



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 1, 2007

Ms. Sharon Alexander  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2007-09765

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# 285385.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for the submissions made by the five companies awarded contracts in Request for Proposal 12-748P5015. Although the department raises no arguments against disclosure of the submitted information, the department believes this information may involve the proprietary interests of third parties. Accordingly, you inform us, and provide documentation showing, that pursuant to section 552.305 of the Government Code, the department notified the interested third parties, Aviles Engineering Corp; Fugro Consultants LP; Geotech Engineering and Testing, Inc.; HVJ Associates, Inc.; and Raba Kistner Consultants, Inc. of the request for information and of their right to submit arguments explaining why the information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in certain circumstances). We have reviewed the submitted information.

We note that an interested third party is allowed ten business days after the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305(d) to submit its reasons, if any, as

to why information relating to that party should be withheld from public disclosure. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this ruling, we have not received arguments for withholding the submitted information from any of the interested third parties. Therefore, we have no basis to conclude that the release of any of the submitted information would harm the proprietary interests of these companies. *See id.* § 551.110(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 661 at 5-6 (1999) (stating that business enterprise that claims exception for commercial or financial information under section 552.110(b) must show by specific factual evidence that release of requested information would cause that party substantial competitive harm), 552 at 5 (1990) (party must establish prima facie case that information is trade secret). Accordingly, we conclude that the department may not withhold any portion of the submitted information on the basis of any proprietary interest that the third parties may have in it. As you raise no other exception to disclosure of the submitted information, it must be released to the requestor.

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).

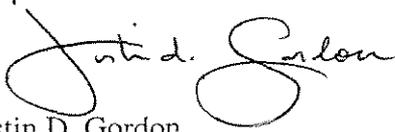
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records 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 cursive script that reads "Justin D. Gordon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Justin D. Gordon  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

JDG/eeg

Ref: ID# 285385

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Robert Jefferies  
10810 Northwest Freeway  
Houston, Texas 77092  
(w/o enclosures)