

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

These questions have been asked during our public outreach efforts to date. If you have other questions, please submit them online at [www.TxOkRail.org](http://www.TxOkRail.org) or to TxDOT Rail Division / 125 E. 11th Street / Austin, TX 78701-2483.

### Why is Texas looking at passenger rail service?

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), along with Oklahoma DOT, is studying passenger rail from Oklahoma City to south Texas because of continued congestion along the IH-35 corridor and because estimates show continuing population growth. With limited funding available for highway improvements and increasing demands on the transportation network, TxDOT is looking into other ways to move people through the region. You can read more about the [congestion and population growth projections](#).

This passenger rail study team is gathering data and looking at the potential opportunity for intercity rail, then recommending options to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for future action. No new rail facilities will be constructed as part of the study.

### Has TxDOT studied this in the past?

In 2010, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) completed a general study of [potential intercity rail service in Texas](#) to consider the demand for rail ridership and the feasibility of an intercity passenger rail system. This 2010 study identified the IH-35 corridor as a potential area for further study because of its high level of congestion and population growth. However, the TTI study did not provide an in-depth evaluation of the corridor.

This study will provide additional analysis, focusing on a detailed review of the IH-35 corridor from central Oklahoma to south Texas. This study includes a service level environmental impact statement (EIS) will provide information about the costs, benefits and impacts of potential intercity passenger rail improvements.

### What is a service level environmental impact statement (EIS)?

A service level EIS explains the impacts, benefits, and costs of each study alternative and compares each to a “no-build” alternative (what the corridor would look like without rail service). This document covers a wide range of topics, including the natural environment (such as fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, and water quality) and community resources (such as economic development, land use, and historic properties). A draft EIS will be prepared and made available for public review to allow the public to provide comments that will be addressed in the final EIS.

This service level EIS is an early step in the process of determining what, if any, passenger rail improvements make sense in the corridor. It will not identify detailed routes or station locations for the passenger rail alternatives.

### How is this study funded? How will construction be funded?

The federal government has provided most of the funding for the service level draft EIS. The study is funded by the following:

- \$5.6 million from a High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail grant from FRA
- \$2.8 million from Texas general revenue
- Federal Highway Administration Statewide Planning and Research funds
- In-kind services to be delivered by TxDOT study partners: Oklahoma DOT and North Central Texas Council of Governments

This service level EIS will not outline how construction would be paid for (or even if anything will be built). Since there is limited funding from the federal government for passenger rail projects, it is possible that the project could be built by the private sector.

## How does this study compare with the cost of the California High-Speed Train Project?

It is hard to compare the two studies because there are major differences between the two. The California High-Speed Train Project, unlike the Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study:

- Examined **every detail related to constructing passenger rail**, including station placement and mitigating negative impacts to the environment or communities along the route.
- Included **more bridges and tunnels** due to more hills and valleys in the area.
- Included **more grade separations** per mile (building bridges or underpasses so that the train does not intersect with roadways).
- Includes plans to **incorporate high speed rail into historic stations** and **connect with new multimodal terminals** (connecting to buses, planes, etc.).
- Is designed for a **statewide rail system** resulting in fewer chances to use existing rail or highway corridors and requiring more properties purchased for new rail alignments.

## When will this study be finished? When will things get built?

TxDOT expects to complete the Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study within the next year. This study will only determine if passenger rail improvements between Oklahoma City and south Texas is feasible. The study will include information that may be used for future projects. As a result, TxDOT does not have a schedule for constructing intercity passenger rail in the corridor.

TxDOT expects to publish the service level draft EIS by the end of 2015. The public and government agencies will be able to review and comment on the findings during an official comment period which will include at least one public hearing. After the public review period is complete, TxDOT and FRA will agree on a preferred alternative (or a package of preferred alternatives for different sections of the corridor) for passenger rail service in the corridor which will be documented in the final EIS.

## How are decisions on the alternatives made?

There are several steps involved with selecting one or more “preferred alternatives.” In April 2013, the study team completed “scoping” to find out the concerns and interests of the community. The team used the scoping comments to create a large list of possible routes and types of service. The team evaluated these options to determine which could be feasible.

