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TxDOT RESOURCE LINKS
Scan the QR codes with your mobile device or click on the resource link buttons located here and at the bottom of every page of this document to direct you to additional resources and more details on the information provided in this document.

**Texas Department of Transportation**
TxDOT’s public website for agency information and resources focused on meeting the needs of drivers, businesses, government officials, and those who want to learn more about TxDOT.

**TxDOT 2021-2022 Educational Series**
TxDOT’s complete 2021-2022 Educational Series that focuses on a range of transportation issues affecting TxDOT and the state of Texas.

**Visual Dictionary**
TxDOT’s Visual Dictionary is designed to provide better understanding of transportation elements, words, and concepts.

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RAIL AND TRANSIT SAFETY

OVERVIEW
Texas, with a total of 10,539 miles of track, has the most rail lines of any state and the most public highway-rail grade crossings, with a total of 9,179 at grade crossings. Three Class I railroads and 55 Class III short line railroads serve the state. Texas’ short line railroads operate on nearly 2,031 miles of the over 10,000 miles of track, providing critical links and serving as last-mile connectors.

In 2005, the Texas Legislature transferred statewide rail planning and safety functions from the Texas Railroad Commission to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). TxDOT’s rail responsibilities focus on the planning and implementing freight and passenger rail projects and programs, coordinating statewide passenger rail system activities, and managing state-partnership and state-owned rail facilities, such as the NETEX Line and the South Orient Rail Line respectively. In regard to rail safety, TxDOT provides oversight of state and federal rail safety compliance, inspections, and operating practices throughout the state. TxDOT is also responsible for the oversight of rail transit safety (see State Safety Oversight section on page 7).

FREIGHT RAIL IN TEXAS
According to the American Association of Railroads, shippers currently use rail to move 380.8 million tons of freight in Texas. The United States Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics estimates that rail tonnage statewide will increase to 421.8 million tons by 2040. TxDOT anticipates that the greatest increase in freight movement will occur along the rail lines connecting Fort Worth and El Paso, Fort Worth and Amarillo, and the northeast to southwest United States line traversing the Texas Panhandle through Amarillo.

While Texas’ extensive rail system is an asset to the state, “bottlenecks” along the system, including at-grade highway-rail crossings, sections of single-track along double-track lines, and bridges with weight and speed restrictions, can severely limit freight rail capacity and mobility and affect the efficiency of the system. Connectivity between north-south rail connections in West Texas is also a challenge for freight movement.
LEGAL OVERSIGHT

TxDOT monitors potential rail line abandonments and coordinates the state’s involvement in and response to abandonment filings. If a rail line owner abandons a rail line due to low traffic volumes, TxDOT analyzes whether the abandoned line could serve the state as a rail facility, future roadway, or expansion of an existing road.

TxDOT is responsible for administering lease and operating agreements on state-owned facilities and operating agreements on state-supported passenger routes. TxDOT also manages state and federally funded construction project contracts on both state- and privately-owned rail facilities such as the South Orient Rail Line in West Texas and the recently-completed Broadway double-track bridge project in Houston.

THE SOUTH ORIENT RAIL LINE

In 2001, as directed by the Legislature, TxDOT completed the acquisition of the South Orient Rail Line in response to an abandonment application by the prior owners. The South Orient Rail Line is 391-miles long extending from San Angelo Junction, a few miles southwest of Coleman, through San Angelo to Presidio at the Texas-Mexico border. The South Orient Rail Line is one of only seven rail gateways located between the United States and Mexico.

TxDOT also entered into an initial 40-year lease agreement with Texas Pacifico Transportation, Ltd., in 2001 for the maintenance and operation of the rail line. The agreement contains a provision for up to five additional 10-year extensions if both TxDOT and Texas Pacifico agree to the extensions. When TxDOT acquired the South Orient Rail Line, the rail infrastructure was severely deteriorated due to deferred maintenance by the previous owners. Additionally, the previous owners constructed the rail gateway at the Presidio-Ojinaga International Rail Bridge, which was damaged by a fire in 2009, to connect with the Ferromex rail system at Presidio. Under the agreement, Texas Pacifico was responsible for the reconstruction of the Presidio Bridge, which was completed in 2019. The only remaining aspect of the bridge is the installation of the rail track, which will be completed in the fall of 2020 as part of the FASTLANE rehabilitation project. TxDOT, Texas Pacifico, and the United States Customs and Border Protection agency are currently working to identify federal requirements and potential funding sources to construct an inspection station to fully open the bridge for rail traffic.

