

# **LONE STAR RAIL DISTRICT**

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

The Austin-San Antonio Rail District formally changed its name to Lone Star Rail District in October 2009. Lone Star Rail District, or simply Lone Star Rail, is the governing agency; the name of the future regional passenger rail service will be LSTAR. The website has also changed. Visit the new website—[www.LoneStarRail.com](http://www.LoneStarRail.com)—for project information and updates as they become available.

The Lone Star Rail passenger rail project is an important priority 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 by the San Antonio and Austin MPOs in 2005) 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 whereas accidents, weather conditions, and other variables can often cause unexpected delays for drivers.

Economic development is also an important benefit of this project. A recent study conducted by the Lone Star Rail District estimates, if this project were implemented, personal income in the region could increase by \$20B over the next 30 years with state and local tax revenues increasing by \$2.3B. Additionally, the project will improve the safety of over 130 at-grade rail crossings along the existing freight railroad that goes through the centers of the cities along the corridor.

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 launched the next big milestone in the project's development—preparation of an environmental impact statement and preliminary engineering. 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.

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
- Improve safety in the I-35 corridor
- Provide a predictable, reliable travel choice
- 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**

### **2006**

- Completed revenue forecasts for transportation infrastructure zones around rail stations
- Completed Seaholm station location study in downtown Austin and partnered with VIA Metropolitan Transit to study station location in downtown San Antonio
- Received federal FY06 appropriation to continue planning and engineering studies
- Completed financial analysis and developed local funding strategies
- Completed Phase 2 and Phase 3 ridership modeling
- Completed *Station Design Report*
- Completed *Conceptual Engineering Design Report*

### **2007**

- Awarded federal metropolitan mobility funds from San Antonio-Bexar County MPO: \$10 million in FY11 and \$10 million in FY12
- Completed *Financial and Economic Benefits Study*
- Added three new members to Rail District: Hays County, cities of New Braunfels and Schertz
- Completed *Existing Conditions Report*
- Completed *Alternatives Analysis Report*
- Redesigned website and upgraded website functions

### **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 designated \$8.7 million for the Austin-San Antonio rail corridor
- Executed agreements with Union Pacific Railroad for initial feasibility studies on freight bypass
- Submitted, in partnership with TxDOT, application to the Federal Railroad Administration for High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail federal stimulus funding
- Executed contract to launch environmental clearance on passenger rail project, with significant public outreach program

**REGIONAL RAIL ROUTE AND PRELIMINARY STATION LOCATIONS**

