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It's been almost 80 years since the last passenger rail car ran through Burleson. City of Burleson officials want a passenger rail line to run through Burleson again as part of an overall transportation system improvement program for the region.

Local officials, including members of the Burleson City Council and the Burleson Area Chamber of Commerce, will attend a press conference on Monday, Feb. 16, at 9 a.m. at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport administration building. The conference will be conducted by Sen. John Carona, chairman of the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee. Sen. Carona will unveil the Texas Local Option Transportation Funding Act. The Act will include specific provisions for Rail North Texas, an initiative for local options to construct and operate passenger rail in North Texas. The press conference will include an outline of the legislative bill as well as the release of a public opinion survey on rail service in the six-county North Texas area.

Rail North Texas is the top priority for the City of Burleson in the 81st Legislature as legislative leaders strive to find funding for rail expansion. The city council adopted a resolution in January to support the Rail North Texas initiative. The Regional Transportation Council (RTC), comprised of local elected officials from the North Central Texas Council of Governments and designated by the state as the transportation policy body for the region, has also made Rail North Texas its highest legislative priority. The RTC is advocating additional transportation funding and flexibility to address not only mobility but air quality throughout North Texas. The region is preparing to address the transportation needs of the projected 9 million residents who will live in this region by 2030. The RTC has asked the legislature to allow local voters to choose from a variety of taxes and fees to pay for the extension of passenger rail.

Burleson is part of the proposed Cleburne line, which will tie Cleburne to Fort Worth. This line, also called the W-4 line for planning purposes by the RTC, will span 27 miles and connect Cleburne, Burleson, Joshua and Crowley to the Intermodal Transportation Center and T&P Terminal in downtown Fort Worth. The Cleburne (W-4) line will be on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line in Johnson and Tarrant counties. It is one of eight proposed rail corridors in the region. Planners predict a ridership of 5,000 daily on the Cleburne line. That number is equivalent to one lane, in each direction, of drivers on the highway.

The Cleburne line will include one station in Crowley, Burleson, and Joshua. Cleburne will have two stations. Burleson's rail station site is located along the BNSF rail line in the northwest quadrant of Shaffstall Road in southwest Burleson. The City of Burleson annexed 653 acres in that area in November 2005 in order to plan for the transit-oriented development that will surround the rail station.

On Wednesday, Feb. 18, the City of Burleson will host a meeting at city hall beginning at 9 a.m. to discuss the findings of the Johnson County Passenger Rail Study, prepared by TranSystems Corporation and managed by the North Central Texas Council of Governments and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (the T). The study, funded by a federal grant and by the cities of Burleson, Cleburne, Crowley, and Joshua, addresses the Cleburne/W-4 line. Representatives from each city as well as these other organizations will be in attendance.

For more information on Burleson's participation in the Rail North Texas project, contact Deputy City Manager David Wynn at 817-447-5400, extension 212, or City Manager Curtis Hawk at 817-447-5400, extension 213. For more information about the regional transportation improvements including Rail North Texas, log on to the North Central Texas Council of Government web site at www.nctcog.org/rnt.