



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 12, 2022

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

OR2022-38406

Dear Ms. Barner:

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# 989031 (ORR# R018108).

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information pertaining to a specified location. The department claims the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the claimed exception and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

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:

¹ 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 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).

The department states the submitted information is from its Pavement Management Information System ("PMIS"), which it explains 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, the department explains PMIS is used to diagnose pavement problems that constitute hazardous roadway conditions. The department states it uses this type of information to evaluate safety hazards and plan safety improvements of potential accident sites. Additionally, the department informs 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, the department asserts the submitted information would be privileged from discovery in civil litigation under section 407 and is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Based on these representations, 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,

James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/jxd

Ref: ID# 989031

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)