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Arlington coffers would benefit from trains to entertainment district

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The greatest gift a city can receive is money from people who do not use its services.

This concept is the basis of the worldwide tourism industry and the logic behind government-subsidized recreation areas, sports facilities and hotels.

Arlington knows this well. The city nets millions in revenue from patrons of Cowboys Stadium, Rangers Ballpark in Arlington and Six Flags Over Texas, as well as from taxes on hotels and restaurants near these attractions. Ballpark margaritas, one-night hotel stays, season passes to Six Flags — all of these put money into Arlington's coffers.

But world-class facilities mean nothing if people can't get to them.

Instead of being a well-designed, easy-to-access tourist destination, Arlington's entertainment district serves as proof of why car-centric urban sprawl has been left in the dust by modern, forward-thinking cities. Interstate 30 is all too often a parking lot during rush hour or after major sporting events. Texas 360 is no better.

To their credit, Arlington and the state are spending \$165 million to improve the congested corridor. Nonetheless, Arlington's dependence on roads will be its downfall. These highways simply cannot grow ad infinitum.

It's time for a better solution.

It's time for rail.

One can simply look east to see such a plan in action. The Trinity Railway Express, which gave 2.5 million rides in 2007, has proved popular among Stars and Mavericks fans, as well as conventiongoers and people who want to spend the day in Dallas.

Such a model is prevalent around the nation, especially regarding sports complexes. Rangers Ballpark is one of only two major league stadiums not served by public mass transit and one of nine without a rail station within a mile.

Only four NFL stadiums have no public transit access. Twelve offer access to buses and, once construction is finished on the new stadium in the Meadowlands, home of the New York Giants and Jets — 15 will provide rail connections.

Cities such as Minneapolis, Seattle and Phoenix get it. Public transit — especially rail — connections are good for business. Each of these cities included its baseball and, in two cases, football stadiums in its transit plans. When the Twins play their first game at brand-new Target Field in April, fans will be able to take light-rail trains to a just-as-new station outside the stadium.

Rangers President Nolan Ryan gets it, too. He testified this year before the House Transportation Committee that traffic jams hurt attendance.

Bringing rail transit to Arlington's entertainment district would be advantageous to the city and its entertainment venues.

Fans might take the money they would have otherwise spent on gas and instead use it to buy food, drinks or better tickets. Parents who are leery about letting their teenage children drive through rush hour traffic to a baseball game would be less apprehensive.

Safety would be increased, as well. Fewer cars jockeying for lanes and parking spots means fewer potential points of impact and fewer traffic jams.

A rail connection would also ease the rush hour traffic that usually coincides with the start of sporting events.

Public transit would be mutually advantageous to Arlington, the owners and operators of the city's various entertainment venues and people who live in North Texas.

It would take planning and a great deal of money, but it would have a net positive effect on the city and its bottom line.

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