

Museum of the American Railroad Frisco, Texas



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Railroad Museum Moving to Frisco, Texas

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The Museum of the American Railroad has entered into an agreement with the City of Frisco to relocate its permanent collection and operations to that city. The new museum will anchor other cultural heritage facilities and compliment a system of planned parks and recreational areas.

Formerly known as the “Age of Steam”, the Museum of the American Railroad is a 45-year old Dallas institution currently located in Fair Park. It houses an extensive collection of historic locomotives, rail passenger cars, and related artifacts. The museum’s mission is to *...share with the general public the heritage, as well as the current and future development of American Railroading through artistic, cultural and educational programming.*

The museum completed a comprehensive strategic plan in 2006 which calls for a minimum 9 acre site, with 15 acres optimal. Prepared by M. Goodwin Associates of Los Angeles, the plan points out challenges at Fair Park, but the principal constraint is the lack of space at its present 1.8 acre site. The strategic plan was the product of a reorganization of the museum which included new governance, a new name, and a new focus on programming that appeals to today’s audience. The City of Frisco became aware of the museum’s plans for expansion and contacted officials in early 2007.

“In terms of our current and future needs, we see Frisco as an excellent fit for us”, said Bob LaPrelle, the museum’s CEO. The City of Frisco has committed a 12.3 acre site to the museum along with certain improvements. This will allow the museum to construct permanent structures that will adequately exhibit and protect its collection. The museum has struggled with space constraints for years at its present location and currently has one quarter of its collection of rail cars stored off-site.

The museum was slated to receive equity funds as part of Fair Park’s share of the 2006 Bond Program. The funds would have gone toward the purchase of 1.4 acres adjacent to the park. The acreage, along with additional property, still fell short of providing adequate space for an expanded museum. The museum was facing several more years of space constraints and a further downsizing of its present operations before any expansion could begin at Fair Park. This was inconsistent with plans to expand programs and reach a growing audience in North Texas.

The railroad museum has enjoyed a good relationship with the City of Dallas, and has been a State Fair tradition for over four decades but had outgrown its original footprint many years ago. “Space is at a premium in Fair Park, and railroad museums require a lot of space – 26 acres on the average. It’s really a business decision; we reached a point where it was more beneficial to put our resources toward creating a new environment for the museum versus addressing the challenges at our current location. There is some disappointment that we couldn’t reach a mutually beneficial arrangement at Fair Park”, said LaPrelle.

The museum has made a major reinvestment in its collection of historic trains which has national prominence. It recently added five cars and two operational diesel locomotives to its new streamliner passenger train exhibit. The museum currently hosts over 70,000 visitors each year, including its largest annual event, *Day Out with Thomas*, which is held off-site and attracts families from around Texas and neighboring states.

The City of Frisco has embraced its railroad heritage and offers opportunities for the museum to become a major north Texas destination with international appeal. The new center for railroad history and technology will be built around the museum’s 36-piece collection of historic locomotives and rail cars. The present operation at Fair Park is held by many as one of the most promising museums in the area. The City of Frisco recognized the museum’s potential and demonstrated a willingness to invest in its future. The collection is now poised to become one of the finest presentations of historic trains in the nation.

The agreement with Frisco was reached after extensive discussions between museum trustees and city officials. Plans for the new museum are well underway and call for a 200,000 square foot facility reminiscent of a large, turn-of-the-century train station. The main exhibits building will resemble a large train station. Boston’s famous North Station architecture is being considered, as it compliments Frisco’s new cityscape. The museum will be a grand public space and serve as a multi-use center for community activity. The trains will be the focus of entertaining, educational programs by day and become a dramatic backdrop for evening events including visual and performing arts.

As an anchor arts and cultural institution in Frisco, the museum will serve surrounding school districts with its interactive educational tours and history-oriented in-class programs. Through expanded programs, the museum will entertain and educate visitors and students in the cultural history and technology of railroading as well as the industry’s profound effect on the growth and prosperity of the nation.

“Since Frisco is named after the St. Louis – San Francisco Railway and the original township was laid out by the railroad, it is great that the Museum of the American Railroad is coming to our city,” said George Purefoy, City Manager. “With the museum’s world class collection of rolling stock and their commitment to celebrating the history of railroads in the United States, we look forward to working together to preserving the spirit of the American Railroad.”

The new Museum of the American Railroad will anchor other cultural heritage facilities in Frisco and compliment a 250 acre system of planned outdoor spaces and recreational areas known as *Grand Park*. For more information about the Museum of the American Railroad and its plans for the future, go to www.dallasrailwaymuseum.com and click on *Visions 2006*.

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