

# **LONE STAR RAIL DISTRICT**

## **Regional Passenger Rail Project: Status Report**

[www.LoneStarRail.com](http://www.LoneStarRail.com)

The Lone Star Rail passenger rail project is a key initiative in Central and South Texas to help alleviate the congestion and safety problems on I-35 due to extraordinary population growth and increased NAFTA traffic. The locally preferred alternative—adopted in 2005 by the Rail District Board as well as the Austin and San Antonio MPOs—is a 112-mile regional passenger rail system located in the existing Union Pacific rail corridor for most of its length. Fifteen stations are planned along the route, which is anchored by the Austin and San Antonio metropolitan areas with additional stations in Schertz, New Braunfels, San Marcos, Kyle/Buda, Round Rock and Georgetown (see map on page 3). A 16<sup>th</sup> station in south San Antonio is being studied in the environmental clearance process which is currently underway.

Intercity rail service will offer relaxing, stress-free travel that allows riders the freedom to make the most of their travel time by studying, working, or simply enjoying the scenery. Travel times will be competitive with, if not faster than, travel by automobile; but the key element is that rail travel is predictable and dependable, while accidents, weather conditions, and other variables can often cause unexpected delays for drivers.

Significant technical work has been completed for the regional passenger rail project, including:

- Conceptual Engineering
- Alternatives Analysis
- Station Location Studies
- Station Economic Impact Analyses
- Capital and Operating Cost Estimates
- Operating Plans
- Ridership Studies
- Financial and Economic Benefits Studies

In January 2010, Lone Star Rail initiated the environmental clearance process on the passenger rail project. A significant public outreach effort will be part of this phase. Key outcomes will be updated project costs, final station locations, and a financial plan. The environmental process will take 2-3 years to complete.

In October 2010, Lone Star Rail and Union Pacific executed a Memorandum of Understanding that states the Rail District and UP will study the feasibility of relocating UP's through freight to a new route. If an appropriate route is identified, UP will consider moving its through freight, which makes up the bulk of the freight traffic, to a new line in exchange for the existing freight line. In November 2010, the Rail District launched the initial study in the freight rail relocation effort—a fatal flaw analysis of alternative routes for the through freight. UP's local freight will remain on the existing mainline, but the relocation of UP's through-freight operations will allow the Rail District to provide passenger rail service on the existing mainline.

To ensure on-going local and regional coordination and collaboration, the Rail District is governed by a Board of Directors that represents local governments and transportation providers throughout the Austin-San Antonio Corridor. Jurisdictions and organizations represented on the Board:

- Cities: Austin, Georgetown, New Braunfels, San Antonio, San Marcos, Schertz
- Counties: Bexar, Hays, Travis, Williamson
- Transit Authorities: Alamo Regional Transit, Capital Metro, CARTS, VIA Metropolitan Transit
- MPOs: CAMPO, SA-BC MPO
- Business Communities: Austin, San Antonio (appointed by the respective City Councils)
- General Public: Austin, San Antonio (appointed by the Texas Transportation Commission)

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT (Why are we doing this?)**

- Improve mobility throughout the Austin-San Antonio Corridor
- Provide a predictable, reliable travel choice
- Divert trucks from I-35 to new freight bypass, thus improving speed and efficiency of NAFTA trade flows
- Improve safety in the I-35 corridor
- Maintain air quality status (Austin and San Antonio both near-non-attainment areas)
- Create a regional, seamless, multi-modal transportation system
- Create economic development opportunities

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL RAIL SYSTEM**

- Express and Local trains (travel time):
  - Express: 90 minutes, Austin CBD – San Antonio CBD (with stops in San Marcos and New Braunfels)
  - Local: 105 minutes, Austin CBD – San Antonio CBD (stops at all stations)
- Operations (full service):
  - 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.
  - Every 30 minutes during peak hours
  - Every 45 minutes during off-peak hours
- Passenger trains will have priority over freight trains

## **MILESTONES**

### **2008**

- Awarded federal metropolitan mobility funds from Capital Area MPO: \$5 million in FY09 and \$5 million in FY10
- Conducted meetings and discussions with Union Pacific executive-level staff on rerouting and exchange of existing right-of-way
- Completed high-level feasibility analysis of SH 130 corridor as possible future route for regional passenger rail service
- Executed agreement with Texas Department of Transportation to fund San Antonio Freight Study Phase 3
- Initiated branding services for Rail District

### **2009**

- Re-branded the Rail District, changed name to Lone Star Rail
- Legislature approved \$182 million for the State Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund for the biennium (subject to certification by State Comptroller)
- Legislature appropriated \$8.7 million for the Austin-San Antonio rail corridor
- Executed agreements with Union Pacific Railroad for initial feasibility studies on freight bypass
- Executed contract for environmental clearance on passenger rail project, with significant public outreach program

### **2010**

- Launched environmental clearance and preliminary engineering on passenger rail project
- Executed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Union Pacific to study freight bypass route and add passenger service to existing rail line
- Initiated analysis of alternative alignments for freight rail relocation
- Added Rail Operations Manager to Rail District staff
- Secured federal trademarks for new brand assets

**2011**

- Attorney General’s opinion affirmed that Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund passed State Legislature’s 3-part test and should be certified by the State Comptroller
- Legislature included \$50 million rider in House appropriations bill for the State Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund for the biennium
- Issued Request for Qualifications for Local Government & Stakeholder Engagement Services to proactively engage and inform local communities and stakeholders along the proposed freight bypass route on the scope and purpose of the project.

Visit the website—[www.LoneStarRail.com](http://www.LoneStarRail.com)—for project information and updates as they become available.

**REGIONAL PASSENGER RAIL ROUTE AND PRELIMINARY STATION LOCATIONS**

