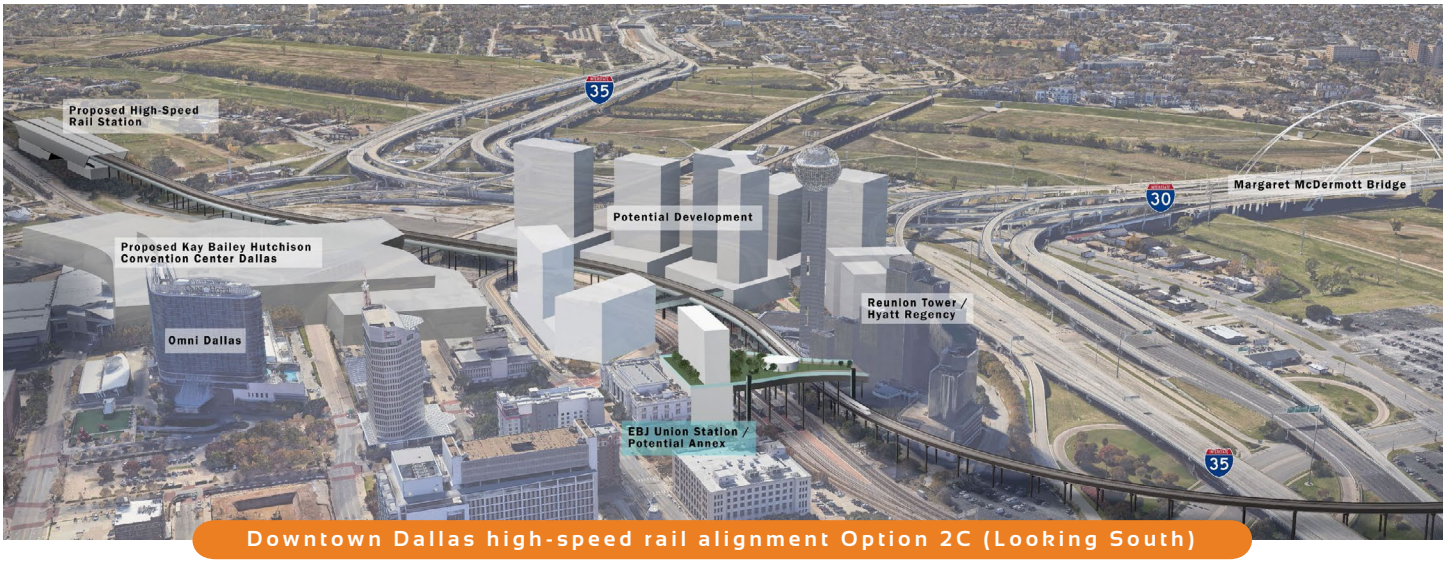


Downtown Dallas high-speed rail alignment Option 2C (Looking South)

Why must we elevate HSR through Dallas?

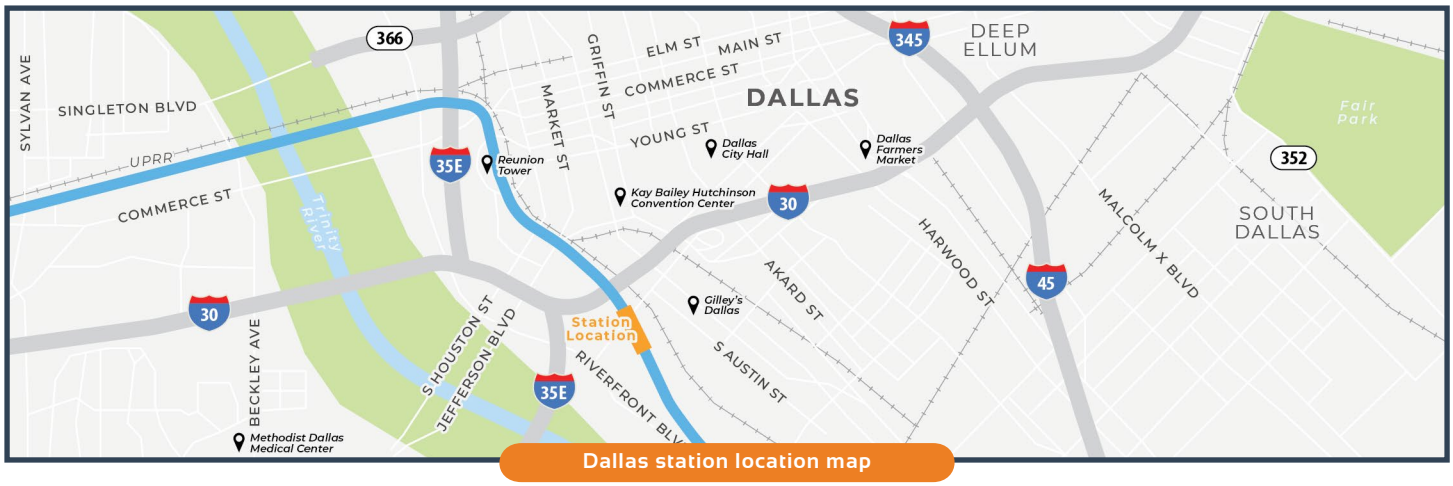
Tunneled options in downtown Dallas were studied in Phase 1 and pre-NEPA but ultimately rejected.

