traveling to jobs in the corridor and in downtown Dallas, and residents from elsewhere in the region traveling to jobs in the corridor (reverse commute).

- **Improve Accessibility and Increase Economic Development Opportunities**
  The Irving/DFW LRT Line will provide access for residents and visitors to the employment centers, educational institutions, health services, entertainment, and a major international airport in the corridor. This increased accessibility will strengthen economic conditions to existing activity centers, and provide an opportunity for development of further economic activity at other locations in the corridor. The Irving/DFW line is also expected to encourage opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) within the corridor, which seeks to reduce automobile dependence by concentrating commerce, services and residences around rail stations. DART has already experienced successful TODs at locations such as Mockingbird Station in Dallas, Galatyn Park in Richardson, and downtown Plano.

The transportation needs described demonstrate that improvements are needed to meet the anticipated demands of travelers in the corridor and region.

The DART LRT, commuter rail and bus system offers travel choices for current and prospective transit riders. The proposed expansion of the LRT system in the Irving/DFW corridor will further add to those choices for transit users in the corridor and from throughout the region.

## 1.5 PLANNING CONTEXT

The evaluation of transportation needs in the Northwest Corridor has been oriented toward the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) planning and project development process. The decision-making framework and the process used in selecting the recommended improvements are described below.

### 1.5.1 Decision Framework

The decision-making process is framed by DART's 1995 amendment to its ***Transit System Plan***, which identified a need in the Northwest Corridor. As shown in **Figure 1-4**, DART completed a Needs Assessment in 1997. This initial step examined the corridor needs and defined the issues to be addressed in the MIS. The needs assessment also defined a comprehensive Public and Agency Involvement Program that provided specific opportunities for review and input from the general public, public agencies and other stakeholders. In the spring of 1998, DART initiated the MIS process for the Northwest Corridor. These efforts were coordinated with the NCTCOG (the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region), and other affected agencies such as the cities of Dallas and Irving and the Texas Department of Transportation.

