



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 18, 2013

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

OR2013-18136

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# 502794.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for signal plans and designs for specific crossings located in Midland, Texas. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code and section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

We note the submitted information includes Railroad Signal Master Agreements that fall within the scope of section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a)(3) provides for required public disclosure of "information in an account, voucher, or contract relating to the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by a governmental body," unless the information is expressly confidential under the Act or other law. *See Gov't Code* § 552.022(a)(3). Although you raise section 552.111 of the Government Code, this section does not make information confidential under the Act. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 665*

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<sup>1</sup>We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988)*. This open records letter does not reach, and does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than those submitted to this office.

at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 470 (1987) (statutory predecessor to section 552.111 subject to waiver). Therefore, the department may not withhold the information at issue under section 552.111. However, the department also contends this information is excepted from disclosure under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. We note section 409 is "other law" that makes information confidential for purposes of section 552.022(a). See *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. 2001); see also *Pierce County v. Guillen*, 537 U.S. 129 (2003) (upholding constitutionality of section 409, relied on by county in denying request under state's Public Disclosure Act). Accordingly, we will consider your argument under section 409 for the information subject to section 552.022. Additionally, we will consider your arguments for the information not subject to section 552.022.

You contend the information subject to section 552.022 is excepted from disclosure under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. Section 409 provides:

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying, evaluating, or planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites, hazardous roadway conditions, or railway-highway crossings, pursuant to sections 130, 144, and 148 of this title or for the purpose of developing any highway safety construction improvement project which may be implemented utilizing Federal-aid highway funds shall not be subject to discovery or admitted into evidence in a Federal or State court proceeding or considered for other purposes in any action for damages arising from any occurrence at a location mentioned or addressed in such reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data.

23 U.S.C. § 409. Federal courts have stated section 409 excludes from evidence data compiled for purposes of highway and railroad crossing safety enhancement and construction for which a state receives federal funding, in order to facilitate candor in administrative evaluations of highway safety hazards and to prevent federally required record-keeping from being used for purposes of private litigation. See *Harrison v. Burlington N. R.R.*, 965 F.2d 155, 160 (7th Cir. 1992); *Robertson v. Union Pac. R.R.*, 954 F.2d 1433, 1435 (8th Cir. 1992); see also *Pierce*, 537 U.S. at 129.

You state the subject railway-highway crossings are always eligible for federal aid under section 103 of title 23 of the United States Code and are therefore federal-aid highways for the purposes of section 409 of title 23. You further state the information at issue was collected and compiled for highway safety purposes. You also state section 409 of title 23 would protect the information at issue from discovery in civil litigation. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the information subject to section 552.022 in the submitted information is excepted under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code.

We now address your argument under section 552.111 of the Government Code for the remaining information not subject to section 552.022. Section 552.111 excepts from disclosure “[a]n 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 information protected by civil discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 647 at 3 (1996), 251 at 2-4 (1980). You claim the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 because it would be privileged from discovery under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. Furthermore, you state the information at issue was created for highway safety purposes. Based on your representations and review, we find the remaining information may be withheld under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

In summary, the information that is subject to section 552.022 is excepted from disclosure under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. The department may withhold the remaining information under section 552.111 of the Government Code.

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.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), 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 may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Britni Fabian  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

BF/dls

Ref: ID# 502794

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)