

Trinity Lakes Streetcar Loop

Overview

The Trinity Lakes Streetcar Loop (TLSL) is the superior option for the initial route of the Dallas Streetcar Transit Plan when compared to the downtown-only option currently being considered. Not only does it cost significantly less, it will have a greater impact on Dallas in terms of maximizing streetcar ridership and spurring economic development. It also goes the extra step of helping to bring our City together both symbolically and in actuality. For these reasons and more, the Trinity Lakes Streetcar Loop should be the initial hub from which the Dallas streetcar system will expand.

Ridership Potential and Transportation Linkages

The Trinity Lakes Streetcar Loop will be used by downtown businesses, visitors to Dallas and our own residents in Downtown, West Dallas and Oak Cliff. The TLSL is envisioned to be a 4.75 single track that ties large areas of current workforce housing in West Dallas and Oak Cliff with major job centers in Downtown, the Stemmons Design District and Methodist Hospital. For visitors and residence of Dallas, it links the Convention Center Hotel with major destination locations such as Union Station, the West End, the 6th Floor Museum, Victory, Stemmons Design District, Continental pedestrian bridge, the Trinity Lakes Park and the shops of Oak Cliff.

The TLSL also creates much needed parking capabilities for downtown employees and visitors to the Trinity Lakes Park by linking them to the currently empty Reunion Arena Garage with its 3000 parking spaces. The TLSL will attract commuters, lunchtime traffic along with visitors and residents attending one of the many destination locations. One complete circuit of the TLSL will take less than 24 minutes, averaging just 12 miles per hour.

The TLSL also connected to many other non-automotive transportation generators. It is linked to DART light rail and the Trinity Rail Express at Union Station. It serves hikers and bikers using the Katy Trail, the Trinity River Trails and the expanding Coombs Creek Trail. It is also centrally located to all the other streetcar lines that have been suggested thus far, making it an ideal center hub from which other routes can emanate. (see DART map of other suggested streetcar lines)

Economic Impact

It is well-documented that streetcar lines attract investments along their routes because developers know that it will serve their building for its economic life. The TLSL serves five different communities that are all trying to build a higher density urban environment that are dependent upon the City of Dallas providing alternative modes of transportation to the automobile. Without transportation choices such as a streetcar, an area cannot sustain a higher density growth pattern without creating automotive gridlock.

The land use plans in Downtown, the Design District, West Dallas, Fort Worth Avenue and the Oak Cliff Gateway all require transportation alternatives other than automobile and bus traffic in order to be successful. Consequently, all five areas will need access to

either DART light rail or a streetcar option. Currently, Downtown is served by one light rail line and the Trinity Rail Express. Soon Downtown will get a second DART light rail line.

Because it is served by other rail systems, it can be argued that the placement of a streetcar system in Downtown is not a "make or break" situation. For the other areas along the TLSL, this is not the case. They have no hope of getting served by DART light rail. Therefore, fulfilling the City's plans for these areas is dependent upon them getting a streetcar route. By doing so, the potential economic impact is impressive. The TIGER grant submitted by the City for the creation of just the Oak Cliff leg of this project touted up to 15,000 new housing units being created. The TLSL will have an even greater impact by including West Dallas, Fort Worth Avenue, the Design District and Downtown.

Projected Costs and Financial Sources

The TLSL will cost much less per mile than the Downtown-only route due to the significant amount of utility relocation issues that must be considered Downtown. The TLSL, by contrast has large stretches over two bridges that have no utilities whatsoever. The TIGER grant submission by the City of Dallas showed a total of 5.7 miles of streetcar, complete with vehicles, for a total all-inclusive cost of \$58 million. This is just slightly more than \$10 million per mile. Extrapolating, this equates to approximately \$48 million to build the TLSL route. The City of Dallas estimates the costs for the Downtown-only line to be \$77 million.

The TLSL has more potential funding sources than the downtown-only route. The financing sources for the downtown-only route are listed by the City as "TIFIA loan, SIB, regional funds, bonds, etc.", possible future increment from the downtown TIF and PID, and the sales proceeds of city-owned property. The TLSL could access these and more. Potential additional sources include the West Dallas and Incap MMD, the Fort Worth Ave TIF, the Oak Cliff Gateway TIF, the Design District TIF, the Sports Arena TIF. Additionally, the TLSL will bring revenue from the renting of the currently empty Reunion Arena Garage. Lastly, it is entirely possible that some of the project might be eligible for funding from the bonds approved to create the Trinity Lakes Park.

Conclusion

The case for making the Trinity Lakes Streetcar Loop the starter route for the Dallas Streetcar Transit Plan is compelling. It is superior in terms of potential ridership, economic impact, cost effectiveness and financing sources. It creates economic development opportunities for Downtown along with West Dallas, the Design District and Oak Cliff. It helps solve the Trinity River parking dilemma. It ties many of our major destination locations together for Dallas' residents and visitors, alike. Just knowing that this TLSL option exists and, that it has not been given due consideration by the City, should be enough reason to reassess how we are approaching our streetcar transit system planning.