### 1.5.2 Selection of the LPIS and Subsequent Refinements

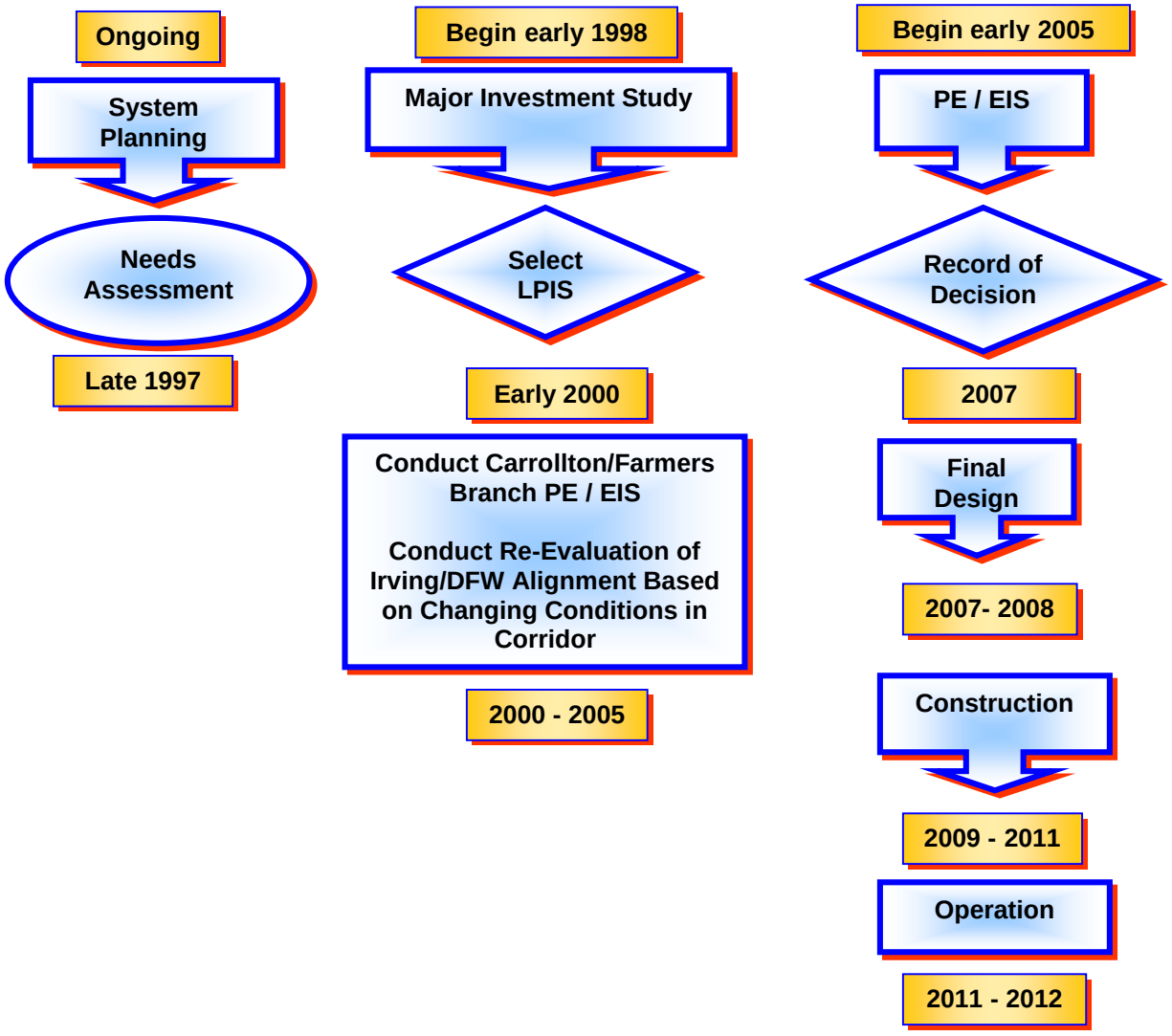
The Northwest Corridor MIS provided a decision-making process for determining transportation investments in the Northwest Corridor and relied upon technical analyses and community and agency input for determining the preferred alternative. On February 22, 2000, the DART Board of Directors approved an LPIS that combined LRT improvements in the corridor with Highway/High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) and Transportation System Management (TSM) components (low-cost transportation improvements and freeway bottleneck removal projects).

The LPIS alignment for the Irving/DFW LRT Line crossed the Trinity River, paralleled Spur 482 and SH 114, and terminated at the north end of DFW International Airport east of International Parkway and south of SH 114.

Since completion of the MIS in 2000, several factors have contributed to revising the alignment of the Irving/DFW LRT Line. The construction of SH 161 and plans to expand SH 114 has constrained available right-of-way. Significant new development within the corridor has become an

impediment to the MIS alignment. This development has also prompted the City of Irving to reconsider how well the proposed project would serve growing activity centers. DART has worked with the City of Irving, property owners, and other stakeholders to revise the original MIS LPIS alignment so as to address these concerns and better serve the activities in the corridor.

**Figure 1-4**
**Project Development Process**




Starting in 2001, the ***DFW International Airport Rail Planning and Implementation Study*** was conducted to determine the feasibility and possible routes for providing LRT and commuter rail to the Central Terminal Area of the airport. The study was completed in February 2002, and identified three options for the DART Irving/DFW LRT Line to enter the airport from the north, south, or central. No preference for any the three alignments was made nor recommended; the study noted that DART would determine the preferred alignment during the Irving/DFW PE/EIS. The three airport access options prompted consideration of alternative LRT options through north Irving, which were developed, studied, discussed with stakeholders and presented to the public during public meetings conducted in 2004 and 2005. A detailed description of the alignment modifications made since completion of the MIS is provided in Section 2.1.5 in Chapter 2.

Given the complexity of serving the airport and the accompanying need for further study, a decision has been made to phase the project with Phase I terminating prior to entering the Central Terminal Area of the airport. FTA and DART have determined that an interim terminus at Belt Line Road is appropriate. Phase I of this project, with an interim terminus at Belt Line Road, and Phase II, terminating at DFW International Airport, have been determined to have independent utility.

