



Office of the Attorney General  
State of Texas

DAN MORALES  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December 28, 1998

Ms. Jennifer D. Soldano  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR98-3253

Dear Ms. Soldano:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 121318.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information concerning a particular motor vehicle accident, specifically a "[f]ull scale, non-reduced plan and profile views of the Angelina River Bridge on U.S. Highway 59 in Nacogdoches County as it existed on January 12, 1997." You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.103 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of documents.<sup>1</sup>

To show that section 552.103 is applicable, the department must demonstrate that 1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated and 2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). Section 552.103 requires concrete evidence that litigation may ensue. To demonstrate that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the department must furnish evidence that litigation is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. Open Records Decision No. 518 at 5 (1989). Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). A governmental body may establish that litigation is reasonably anticipated by showing that 1) it has received a claim letter from an allegedly

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<sup>1</sup>In reaching our conclusion here, we assume that 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.

injured party or his attorney and 2) the governmental body states that the letter complies with the notice of claim provisions of the Texas Tort Claims Act (TTCA) or applicable municipal statute or ordinance. Open Records Decision No. 638 (1996).

You have submitted a notice of claim letter which you state complies with the notice requirements of the TTCA. We conclude that litigation is reasonably anticipated, and that the documents submitted by the department are related to the reasonably anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103. Thus, you may withhold the requested information from public disclosure under section 552.103.

Generally, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103 interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103, and it must be disclosed. Moreover, the applicability of section 552.103 ends once the litigation has been concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied on as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have any questions regarding this ruling, please contact our office.

Yours very truly,



Yen-Ha Le  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

YHL/nc

Ref: ID# 121318

Enclosures: Submitted documents

cc: Mr. David R. Deary  
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(w/o enclosures)