Late in 2009, TxDOT and Texas Pacifico began the rehabilitation of the line from near Coleman and westward. The ongoing rehabilitation has resulted in a dramatic

THE SOUTH ORIENT RAIL LINE MAP

[Map of the South Orient Rail Line showing the route from San Angelo Junction to Presidio at the Texas-Mexico border.]
increase in rail freight traffic. In 2017, annual carloads totaled over 43,000. Much of the increased freight is in support of the regional oil and gas industry. Funding for the rehabilitation program has included state, federal, and private participation. TxDOT and Texas Pacifico are developing additional projects to continue the rehabilitation of the South Orient Rail Line.

**PASSENGER RAIL IN TEXAS**
Under Chapter 201, Texas Transportation Code, TxDOT “shall coordinate activities regarding the planning, construction, operation, and maintenance of a statewide passenger rail system as well as with other entities involved with passenger rail systems, including governmental entities, private entities, and nonprofit corporations.” Passenger rail categories include high-speed rail, intercity rail, commuter and regional rail, light rail, and trolley and tourism rail. While definitions may vary, high-speed rail runs at speeds greater than 110 mph on a dedicated track. Intercity rail primarily provides commuter service and operates at speeds slower than high-speed rail. Commuter and regional rail serve customers on daily trips between suburban and urban areas and may run on freight corridors. Light rail generally serves commuters typically within urban areas on dedicated corridors with specialized equipment.

**INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL**
Amtrak is the sole provider of intercity passenger rail service in Texas, offering three service routes. These routes serve most major metropolitan areas throughout the state and Amtrak partners with motor coach bus services to provide connections to other areas that Amtrak does not directly serve.

Amtrak fully funds two of the Texas routes: the Texas Eagle (San Antonio to Chicago) and the Sunset Limited (Los Angeles to New Orleans). TxDOT and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation jointly provide financial support to the third Amtrak route, the Heartland Flyer (Fort Worth to Oklahoma City). Texas’ share of the annual subsidy for this route increased over the years from the original $1.8 million in 2007 to an estimated $3.12 million in 2015. For fiscal years 2018 and 2019, the Texas Legislature has limited the state’s financial participation to $2.5 million per year. The Heartland Flyer provides once-daily service in each direction between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City, with stops in Gainesville, Texas, and in four Oklahoma cities. The Heartland Flyer operates on tracks owned by BNSF Railway.

TxDOT is conducting a Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study using federal funds to evaluate a range of passenger rail service options in an 850-mile corridor from South Texas to Oklahoma City. The study will produce an environmental document and service development plan for the corridor, which can serve as a business prospectus for private investors to develop passenger rail services in the corridor.

**COMMUTER AND REGIONAL RAIL SERVICE**
Capital Metro in Austin, Fort Worth Transit Authority (Trinity Metro), Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), McKinney Avenue Transit Authority in Dallas, Dallas Streetcar, Denton County Transportation Authority, Sun Metro in El Paso, Island Transit in Galveston, and Houston METRO all have a rail transit component within their systems.

- Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Trinity Metro, via an interlocal agreement, established the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) to serve customers with stops between Dallas and Fort Worth. Dallas Area Rapid Transit operates the nation’s longest light rail system (90 miles), providing service to destinations in Dallas, Carrollton, Farmers Branch, Garland, Irving, Plano, and Richardson. Riders can access the Dallas Fort-Worth International Airport and downtown Fort Worth through both Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Trinity Railway Express connections.

- The Trinity Railway Express service extends from Union Station in downtown Dallas to the T&P Station in downtown Fort Worth. It has Dallas County stops at Medical/Market Center and downtown Irving, as well as Tarrant County stops in Richland Hills and at the Fort Worth Intermodal Transportation Center.

- The Dallas Streetcar provides streetcar service in downtown Dallas from the Eddie Bernice Johnson Union Station to the Bishop Arts District.

- The McKinney Avenue Transit Authority provides historic trolley service connecting the Dallas Area Rapid Transit City Place Station to the downtown Central Business District.

- Sun Metro operates historic streetcar service through El Paso’s uptown and downtown areas.

- Capital Metro’s 32-mile MetroRail commuter rail line extends from Leander, a suburb north of Austin, to downtown Austin and the Austin Convention Center.

- Island Transit in Galveston anticipates resuming historic trolley service in November 2020. The historic trolley service will operate on Galveston’s Downtown Loop between The Strand and the Seawall.