All alignment options through the North Irving Sub-area, termination points and the phasing of the project were discussed during the Scoping process. Eight stations, two being deferred, are proposed for Phase I, terminating at Belt Line Road.

**Figure 1-5** shows the revised preferred alignment of the Irving/DFW LRT Line. The Irving/DFW LRT Line begins at the Northwest Corridor LRT Line to Farmers Branch and Carrollton near the Bachman LRT station. Extending southwest parallel to Spur 482 the line crosses IH-35E and the Elm Fork of the Trinity River, and continues into the City of Irving. Turning northwest and passing Texas Stadium parallel to SH 114 the alignment crosses into the Las Colinas Urban Center and enters the median of Lake Carolyn Parkway. It then exits the urban center by crossing south of SH 114 near Northwest Highway, and continues west, crossing Walnut Hill Lane and onto DFW International Airport property southeast of the intersection of Valley View Lane and Belt Line Road. From here any of the three airport access options may be considered for the next phase of the project. Airport access options extending from Belt Line Road to the DFW Central Terminal Area will continue to be studied and evaluated by DART, DFW Airport, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and others, but are not proposed to be part of this EIS.

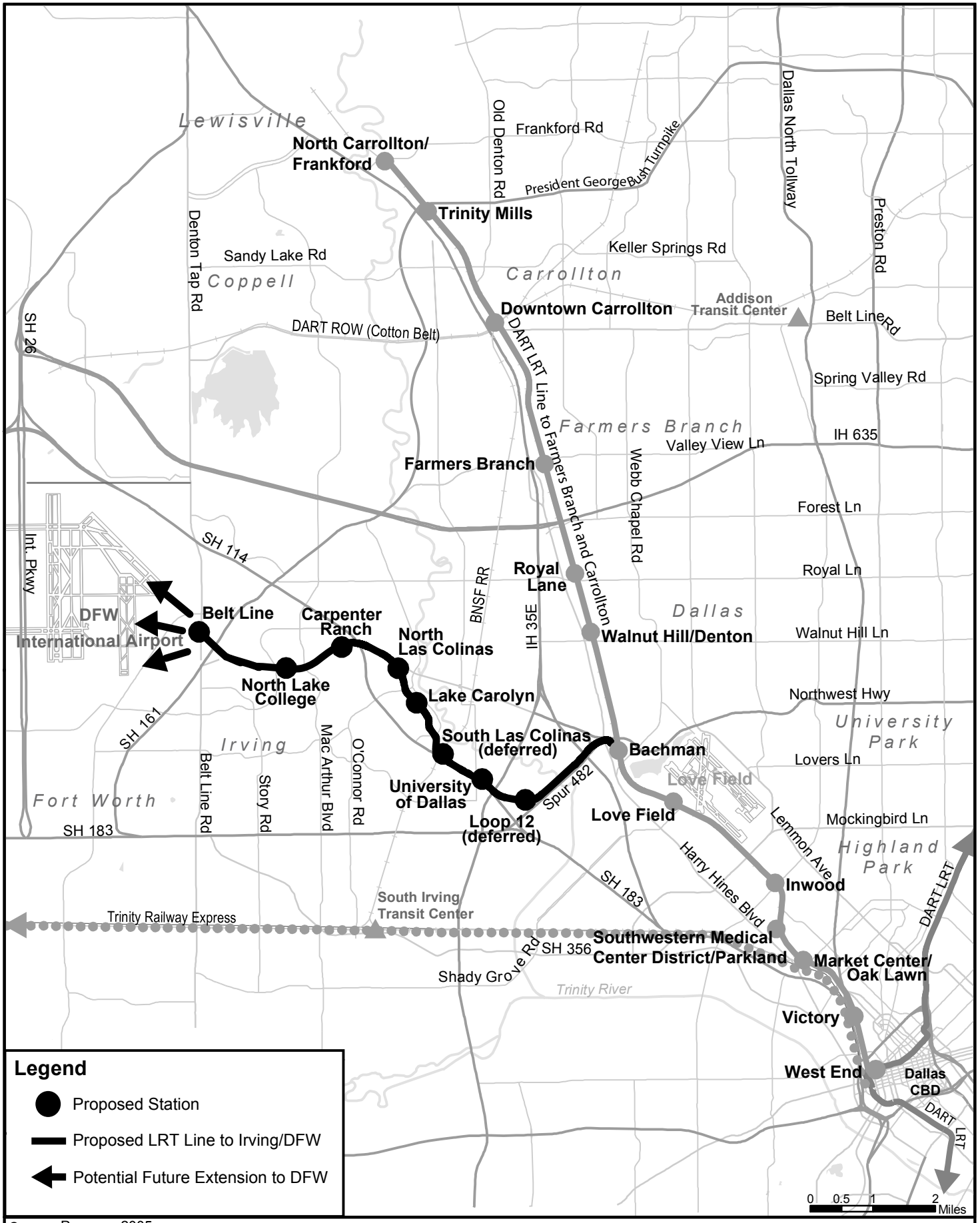
### 1.5.3 The Role of the EIS in Project Development

