



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 9, 2022

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

OR2022-13245

Dear Ms. Parker:

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# 946424 (Ref. No. R011502-021622).

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified location. You state the department will release some information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code and privileged under section 407 of title 23 of the United States Code. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.111 of the Government Code 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." Section 552.111 encompasses information that is protected by civil discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 647 at 3 (1996), 251 at 2-4 (1980). You contend that the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 because it would be privileged from discovery under section 407 of title 23 of the United States Code. Section 407 provides as follows:

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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 therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

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. § 407. Federal courts have stated that section 407 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 County v. Guillen*, 537 U.S. 129 (2003) (upholding constitutionality of predecessor to 23 U.S.C. § 407, relied on by county in denying request under state's Public Disclosure Act).

You state the submitted information is from the department's Pavement Management Information System ("PMIS"), which you explain is a system "for storing, retrieving, and analyzing pavement information to be used by decision-makers in finding cost-effective strategies for providing, evaluating, and maintain pavements in a serviceable condition and in planning the safety enhancement of potential accident sites." Further, you explain PMIS is used to diagnose pavement problems, which constitute hazardous roadway conditions. You state the department uses this type of information to evaluate safety hazards and plan safety improvements of potential accident sites. Additionally, you inform us the submitted information pertains to roadways that are part of the National Highway System under section 103 of title 23 of the United States Code and are, therefore, federal-aid highways for the purposes of section 407 of title 23. Thus, you assert the submitted information would be privileged from discovery in civil litigation under section 407 and is therefore excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the department may withhold the submitted 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 <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/what-expect-after-ruling-issued> or call the OAG's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Public Information Act may be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the OAG, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

Blake Brennan  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

BBX/jxd

Ref: ID# 946424

c: Requestor