

Allen and McKinney plan for bus service as DART looks to the future

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Two more Dallas suburbs are close to launching commuter bus service in a test of whether those living far from the urban center will warm to mass transit.

City officials in Allen and [McKinney](#) are firming up plans for separate bus lines that will link into DART's Red Line rail service at Parker Road. On Tuesday, Mesquite's City Council approved money for an express bus stop that will serve DART's Green Line.

The endeavors come as a number of car-centric communities look to give residents more transportation options and ease increasingly traffic-clogged roads.

[DART](#), meanwhile, is attempting to serve fast-growing suburbs at minimal cost, alleviate large parking crowds at end-of-the-line stations like Parker Road in [Plano](#), and lay groundwork for future rail expansions.

"A little over 50 percent of the people who work in the DART [rail] service area actually live outside of the DART service area," said Todd Plesko, DART's vice president of planning and development. "This is the single largest growth market. And we don't have any tests of that outside of our service area."

As growth and congestion have pushed outward, suburban transit projects like the A-Train between Dallas and Denton and a proposed suburban east-west rail line from U.S. Highway 75 to D/FW International Airport have gained momentum. But given transit's often steep cost, most cities are starting small.

Like [Mesquite](#), McKinney is examining an express bus line that will shuttle passengers from a park-and-ride lot to the DART rail system.

Allen's intentions are a little different. It is contemplating a route that would bring passengers from the DART rail to job and retail centers in Allen. The route would have multiple stops and probably serve some of Allen's busiest areas, such as its always-crowded outlet mall.

Officials in Allen have yet to decide whether to let DART or a private service operate its bus line.

“This is a pilot project that will help us determine what the demand for service is,” said Lee Battle, Allen’s assistant director of planning and development.

Both Allen and McKinney plan to pay for the new lines with three-year federal grants and some local funds. Mesquite hopes to do the same. All three services could launch as soon as this fall.

Other cities also have expressed interest in suburban bus lines but are waiting to see how the services perform in Allen, Mesquite and McKinney, Plesko said.

Mobility aside, the new bus lines are a way to help DART manage the growing number of commuters who live and pay sales taxes outside of its designated service area.

Riders from Plano and [Richardson](#) on DART’s popular Red Line, for instance, have long complained of trains crowded with passengers from Allen, McKinney and other outlying suburbs. The cities of Plano and Richardson use a portion of sales tax collections to help subsidize DART. Allen and McKinney do not.

[Michael Morris](#), transportation director for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, said the new bus lines could help level the funding disparities.

“We always talk about how people from [non-DART cities] travel to the rail system, use the rail system and pay the fare. But they’re not paying the [sales tax] subsidy on transit,” Morris said. “The question is: How do we get past all of this? Advancing transit is a positive move.”