If the high-speed rail line were tunneled through downtown Dallas, a one-seat ride through the high-speed rail station in the Cedars (south of Cadiz Street, east of Riverfront Boulevard), which already received federal approval in 2020, would be impossible. By connecting the Dallas-to-Fort Worth and Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail lines at the same terminal, riders can enjoy a seamless "one-seat ride" from Fort Worth to Houston without requiring a lengthy transfer.

Another important consideration is TxDOT already completed construction of the eastern section of I-30, so tunneling would require costly demolition and route modifications, all of which would result in significant traffic delays. Project engineers agree reducing costs and traffic disruptions is paramount for this project.

"If we change the federally approved Dallas station and try to put it underground, that would almost certainly kill the Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail line," explained Andy Byford, Amtrak Vice President of High-Speed Rail Development Programs, at a recent Dallas City Council meeting. "We'd have to restart the station design from scratch, meaning we'd have to receive federal clearance all over again."

Altering the federally approved high-speed rail station in the Cedars in any way would require completely redoing that project's environmental documentation, resulting in delays, increasing costs, and jeopardizing the Dallas-to-Houston high-speed rail line. "We are working with everyone in good faith to develop a silo-busting, win-win strategy," emphasized Michael Morris, P.E., NCTCOG Transportation Director.

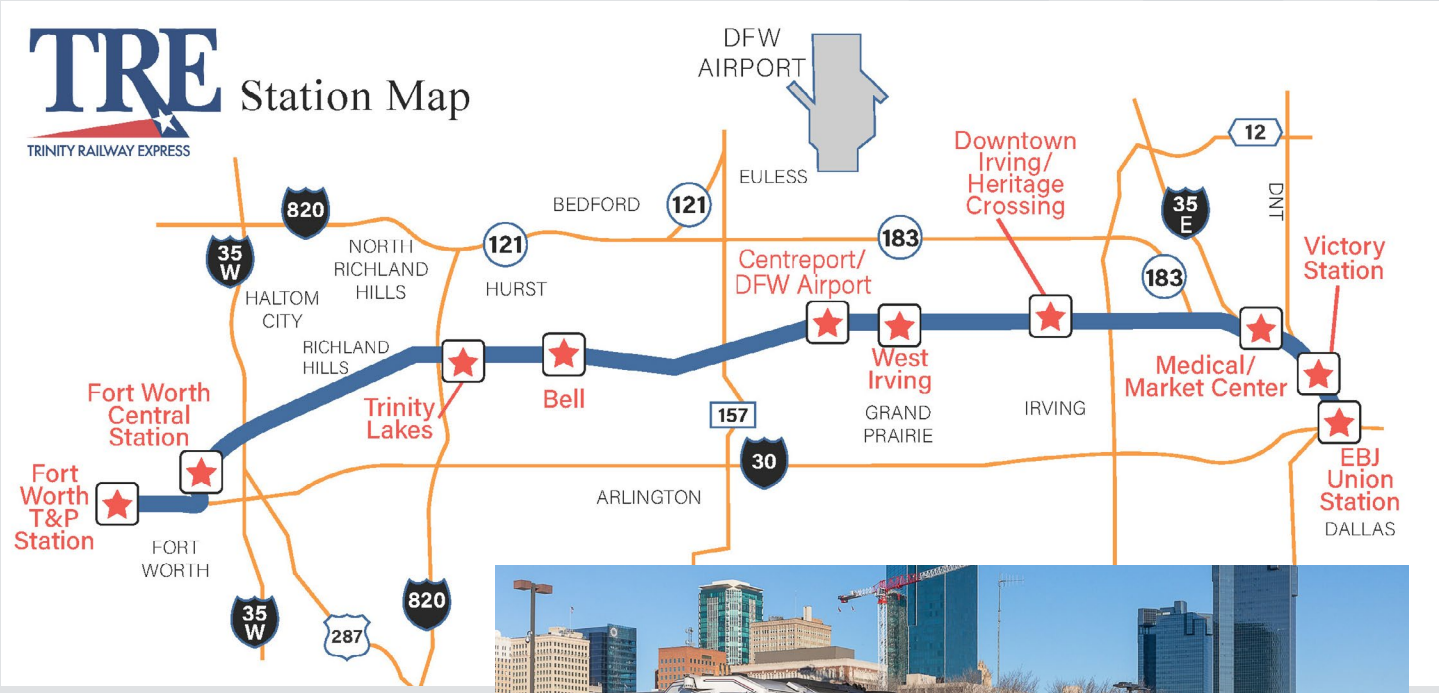


Dallas station location map

Why not retrofit TRE for high-speed rail?

Trinity Railway Express (TRE) is a ten-station rail line connecting downtown Dallas and downtown Fort Worth. An end-to-end trip takes takes over an hour, but few TRE passengers ride end to end. The lower-speed rail service is popular among those connecting with businesses and other resources in and around the Mid-Cities and urban centers.

High-speed rail serves a different market—those wishing to travel quickly between urban centers. The proposed high-speed rail line will connect downtown Fort Worth and downtown Dallas in just 21–25 minutes. Also planned is a station in the Arlington Entertainment District with transit options connecting to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW Airport).



TRE Corridor Constraints.

Despite appearing similar, transportation engineers agree the existing TRE corridor is not workable for high-speed rail. Right-of-way is limited because upgrading the line for high-speed rail would displace homes and businesses.

Converting the TRE tracks to high-speed rail would lose the eight midpoint stations used by 95% of TRE ridership.

Ensuring the safety of the alignment's numerous curves would reduce high-speed rail's speed to approximately 120 mph.

