

Midwest City seeks out, Yukon shows interest in joining as Regional Transit costs emerge



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Oklahoman
02/27/2022



[The Regional Transportation Authority created to link Oklahoma City and its major suburbs](#) via public transit is proceeding without further participation from its anticipated eastern anchor, Midwest City.

The departure coincides with talks started by another suburb, Yukon, about whether to join the RTA as it begins to compile cost estimates for a north-south rail service between Edmond and Norman.

Midwest City Mayor Matthew Dukes joined the mayors of Edmond, Norman, Moore, Del City and Oklahoma City in creating the [Regional Transit Authority](#) in 2019. The new governmental entity is authorized to call for a property or sales tax election which would need a majority vote of all of the voters in the six cities combined.

Dukes and the Midwest City Council voted in December to end their involvement.

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“I still think the RTA is an excellent idea,” Dukes said. “It’s an idea that should have come to us 30 years ago. I can no longer put forward the financial requirement in good faith ... until some planning and other things take place.”

Planning is advancing on costs and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber has indicated it is prepared to wage a potential campaign to fund the system.

The RTA board was recently given its first glance at the cost of operations for running a commuter rail along the BNSF tracks between Edmond, Oklahoma City, Moore and Norman.

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The latest Kimley Horn study for the RTA shows that yearly operating costs will start at \$10 million for 12 daily round trips with one-hour intervals during peak demand and two-hour intervals for off-peak demand. The estimated cost is \$17.5 million for 24 daily round trips to coincide with more investment in infrastructure.

The study, presented by Kimley Horn consultant Liz Scanlon, also shows that continued phased increased investment will result in operational costs of \$30 million for 44 daily round trips with 15-minute intervals during peak demand and 30-minute intervals during off-peak demand.

Scanlon recommended the district start with basic service and then realize cost efficiencies as ridership grows and trip frequency is increased.

“Goals can scale over time as the corridor matures,” Scanlon said. “You start with Step One and grow interest in rail.”

The Edmond to Norman route is seen as the likely start to any rail-based regional transit, with Interstate 35 remaining congested after a \$400 million rebuild and widening of the highway over the past 40 years.

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The operating cost estimate does not include any bond debt payments, nor does it include capital investment that will include train cars, rail yards, stations, maintenance buildings, crossing signals, passing rails and grade crossings. The transit authority also hasn’t negotiated an access fee with the BNSF.

If and when voters are asked to approve a tax to fund regional transit, part of the message likely will include a warning about the inability of highways like I-35 to adequately serve a metropolitan population that grew from 1.2 million to 1.4 million over the last decade.

The commuter rail being considered for the Edmond to Norman route is a form of transit that is generally less expensive than streetcar or light rail operations. The commuter rail would connect the urban core to surrounding suburbs and operates on standard rail tracks sharing access with freight rail and Amtrak.



The trains are diesel powered and compare to Amtrak passenger cars and can operate at 79 mph. The BNSF Railroad has entered into commuter rail agreements with other communities and is in talks with the Regional Transit Authority to do so in central Oklahoma.

The Union Pacific Railroad has tracks that might also be usable for a west line that could extend the system past Will Rogers World Airport and to Yukon and Mustang. Planning for that route, however, is not funded as Yukon and Mustang have yet to join the transit authority.

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The east route planning, meanwhile, continues without participation by Midwest City. Unlike the other corridors, the east corridor does not provide an existing freight or passenger rail that can be shared by a commuter service so anything along that corridor likely will be built from scratch.

Del City remains in the district and talks are ongoing with Tinker Air Force Base officials on linking it with the regional system. Transit authority chair Brad Henry said the Midwest City Council's decision will, however, exclude the city from having a station, stop or maintenance facility as part of the transit district.

“Based on their action, they will be de-annexed from the RTA district,” Henry said. “Whether Midwest City is in or out, our goal is to service Tinker — that serves all of central Oklahoma and it makes sense.”

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