

DALLAS AREA RAPID TRANSIT

Cities give terms for compromise

Here's what some say it would take to call off incoming exit elections



Irving Mayor Rick Stopfer said he'd recommend his council stop efforts to leave DART if they entered a five-year agreement. (2012 File Photo/Staff)



“The city remains pro-transit and pro-regional connectivity,” Farmers Branch Mayor Terry Lynne wrote. (2010 File Photo/Tom Fox)



Plano city staff are hopeful that the agreement will offer a creative solution that allows them to have more of a say in DART services. (2025 File Photo/Shafkat Anowar)

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At least three of the five cities considering leaving Dallas Area Rapid Transit have told the agency's leadership what it'll take for them to consider calling off elections as a late February deadline to remove the question of membership in DART from the May ballot puts pressure on both sides to reach an agreement.

Plano, Irving and Farmers Branch have sent proposals to DART outlining their demands after calling elections to ask voters to reconsider remaining in the public

transportation system. The agency's leadership has not received terms from the Park Cities.

University Park has not submitted a proposal because the city "believes that calling a special election allows the residents to determine the best path forward for the community," said communications officer Paige Ruedy in a statement.

In their proposals, city leaders ask DART to refund sales tax, change services, reform the agency's governance model — a move Dallas leaders are considering — and increase transparency in exchange for calling elections off or recommending allegiance to DART.

Cities have until 45 days before the elections to call them off, but county officials would need to know by late February whether the items will be on the ballot.

'Front and center'

Some DART board members have expressed frustration that the governing body has not yet considered the three city proposals. The board is scheduled to hear a briefing Tuesday on the status of city and regional discussions related to the agency's governance, funding and service.

"The full 15-member DART Board should be ... turning over every stone to resolve member city concerns and avert the need for these elections," wrote Anthony Ricciardelli, who represents Plano on the DART board, in a statement. "The DART Board should be front and center in these important discussions, not sidelined."

DART Board Chair Randall Bryant said he is meeting with city leaders and planning to formally consider the terms soon but said they are not fully fleshed out yet.

"What will be the outcomes of the proposals if we were to implement them?" Bryant said to *The Dallas Morning News* this month. "We are doing the work to try to figure that out, and once we do, we will present it to the board."

DART's leadership is also evaluating what kind of sales tax reduction it could withstand to offer relief to cities, he said, in order to develop a funding proposal.

Ballots for the May election will be finalized on Feb. 23 in Collin County and Denton County and Feb. 27 in Dallas County, according to a presentation from the city of Dallas.

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Plano

Plano submitted a proposal to DART in November and outlined a potential agreement in more detail in January, according to documents obtained by *The News*.

The updated, drafted deal would allow cities to recoup a quarter of the sales tax they contribute to DART.

In return, cities would waive their right to withdraw from the transit agency during the agreement term through September 2031.

By law, cities can consider leaving the agency every six years.

Similar proposals were presented at the state legislative session last year. The bills died in committee and DART agreed to return 5% sales tax back to cities as a compromise — such agreements have been called a general mobility program.

Now, as conversations around several cities leaving DART reach their fever pitch, Plano city staff are hopeful that the agreement will be a creative solution that allows them to have more of a say in DART services — not just for Plano.

“An à la carte system where cities can pick and choose some of their services, or ... a general mobility program to fund some of those infrastructure projects ... would be something that other cities would be very interested in,” Plano City Manager Mark Israelson said.

Under state law, the cities would only be able to use the money that DART returns to them on projects related to transportation, including services for the elderly or those with disabilities, medical transportation services, street modifications and projects like parking garages that could complement DART facilities.

Cities that are satisfied with the service that DART provides could choose to forgo the 25% return and let the transit agency use the funds.

Irving

Irving Mayor Rick Stopfer drafted a list of conditions, sent to DART Board Chair Randall Bryant in a letter dated Nov. 25. He wrote in his letter that the region has outgrown DART’s original governance and funding structure.

He said he’d recommend his council stop efforts to leave the agency if they entered a five-year agreement. Here’s a summary of the deal, under which DART would:

Fund and maintain bus routes in Irving with appropriately sized vehicles.

Return 5% of the 1-cent sales tax that Irving pays every year for five years, for the city to use on microtransit and other improvements supporting DART.

Suspend this return for any year in which DART ridership increases by 10% in Irving, starting in the second year of the agreement.

Allow Irving to forgo GoLink services.

Continue providing paratransit services.

Fund the design, engineering and construction of two light rail stations and a Trinity Railway Express station.

Provide \$1.5 million a year for a new circulating route in Irving's urban center.

Provide and maintain fixed-route bus service to all train stations.

Extend the timeline for the city to enter into a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone agreement — a tool that captures the projected increase in tax revenue and reinvests those funds in a specific area.

Meet annually in August to review General Mobility Program activity.

Reform its governance structure with a “one city, one vote” model with population-based weighting.

Agree that all new debt issued by DART must be approved by member cities.

Assist cities in advertising all city-sponsored community events to encourage ridership.

Approve this agreement no later than Feb. 13.

Farmers Branch

Farmers Branch sent a wish list of terms late last year. Here's a summarized list of the city's minimum conditions to recommend continued membership in the public transportation system, outlined in a Dec. 17 letter from Mayor Terry Lynne.

Redesign, secure and operate the city's rail station as a controlled-access facility, with standards for safety and cleanliness.

Return a phased portion of the 1-cent sales tax the city pays, which Farmers Branch will use for transportation initiatives such as microtransit and pedestrian access.

Allow the city to decline GoLink services and all fixed-bus route services, while DART would continue operating paratransit and rail services.

Provide \$1 million a year to support staffing a police officer at the city's DART station.

Reform its governance structure with a “one city, one vote” model with population-based weighting.

Agree to oversight of the agency's debt issuance, with future debt requiring member approval.

Report quarterly ridership data specific to Farmers Branch, including trends at stations and on routes.

Promote ridership in partnership with Farmers Branch by supporting advertising for city events on DART platforms and at stations, and address infrastructure needs at stations.

Require professional conduct and decorum from DART officers, employees and agents toward the city, elected officials and staff.

Review and correct procedural, operational and policy deficiencies affecting the system's reliability, rider experience, safety, cleanliness and accountability.

"The city remains pro-transit and pro-regional connectivity," the mayor wrote. "However, continued participation must be grounded in equity, safety, transparency, fiscal responsibility and accountability to our taxpayers."