

Dallas to Fort Worth high-speed rail has some planning head scratchers

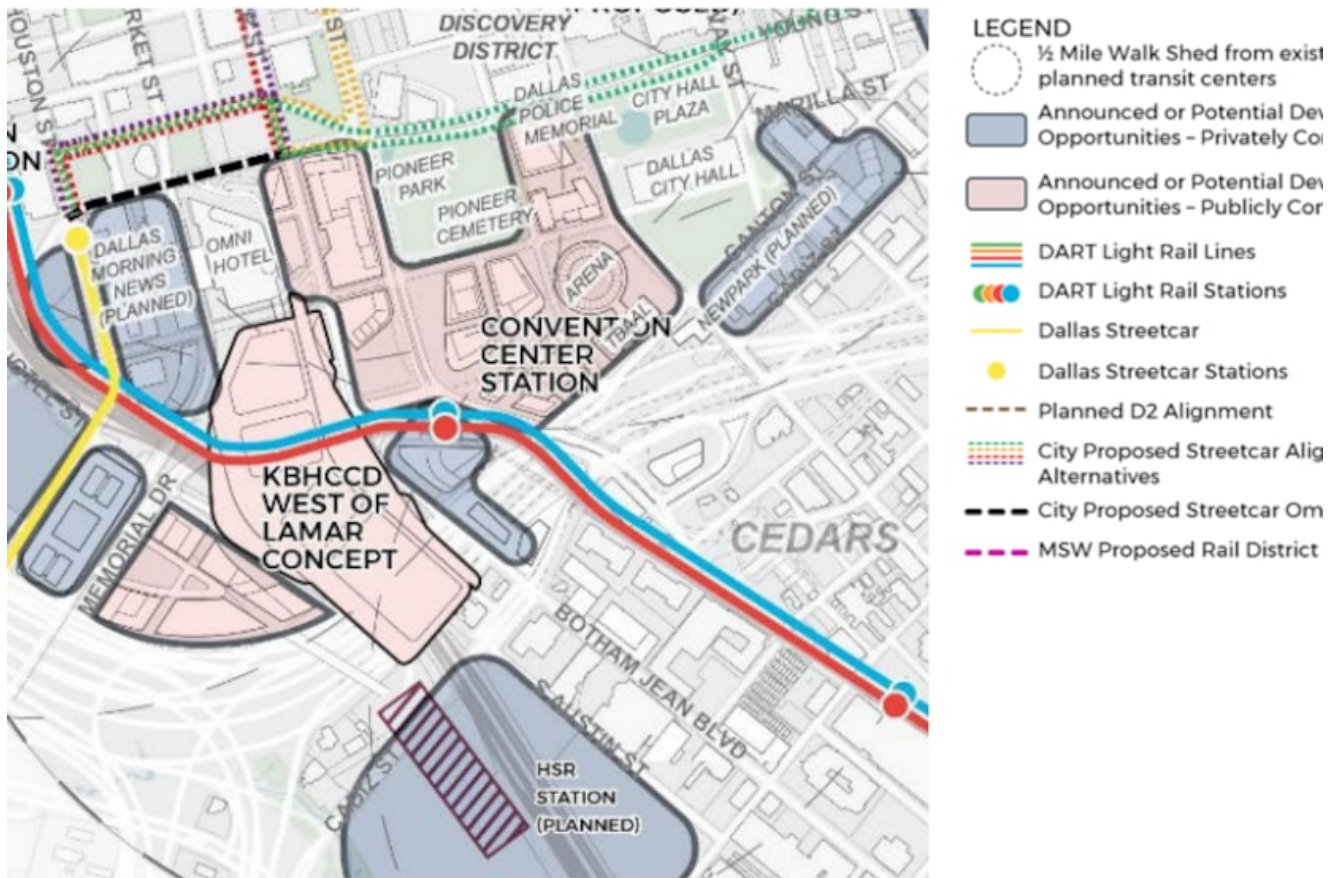
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A briefing to the City Council’s transportation committee raised more questions than it answered.



By [Dallas Morning News Editorial](#)
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A map of planned expansions to transit around the proposed Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center development. The planned high-speed rail station is marked south of the new Convention Center. (City of Dallas)

The thought of high-speed rail in North Texas is exciting, but we aren’t sure that we are having the public discussion we need about the planning that’s taking place. And we are less sure that what’s being proposed even at the drawing-board stage is what Dallas should

accept.

Though a line from Fort Worth to Dallas has been kicked around by transportation planners at the North Central Texas Council of Governments for some time, last week was the first time it was discussed in a Dallas City Council committee. And the briefing to the transportation committee showed how unclear the project's progress is.

Planning has inched forward in the last few months. The Dallas-to-Houston section, which Amtrak is heading up, and the council of government's Fort Worth-to-Houston plan each received a federal Corridor Identification and Development grant. But that \$1 million is a drop in the bucket for projects that cost billions. The council of governments is waiting on federal approval to begin a 12-month environmental study process that must precede fundraising and building.

Every part of the project is in its earliest stages, but the city needs to understand it now because the proposed Dallas station is set for the Cedars, a stone's throw from the new Convention Center. That plan under consideration, meanwhile, designated that Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station downtown should be a transportation hub, and that the land around it will be a mixed-use "Convention Center district."

So how do people get from the high-speed rail station in the Cedars to Union Station on the southwest side of downtown?

How about a walkway in the sky? That's what city and North Central Texas Council of Governments staff are proposing, an elevated walkway from the high-speed rail station to EBJ Union station over Interstate 30 and the levees, overlooking Harold Simmons Park.

If that's hard for you to visualize, you're not alone. Instead of a map or rendering, staff presented a video of a footbridge connecting a mall in Dubai to a metro station. Council members began questioning how the walkway would impact economic development and street activation in the Cedars, rather than focusing on the train itself.

Stakeholders in Dallas are also concerned that the train will travel 70 feet above ground downtown, while stations in Fort Worth and Arlington are going to be underground. The Dallas station is slated to be above ground because back in 2020 the Houston leg of the project got federal clearance for a station at that height in the Cedars.

Michael Morris, the council of government's director of transportation, said an underground option would be studied. Forty-two other alignments have been eliminated since 2020, and getting federal approval for the Dallas-to-Houston station was a laborious process, so it's

unclear whether making it an option is realistic at this stage. Morris said that an underground station would have to be buried 17 stories deep, so how much it could really be considered is in serious doubt.

If this project goes forward, Dallas needs to ensure that it is designed in a way that integrates with the city. Having people carried along on a walkway seven stories above the city is not the sort of integration that makes sense. And having them carried out from the depths some 17 stories below is just unrealistic.

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