

Airtrans Shut Down Amid Controversy

By PAT SVACINA

Dallas-Fort Worth Airport's Airtrans was shut down at midnight Thursday after the airport board refused acceptance of the "people-mover" system.

LTV Aerospace Corp. ordered its Airtrans maintenance crew to leave the airport when disagreement over the system's performance resulted in the board's Thursday afternoon decision.

DFW Airport Executive Director Ernest Dean said the Airtrans back-up system—Surtran buses—was ordered into operation immediately.

In its third meeting in two weeks, the board was behind closed doors for more than three hours before voting 7-2 not to submit to LTV's demand that Airtrans be accepted. The center of the controversy is whether Airtrans is performing up to standards set out in the airport's contract with LTV or whether the board now wants higher standards.

DALLAS MAYOR Wes Wise and J. Lee Johnson of Fort Worth cast the two opposition votes and then quickly slipped out of the meeting before reporters could talk to them.

In a prepared statement read after

the meeting, board chairman Erik Jonsson said the majority of the board felt it could not "responsibly accede to this demand."

He said LTV wanted Airtrans accepted whether or not it is working and despite the fact only the passenger and supply moving system are in regular service. The other systems—baggage and mail, airline employee transportation, trash removal and air-mail service—have had little or no actual operating experience, he said.

To avert the shutdown, which has loomed as a possibility since January, Jonsson said the board offered to pay part of what is still owed on the con-

tract if LTV would do intense testing to see if everything works properly.

ROBERT S. BUZARD, LTV's Airtrans head, called the compromise offer "unreasonable." He said the initial maintenance contract between the airport and LTV ended Jan. 24 and the board wants LTV to maintain the system free of charge while the airport "collects all the quarters."

The LTV vice-president of engineering and logistics argued that Airtrans is operating up to contract specifications, but the U. S. Postal Service and the airlines want faster service. He called the airlines and post office

a third party with a "distressing" veto power.

Although LTV's withdrawal does not legally prevent the airport from operating Airtrans, Dean ordered the back-up buses for safety reasons. Some LTV crews, however, stayed on to "secure equipment and preserve the system from deterioration" while Airtrans is shut down.

Neither side speculated about immediate legal action, but the board's decision to allow the shutdown was taken as a sign that the board was prepared to go to court.

Airtrans cost \$34 million to build, much of which has been paid. Added to

the remaining part of the contract, however, is \$15 million in additional claims by LTV.

Airtrans first came under fire shortly after the airport opened in January, 1973 when frequent breakdowns forced its use only on a limited basis. National attention, much of it derisive, was drawn to its problems by newsmen who were using the system when it broke down.

LTV said Airtrans has moved more than three million passengers since January, 1973 and now boasts operating efficiency of better than 99 per cent.