



February 5, 2015

Ms. Shannon C. Francis
Assistant County Attorney
County of Williamson
405 M.L.K. Street, #7
Georgetown, Texas 78626

OR2015-02313

Dear Ms. Francis:

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# 555314.

Williamson County (the "county") received a request for records pertaining to a specified study. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note you indicate a portion of the submitted information is not responsive to the instant request for information. This ruling does not address the public availability of any information that is not responsive to the request, and the county is not required to release such information in response to this request.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information protected by other statutes, including federal law. On November 25, 2002, the president signed the Homeland Security Act ("HSA"). The HSA created the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") and transferred the Transportation Security Administration ("TSA"), a new agency created in the

Department of Transportation (“DOT”) the previous year to oversee the security of transportation, to DHS. *See* 6 U.S.C. §§ 111, 203.

In connection with the transfer of TSA to DHS, the HSA also transferred TSA’s authority concerning sensitive security information (“SSI”) under section 40119 of title 49 of the United States Code to section 114(r) of title 49 of the United States Code and amended section 40119 to vest similar SSI authority in the secretary of DOT.¹ Section 114(r) of title 49 states, in part, the following:

(1) Notwithstanding [the Federal Freedom of Information Act (the “FOIA”),] the Under Secretary [for Transportation Security, head of TSA] shall prescribe regulations prohibiting the disclosure of information obtained or developed in carrying out security under authority of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act . . . if the Under Secretary decides disclosing the information would

. . .

(C) be detrimental to the security of transportation.

49 U.S.C. § 114(r)(1)(C). This provision authorizes the TSA’s Under Secretary to prescribe regulations that prohibit disclosure of information requested not only under the FOIA, but also under other disclosure statutes. *Cf. Public Citizen, Inc. v. Federal Aviation Administration*, 988 F.2d 186, 194 (D.C. Cir. 1993) (former section 40119 authorized Federal Aviation Administration administrator to prescribe regulations prohibiting disclosure of information under other statutes as well as under FOIA). Thus, the Under Secretary is authorized by section 114(r) to prescribe regulations that prohibit disclosure of information requested under the Act.

Pursuant to the mandate and authority of section 114 of title 49, TSA published regulations in title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations that took effect June 17, 2004. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 28066. Section 1520.1(a) of these regulations provides that the regulations govern the “maintenance, safeguarding, and disclosure of records and information that TSA has determined to be [SSI], as defined in § 1520.5.” 49 C.F.R. § 1520.1(a). Section 1520.7 states that the covered persons to which these regulations apply include, among others, to “[e]ach person who has access to SSI, as specified in § 1520.11.” *Id.* § 1520.7(j). Pursuant to section 1520.11(a), a person has a need to know SSI “[w]hen the person requires access to specific SSI to carry out transportation security activities approved, accepted, funded, recommended, or directed by DHS or DOT.” *Id.* § 1520.11(a). Section 1520.11(b) further states that a local government employee has a need to know SSI “if access to the information

¹This ruling does not construe the parallel federal statutes and regulations that apply to DOT.

is necessary for performance of the employee's official duties on behalf or in defense of" the interests of the local government. *Id.* § 1520.11(b)(1). Thus, the regulations in title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations apply to the county.

As to the release of information by persons other than TSA, section 1520.9(a) of title 49 provides in part that a person to which these regulations apply has a duty to protect information and may disclose SSI "only to covered persons who have a need to know, unless otherwise authorized in writing by TSA, the Coast Guard, or the Secretary of DOT." *Id.* § 1520.9(a)(2). Section 1520.9(a)(3) of title 49 further provides that those covered by the regulation must "[r]efer requests by other persons for SSI to TSA or the applicable component or agency within DOT or DHS." *Id.* § 1520.9(a)(3). SSI is defined to include certain information obtained or developed in the conduct of security activities, the disclosure of which TSA has determined would constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy, reveal trade secrets or privileged or confidential information obtained from any person, or be detrimental to the security of transportation. *Id.* § 1520.5(a). SSI also includes "[a]ny security program or security contingency plan issued, established, required, received, or approved by DOT or DHS," "[s]pecific details of . . . rail transportation security measures, both operational and technical, whether applied directly by the Federal government or another person, including . . . [s]ecurity measures or protocols recommended by the Federal government," and "[a]ny information not otherwise described . . . that TSA determines is SSI under 49 U.S.C. 114(s) or that the Secretary of DOT determines is SSI under 49 U.S.C. 40119." *Id.* § 1520.5(b)(1), (8), (16).

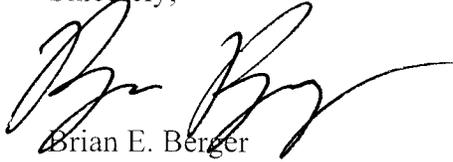
You state the submitted responsive information consists of information relating to the flow of hazardous materials in the county. You state, and provide documentation showing, the county has referred this matter to DOT. Further, the information at issue is labeled as records containing "sensitive security information," as defined by the TSA. Based on the statutory and regulatory scheme described above, and our review, we conclude the decision to release or withhold the submitted information is not for this office or the county to make, but rather is a decision for the Under Secretary as head of the TSA. *See English v. Gen. Elec. Co.*, 496 U.S. 72, 79 (1990) (state law is preempted to extent it actually conflicts with federal law). Therefore, the county may not release the submitted responsive information at this time under the Act, but instead must refer the information to the TSA to make a determination concerning disclosure of this information.

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](#), 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,



Brian E. Berger
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

BB/akg

Ref: ID# 555314

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)