"For TRE and high-speed rail to coexist the corridor must be widened, resulting in expensive right-of-way acquisition due to dense development along the corridor," said Ian Bryant, AICP, HNTB Project Manager. "These infrastructure improvements and costs are essentially equivalent to constructing an entirely new rail line adjacent to the existing corridor."

With high-speed rail and TRE, travelers would have the freedom to choose between speed or accessibility to smaller areas. Altering the TRE or eliminating either option would hurt mobility for all.

Alignment's environmental assessment provides assurances to all.

High-speed rail project moves forward.

The Dallas-Fort Worth High-Speed Rail Study, now in Phase 2, focuses on the effects of the proposed project on neighborhoods, community assets (including parks and schools), air quality, noise, ecosystems, water, cultural resources, economics, and transportation networks.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law that protects the environment and local communities.

"Between now and March 2025, we will work with our federal partners examining the potential social and environmental impacts of the high-speed rail alignment and station locations in North Central Texas," said Brendon Wheeler, P.E., CFM, Program Manager, North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG).

"We are mindful of the responsibility the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has entrusted us with to expeditiously complete the NEPA analysis to move closer to integration of high-speed rail into the region's multimodal transportation system," continued Wheeler.

"Prior to NEPA, we studied 43 alignments, five modes of technology, and had over two hundred stakeholder meetings," said Ian Bryant, AICP, HNTB Project Manager.

"Community feedback has shaped the project from the beginning, and we'll continue to tweak designs to best meet the needs of residents, businesses, property owners, and the public."

During the process, appropriate mitigation measures are considered, including avoiding, minimizing, rectifying, reducing over time, and compensating for adverse impacts. For example, a noise analysis will be conducted.

If a noise impact is identified, the project team will look for opportunities to avoid or minimize that impact. If this is not possible, the project team would work to mitigate the impact, by perhaps constructing a noise wall.

"When NEPA is completed, the public can be assured this project has been subjected to an exhaustive review, recommending positive modifications if indicated," Wheeler said.

Let Your Voices Be Heard

"The cornerstone of NEPA is community engagement, and the coming months will be filled with team members connecting with stakeholders at community events, festivals, homeowners' association and neighborhood association meetings, business organizations such as chambers of commerce, and more," said Rebekah Gongora, NCTCOG Communications Manager.

Visit www.nctcog.org/dfw-hstcs to leave your feedback or request a speaker for your organization today.

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