

City Works to Ensure Timely, Quality Delivery of Orange Rail Line

The following guest column from Mayor Herbert Gears and City Council ran in the "Dallas Morning News," Community Opinion section, Feb. 17, 2008.

We want to deliver a message today on behalf of the 200,000 people who call Irving home. The DART Board and executive staff have made significant efforts to ensure that the Orange Line light rail project comes through Irving by December 2011, but we must maintain a concerted effort and strong partnership to make sure this project becomes a reality.

The benefits of this project span beyond the boundaries of Irving to the entire North Texas region. It must be completed on time and as promised with quality design standards. Any failure by DART to live up to its obligation would severely curtail the success of mass transit in the entire North Texas region.

It was a disappointment to learn in late November at a DART Board meeting that Orange Line funding was in jeopardy due to construction costs almost doubling. We have already experienced one construction delay with the Irving light rail project, and we cannot afford to have this happen again.

We are proud of Irving's quick response to help resolve the funding crisis, working hand in hand with DART officials to find an effective solution to this issue. Our residents have shown strong support for keeping the project on a strict time schedule with more than 11,000 petition signatures presented to the DART Board in January. Business leaders have also dedicated their time to support the project with letters to DART officials and participation in several DART meetings to emphasize the value of this rail line project.

Irving has invested more than \$750 million in sales tax dollars for DART, while millions of private sector dollars have been invested in new projects along the planned rail corridor. An additional \$4.4 billion of new retail, commercial, office and housing developments will be positioned along the Orange Line, which will travel through areas such as the Texas Stadium redevelopment, Las Colinas Urban Center and ultimately to D/FW International Airport.

The Orange Line will be at the center of the largest economic engine for our entire area. DART Board members saw these development plans firsthand when they toured the Irving-Las Colinas area last month. This rail project will greatly improve the quality of life for many North Texans by helping to alleviate growing traffic congestion and decreasing air pollution.

To delay this extension through Irving and to D/FW International Airport would be devastating. DART and city officials must continue to work together for the success of the project. During a City Council work session on Dec. 12, DART Executive Director Gary Thomas committed to have all sections of the Orange Line completed on time and consisting of the same high-quality infrastructure

as originally promised. In addition, the DART Board unanimously passed a resolution at its Jan. 22 meeting reaffirming the promise to build the Orange Line to Irving and the line to Rowlett and complete them by the original dates and with the quality standards as planned.

We're encouraged by the commitment of newly appointed DART Board Chairman Randall Chrisman. He supports holding monthly meetings between City of Irving and DART officials and staff to ensure DART meets its long-standing commitments. The city of Irving has dedicated the necessary city staff toward the project and is fully engaged to augment DART efforts. With this dedication, we expect improved communications between the two organizations.

Irving has been a longtime leader in regional transportation issues and will remain a strong partner with DART and other agencies to better serve area residents. The future of both light rail transit and commuter rail transportation in North Texas depends on all of us working effectively. Failure or delay is not an option. It's time to roll up our sleeves and continue to work together and complete the line. Many people are counting on