The project team took this smaller set of alternatives to the public January and February 2014 for public review. After reviewing that input, TxDOT determined which alternatives should be studied in the service level draft EIS. When the service level draft EIS is complete, the public will be invited to review it. Once the review is complete, TxDOT and FRA will determine preferred alternatives to be carried forward for more detailed study in the future.

## Where will the passenger rail routes go? Will my property be affected?

The alternatives (available at [www.TxOkRail.org](http://www.TxOkRail.org)) that will be evaluated in the service level EIS will be general and will not study impacts to specific properties. Future studies (that would begin after this study is completed) will identify specific alignments for the alternatives and examine property impacts.

The “Alternative Study Report” describes the broad range of alternatives initially considered, and the alternatives that are being carried forward for analyses in the service level EIS (available at [www.TxOkRail.org](http://www.TxOkRail.org)).

### Have you selected station locations?

The service level EIS will not examine specific station locations. However, the study identifies cities that have enough population to potentially justify a station. Stations in these cities will be studied in the service level EIS:

Ardmore, Oklahoma	Dallas, Texas	San Antonio, Texas
Edmond, Oklahoma	Fort Worth, Texas	San Marcos, Texas
Norman, Oklahoma	Gainesville, Texas	Schertz, Texas
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	Harlingen, Texas	Seguin, Texas
Pauls Valley, Oklahoma	Killeen, Texas	Taylor, Texas
Alice, Texas	Kingsville, Texas	Temple, Texas
Austin, Texas	Laredo, Texas, Texas	Waco, Texas
Brownsville, Texas	McAllen, Texas	Waxahachie, Texas
Corpus Christi, Texas	Raymondville, Texas	Weslaco, Texas

### Have you looked into an elevated rail line over the highway?

Elevated rail lines over existing highways was one design option considered as an early step to identifying potential route alternatives. However, existing highways include curves, profiles, and interchanges that are not compatible with the proposed passenger rail systems (look for the “Alternative Study Report” on the Meeting Materials page at [www.TxOkRail.org](http://www.TxOkRail.org)). Because of these compatibility issues, TxDOT eliminated this option from further study.

### Have you thought about a rail line from Dallas to Houston?

A separate study, expected to begin soon, is looking at passenger rail between Houston and Dallas. Once that study begins, more information will be available on the TxDOT website (<http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/projects.html>).

### Are you extending passenger rail service into Mexico?

TxDOT is considering the possibility of coordinating with the Mexican government to provide passenger rail service between the two countries. Route alternatives S4 (to McAllen, Texas) and S6 (near Laredo, Texas) have the option to be extended to Monterrey, Mexico. If the study finds that this extension would create a better alternative which meets the “revenue to operating cost ratio threshold” and other criteria, then this extension could be completed as a separate project in the future. Routes that terminate in south Texas without a link to Mexico are also included in the study.

### Can the existing rail lines be upgraded to work with passenger rail? How fast could trains travel on these existing rail lines if they were improved?

TxDOT is considering several options for passenger rail service. One option is to provide service at roughly current railroad speeds; this option would require the least amount of upgrade to existing rail lines and could include additional service. Depending on the railroad lines selected and specific locations, the maximum speeds

of “conventional” service level alternatives would be between 70 and 90 miles per hour (mph). Some improvements to the existing rail network would be required for capacity or speed.

The second option is a “higher speed” service level, which would include new tracks in existing freight rail rights-of-way. Alternatives at this service level would be designed to operate at maximum speeds of 110 to 125 mph.

Finally, TxDOT is considering a true “high-speed” service level, which would require building all new rail lines because existing freight lines would not be able to share right-of-way with high-speed passenger rail. The maximum speed of high-speed passenger rail would be between 165 and 220 mph.

### **What about the trains that already run? Will existing rail service be interrupted?**

The current train operators are involved with this study and do not expect existing freight and passenger service to be interrupted. The operators have provided information to TxDOT so that future passenger rail service could be coordinated with existing trains.

### **Who will operate the trains?**

Upon completion of this study, TxDOT and FRA will evaluate the opportunity to move forward with the Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail program, including further development of preferred routes and service level options. There are a number of qualified rail operators in the United States; however, the selection decision would come at a much later point in the process.