

Leininger named DART interim CEO

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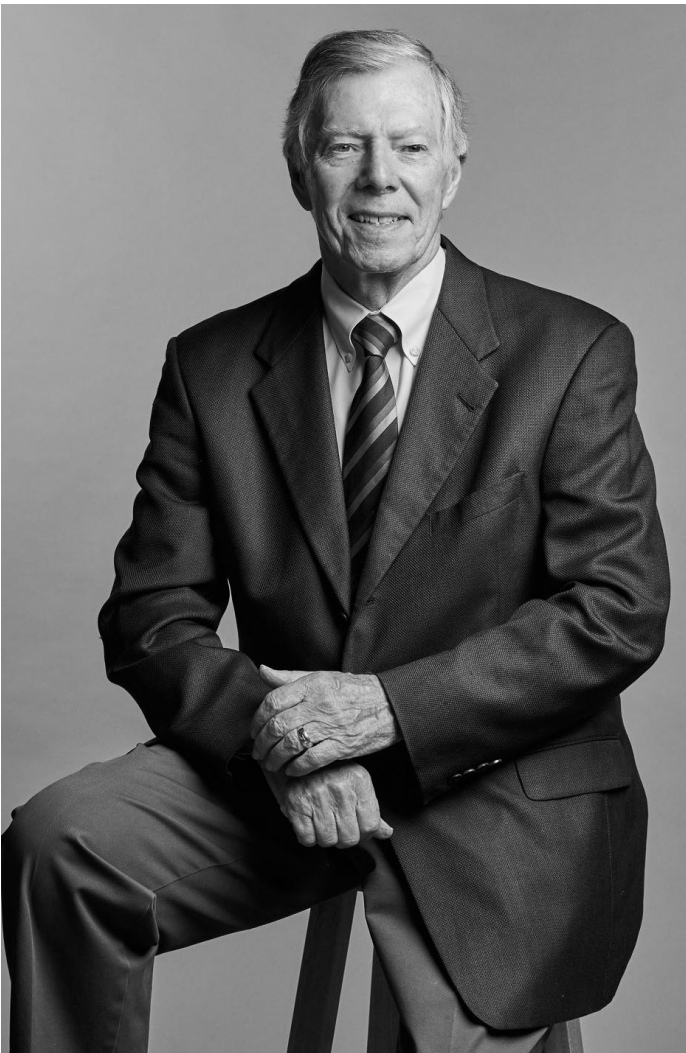
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DART Interim CEO named

Meanwhile, the agency continues to search for a permanent leader



David Leininger will oversee the daily operations of DART while the agency recruits its next CEO.

By LILLY KERSH

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Dallas Area Rapid Transit has named an interim CEO as the agency searches for a permanent leader.

David Leininger will oversee the daily operations of DART while the agency recruits its next CEO.

Former CEO Nadine Lee stepped down from her role amid a tumultuous year for the public transportation system. She asked the board in March to not renew her contract, which was set to expire in September, and the agency decided to terminate Lee shortly after.

DART's general counsel Gene Gamez has filled in as acting CEO temporarily. DART's board of directors appointed Leininger to replace him as CEO in the short term, effective May 4, before a permanent leader is hired.

DART's administration committee interviewed Leininger earlier this month, according to the agency's documents.

Leininger previously served as DART's interim president in 2021, filling in after Gary Thomas announced he was retiring after more than 20 years of leadership at the agency. Previously, Leininger served as executive vice president and chief financial officer at DART until his departure in 2018.

He first joined the agency in 2008 and served in several departments, including roles overseeing finance, information technology, communications, procurement, risk management and more.

Prior to working at DART, he worked at the cities of Irving, Dallas and Garland in positions regarding budgets, economic initiatives and fiscal services administration.

"I am honored to serve in this role once again and support the dedicated employees of DART," Leininger said in a statement. "Together, we will remain focused on providing dependable transit options, enhancing the customer experience and advancing the agency's mission to connect people, places and opportunities across our region."

Leininger returns to the agency at a turning point for public transportation in North Texas, just months after DART narrowly avoided a potential mass exodus of

suburban cities.

Nearly half of the agency's 13 member cities called elections to cut ties with DART. City leaders cited concerns over inadequate service, a governing structure that favored Dallas over smaller, suburban cities, and a hefty price tag of a one-cent sales tax that cities not in DART can use on services like public safety and economic development.

Lee, DART Board Chair Randall Bryant, city leaders and many other regional transportation leaders came to agreements on plans to restructure DART's governing board and funding structure, including giving cities some sales tax back over six years and pursuing changes to regional transit in the state Legislature.

The proposals convinced Plano, Irving and Farmers Branch to cancel their elections and remain in the system. Voters in the Park Cities and Addison will choose their cities' fate with DART in May 2 elections, just two days before Leininger begins as interim CEO.

DART's next CEO will be tasked with seeing many of those agreements, proposals and transitions through. City and DART leaders have said they hope the agency's next leader has the political savvy to toe tense lines and navigate fragile relationships that cracked under pressure last year.

"The board is confident that David's steady leadership, industry expertise and collaborative approach will ensure continuity of service and maintain the agency's focus on delivering safe, reliable and efficient transit," Bryant said in a statement. "His experience will be critical as we continue advancing key priorities, strengthening partnerships with our member cities and positioning DART for long-term success."

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