

DART addresses White Rock Trail concerns

Jun 12 2009, 1:05 pm by LHT Staff



LHN neighbors front porch opinions

DART representatives were in Lake Highlands for yet another meeting about the hotly debated east side access to its planned light rail station near White Rock Trail.

A standing room crowd of Lake Highlands North residents and interested neighbors attended the meeting Thursday evening at the Lake Highlands North Rec Center.

The meeting was called as new signs protesting DART's plans to provide pedestrian access along White Rock Trail have sprung up throughout Lake Highlands North. The community has grown increasingly divided over the issue.

"We don't want east side access onto White Rock Trail, period. We're all for DART and we're all for development, but east side access is a bad idea," said LHN resident Melissa Amick.

Amick and other residents opposed to east side access cite several concerns, including increased traffic and crime, safety issues along the street and the possible expansion of White Rock Trail to accommodate higher pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Supporters of the access point, such as Lake Highlands North resident Brad Stansberry, say the rail station and east side access will benefit the neighborhood and the entire Lake Highlands community.

"I understand the initial reaction of fear, but there's no data to support increased crime associated with these stations. Our property values will increase and we're excited about easy access to downtown and sporting events," Stansberry said.

DART representatives outlined three key elements to their proposal at the meeting – increased west side parking in the Town Center, the planned hike and bike trail and parking enforcement.

While better parking options and enforcement measures are needed, DART says the city's planned

hike and bike trail through the Town Center and onto White Rock Trail is critical.

"If the city builds a trail system, we'll be a good partner. If there is no trail system, there is no east side access from White Rock Trail," said DART Chief Architect David Ehrlicher.

In his presentation, Ehrlicher said DART is still considering preferred access options presented by the Lake Highlands North HOA and did not rule out Walnut Hill as a possibility for pedestrian access.

Also in attendance Thursday were representatives from White Rock North School . The facility has operated for more than 45 years in its location very close to the proposed White Rock Trail access point. A lawyer for the school says it supports development in the area but stopped short of endorsing east side access.

"The school's top priority is the safety and security of its children. We'll cooperate with DART and we expect them to consider the safety needs of the students," said Rory Nerenberg.

DART says safe and efficient access to the station is a top planning priority. The group is expected to update Lake Highlands residents again in mid-August.

