



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 26, 2010

Ms. Pauline E. Higgins
Senior Vice President and General Counsel
Metropolitan Transit Authority
P.O. Box 61429
Houston, Texas 77208-1429

OR2010-01226

Dear Ms. Higgins:

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# 368200 (METRO Request No. 2010-0009).

The Metropolitan Transit Authority (the "METRO") received a request for traffic engineering studies from 2008 and 2009. 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.

Initially, we note that the 2009 study constitutes a completed report made for METRO subject to 552.022(a)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(1) provides for required public disclosure of "a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body[.]" unless the information is expressly confidential under other law or excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). You seek to withhold the information at issue under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Section 552.111 of the Government Code is a discretionary exception and does not make information confidential; therefore, METRO may not withhold the 2009 report under this exception. *See* Open Records Decision No. 473 (1987) (section 552.111 may be waived). As you raise no further exceptions for this information, it must be released.

We now address your argument for the remaining information. You assert that the 2008 study is subject to section 552.111 of the Government Code, which excepts from disclosure

“an interagency or intraagency memorandum or letter that would not be available by law to a party in litigation with the agency.” Gov’t Code § 552.111. This exception encompasses the deliberative process privilege. *See* Open Records Decision No. 615 at 2 (1993). The purpose of section 552.111 is to protect advice, opinion, and recommendation in the decisional process and to encourage open and frank discussion in the deliberative process. *See Austin v. City of San Antonio*, 630 S.W.2d 391, 394 (Tex. App.—San Antonio 1982, no writ); Open Records Decision No. 538 at 1-2 (1990).

In Open Records Decision No. 615, this office re-examined the statutory predecessor to section 552.111 in light of the decision in *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ). We determined that section 552.111 excepts from disclosure only those internal communications that consist of advice, recommendations, opinions, and other material reflecting the policymaking processes of the governmental body. *See* ORD 615 at 5. A governmental body’s policymaking functions do not encompass routine internal administrative or personnel matters, and disclosure of information about such matters will not inhibit free discussion of policy issues among agency personnel. *Id.*; *see also City of Garland v. Dallas Morning News*, 22 S.W.3d 351 (Tex. 2000) (section 552.111 not applicable to personnel-related communications that did not involve policymaking). A governmental body’s policymaking functions do include administrative and personnel matters of broad scope that affect the governmental body’s policy mission. *See* Open Records Decision No. 631 at 3 (1995).

Further, section 552.111 does not protect facts and written observations of facts and events that are severable from advice, opinions, and recommendations. *See* ORD 615 at 5. But if factual information is so inextricably intertwined with material involving advice, opinion, or recommendation as to make severance of the factual data impractical, the factual information also may be withheld under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 313 at 3 (1982).

This office has also concluded that a preliminary draft of a document that is intended for public release in its final form necessarily represents the drafter’s advice, opinion, and recommendation with regard to the form and content of the final document, so as to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.111. *See* Open Records Decision No. 559 at 2 (1990) (applying statutory predecessor). Section 552.111 protects factual information in the draft that also will be included in the final version of the document. *See id.* at 2-3. Thus, section 552.111 encompasses the entire contents, including comments, underlining, deletions, and proofreading marks, of a preliminary draft of a policymaking document that will be released to the public in its final form. *See id.* at 2.

Section 552.111 can also encompass communications between a governmental body and a third-party consultant. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 631 at 2 (section 552.111 encompasses information created for governmental body by outside consultant acting at governmental body’s request and performing task that is within governmental body’s authority), 561 at 9 (1990) (section 552.111 encompasses communications with party with

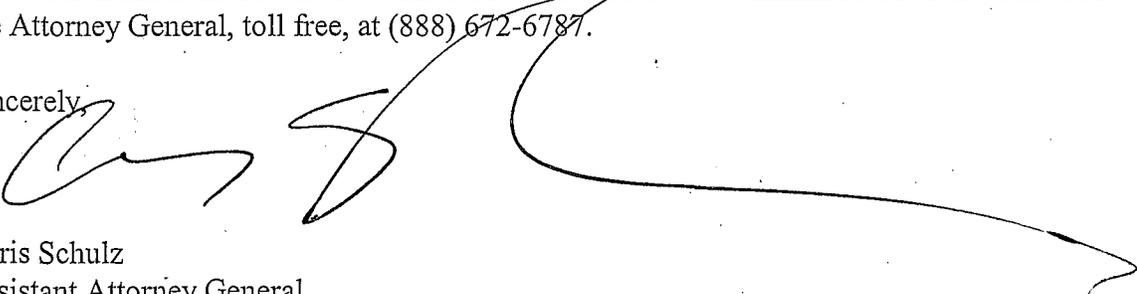
which governmental body has privity of interest or common deliberative process), 462 at 14 (1987) (section 552.111 applies to memoranda prepared by governmental body's consultants). For section 552.111 to apply, the governmental body must identify the third-party and explain the nature of its relationship with the governmental body. Section 552.111 is not applicable to a communication between the governmental body and a third-party unless the governmental body establishes it has a privity of interest or common deliberative process with the third-party. *See* ORD 561 at 9.

You inform this office that METRO commissioned a study in 2008 pertaining to traffic congestion. You state the 2008 study is in draft form. You indicate the completed study will be released to the public. After reviewing your arguments and the information at issue, we find that METRO may withhold the 2008 study under section 552.111 of the Government Code. The remaining information must be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information 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 information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php, or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Chris Schulz
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CS/cc

Ref: ID# 368200

Enc. Submitted documents

cc: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)