



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 29, 2006

Ms. Paula J. Alexander  
General Counsel  
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas  
P. O. Box 61429  
Houston, Texas 77208-1429

OR2006-06940

Dear Ms. Alexander:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 252849.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County ("METRO") received a request for copies of (1) "any and all studies, reports or other data compilations regarding placing the light rail line on Westpark (including prior drafts of each such document);" and (2) "any and all studies, reports or other data compilations regarding placing a light rail line on Richmond (including all prior drafts of each such document)." You state that METRO will release some of the responsive information to the requestor. You claim that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note that METRO has failed to comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. Section 552.301 prescribes procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Section 552.301(b) requires the governmental body to ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions to disclosure that it claims not later than the tenth business day after the date of its receipt of the written request for information. *See Gov't Code § 552.301(b)*. If a governmental body fails to comply with section 552.301, the requested information is presumed to be subject to required public disclosure and must be released, unless there is a compelling reason to withhold any of the information. *See id.*

§ 552.302; *See also Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ).

Because METRO did not request this decision within the ten-business-day period prescribed by section 552.301(b), the submitted information is presumed to be public under section 552.302. This statutory presumption can generally be overcome when the information is confidential by law or third-party interests are at stake. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982)*. Although you seek to withhold the submitted information under section 552.111 of the Government Code, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Gov't Code § 552.007; Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions), 470 at 7 (1987) (statutory predecessor to section 552.111 subject to waiver)*. Therefore, METRO's claim under section 552.111 is not a compelling reason for non-disclosure under section 552.302 and no portion of the submitted information may be withheld under that exception. As METRO claims no other exception to disclosure, the submitted information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

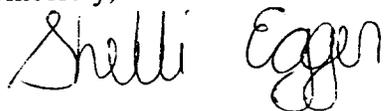
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Office of the Attorney General at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelli Egger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shelli Egger  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SE/krl

Ref: ID# 252849

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. John Dorsa  
Attorney at Law  
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(w/o enclosures)