- Houston’s METRO Rail Red Line light rail connects downtown Houston to the Houston Medical Center and averages over 26 million boarding’s per month. Travel time from end-to-end of the line is 50 minutes. Houston METRO recently opened its METRO Rail purple and green lines, providing service from downtown to the University of Houston.
HIGH-SPEED RAIL
Texas has no high-speed passenger rail service. However, a private entity is currently conducting federal planning and environmental studies between Dallas and Houston. TxDOT has limited involvement and oversight of this privately-funded project. In July of 2020 the Surface Transportation Board found that the proposed rail line could be constructed and operated as part of the interstate rail network and therefore subject to the Board’s federal jurisdiction.

TEXAS RAIL PLAN
In 2019, TxDOT updated the Texas Rail Plan. TxDOT developed the plan in conjunction with stakeholders and the Federal Rail Administration to address existing and future passenger and freight rail services in Texas. The updated rail plan includes establishing the vision, goals, and objectives for the rail system and its integration into the state’s multimodal transportation system. The plan also includes an inventory of freight and passenger rail infrastructure and an overall needs assessment.

STATEWIDE RAIL SAFETY

HIGHWAY-RAIL SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS
TxDOT administers federal and state programs to improve highway-rail grade crossings by partnering with railroads to install and maintain crossing signals and gates, improve crossing surfaces on state highways, consolidate and close redundant crossings, and construct highway-rail grade separations. TxDOT is also responsible for facilitating railroad involvement with TxDOT highway construction projects. TxDOT executes more than 250 agreements annually with railroad companies for safety, maintenance, and construction activities involving railroad rights of way. TxDOT also administers several programs to improve safety and operations on and around railroad rights of way. TxDOT has begun leveraging federal railroad-highway crossings safety funds and negotiating with the Class I railroads for their cost participation in these safety construction projects.

Funding for the highway-rail safety program includes:

- $15 million per year – Federal Railroad-Highway Crossing Safety & Signal;
- $25 million per year – Federal Railroad Grade Separation;
- $3.5 million per year – State Railroad Grade Crossing Re-planking (Re-Surfacing); and
- $1.1 million per year – State Railroad Signal Maintenance.
RAILROAD SAFETY COMPLIANCE INSPECTIONS

The Federal Rail Administration (FRA) certifies TxDOT railroad investigators to conduct investigative and surveillance activities to ensure that railroad operators comply with federal rail safety regulations, orders, and standards. State railroad investigators conduct safety compliance inspections of railroad facilities and equipment, as do the Federal Rail Administration railroad inspectors, to establish a uniform body of regulation and enforcement. State railroad investigators monitor compliance with both state and federally mandated safety regulations in the areas of hazardous materials, operating practices, locomotive power and equipment, crossing signals, and track conditions.

Since 1982, the State of Texas has supported railroad safety compliance inspection efforts under the Federal Rail Administration State Rail Safety Participation Program. Currently, 30 states and the District of Columbia participate with the Federal Rail Administration program. State railroad investigators conduct compliance inspections of rail track, freight car safety standards, safety appliance, locomotives, signals, and hours of service. States also perform rail hazardous materials inspections and ensure that railroads are properly testing, inspecting, and maintaining automated warning devices at grade crossings. These devices include flashing lights, gates, bells, and related circuitry.

Freight railroad companies pay an annual assessment, referred to as the State Rail Safety Program Fee, based on gross ton-miles. These fee revenues fund the State Rail Safety Inspection Program.

STATE SAFETY OVERSIGHT

In 1996, the United States Congress directed the Federal Transit Administration to establish the State Safety Oversight Program to oversee safety at rail fixed guideway public transportation systems. In 1997, the Texas Legislature designated TxDOT as the administering agency for Texas. In 2017, the Texas Legislature updated state law to bring TxDOT into compliance with additional Federal Transit Administration State Safety Oversight regulations. State Safety Oversight requirements include the development of Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans, accident notification and investigation, hazard management, corrective action oversight, on-site reviews, audit programs, and annual certifications.

Currently, there are six Rail Transit Agencies subject to the provisions of the State Safety Oversight program in Texas:

1. Dallas Area Rapid Transit;
2. Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County;
3. The Dallas Streetcar;
4. McKinney Avenue Transit Authority;
5. El Paso Streetcar; and

As the program administrator, TxDOT works with and provides oversight to these agencies to ensure that they meet federal safety standards.

For more information about State Safety Oversight Program Standard

TxDOT is committed to your safety and to the reliability of the information contained on this site. While road conditions can change rapidly, DriveTexas.org is an industry leader in providing some of the most accurate and up-to-date travel-related information currently available to drivers in Texas. Information presented here is as close to real time as possible. For those who use our roads, please do not use this site while operating a motor vehicle.

Be Safe. Drive Smart. Thank you!

TxDOT's Government Affairs Division works closely with government on both the state and federal levels though the State Legislative Affairs and Federal Affairs sections.

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