FTA, in cooperation with FAA and DART, is using the FTA project development process illustrated in **Figure 1-4** to guide the implementation of the proposed action. The EIS is prepared in accordance with FTA guidelines in order to fulfill the requirements of NEPA. These requirements define the process to be followed to ensure that reasonable and feasible transportation solution alternatives are evaluated, and that the environmental effects of proposed improvements are assessed thoroughly.

Since the LRT alignment will extend into DFW International Airport, FAA is participating as a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EIS. FAA has jurisdiction over airports and will provide expertise and oversight in airport related content necessary to fulfill NEPA requirements.

The EIS is prepared as a full-disclosure document and is intended to inform the public of potential environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with the proposed LRT project and the No-Build Alternative. The No-Build Alternative represents the base condition for identifying impacts associated with the proposed action (Build Alternative).

The EIS serves as the primary document to facilitate review by federal, state, and local agencies and the general public of the proposed project. The EIS documents the purpose and need for the project and describes the alternatives considered. It addresses in detail the anticipated transportation and environmental impacts of the project and identifies appropriate mitigation measures.




*Source:* Parsons, 2005

Figure 1-5

**Proposed Irving/DFW LRT Line**

NW Corridor LRT Line to Irving/DFW
Environmental Impact Statement

Northwest Corridor LRT Line to Irving/DFW

N

This Draft EIS will be circulated for a required 45-day review and public comment period. During this comment period, the Draft EIS will be made available to interested parties including private citizens, community groups, the business community, elected officials and public agencies. A series of public hearings will be held within the project Study Area to formally receive comments. Public comments may be submitted in writing throughout the full comment period.

After circulation of the Draft EIS, preliminary engineering and environmental studies will be completed. Mitigation commitments, where necessary, will be identified and responses to comments received during the Draft EIS comment period will be prepared. A Final EIS will incorporate all of these elements and will be published and made available to the public. Subsequent to the issuance of the Final EIS, FTA may approve the EIS by issuing a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD for this EIS is anticipated in 2008. As a cooperating agency the FAA may also issue a ROD for the project. Upon receipt of the RODs the project will be advanced to final design and construction.

System planning, the MIS, and the PE/EIS are considered to be project planning phases. Following the PE/EIS, final design will be conducted. The Phase I Project terminating at Belt Line Road is not an FTA Section 5309 New Starts Project. The LRT line will be financed through a combination of federal and local funding. Federal financing will include funds available through the Transit Strategic Funding Program (Partnership Program 2) designed to flex Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funds to make transit-related improvements in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The program is administered through the Regional Transportation Council (RTC), which serves as the transportation policy board of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Local financing includes contributions from DART as well as the City of Irving which, through an interlocal agreement with DART, has committed $60 million (1999$) towards implementation of this project.

The future Phase II Project, extending from Belt Line Road to the DFW Central Terminal Area, is a potential candidate for a FTA Section 5309 New Starts Project in the recently adopted Federal Public Transportation Law (SAFETEA-LU: the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users), enacted on August 10, 2005.