



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

February 6, 2003

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

OR2003-0788

Dear Ms. Wright:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 176386.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for information relating to a proposed temporary border safety inspection facility. 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 have reviewed the information you submitted.

Initially, we address your comments with regard to the questions that are contained in this request for information. You note that the requestor asks a question about the construction of Riverbank Drive. He also asks a second question about the construction specifications. We agree that chapter 552 of the Government Code does not require a governmental body to answer factual questions. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 563 at 8 (1990), 555 at 1-2 (1990). However, a governmental body must make a good-faith effort to relate a request for information to any responsive information that is within the governmental body's possession or control. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 8-9 (1990). The department does not claim an exception to the disclosure of any information that would be responsive to the requestor's questions. Therefore, you must release any responsive information that was in existence when the department received this request for information. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302; Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000). We note that the department is not required to release information that did not exist when it received this request or to create

responsive information. *See Economic Opportunities Dev. Corp. v. Bustamante*, 562 S.W.2d 266, 267-68 (Tex. Civ. App. – San Antonio 1978, writ dismissed); Open Records Decision Nos. 605 at 2 (1992), 452 at 3 (1986), 362 at 2 (1983).

Next, we address your claim under section 552.103 of the Government Code with regard to the submitted information. This exception provides in part:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). The governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents sufficient to establish the applicability of section 552.103 to the information that it seeks to withhold. To meet this burden, the governmental body must demonstrate: (1) that litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date of its receipt of the request for information *and* (2) that the information at issue is related to that litigation. *See 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 (Tex. App. – Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ refused n.r.e.); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). Both elements of the test must be met in order for information to be excepted from disclosure under section 552.103. *Id.*

You state, and have provided documentation demonstrating, that the department was a party to pending litigation when it received this request for information. You also state that the submitted information relates to the pending litigation. Based on your representations, your supporting documentation, and our review of the submitted information, we conclude that the department may withhold this information at this time under section 552.103.

In reaching this conclusion, we assume that the opposing party in the pending litigation has not seen or had access to any of the information that the department seeks to withhold. Section 552.103 enables a governmental body to protect its position in litigation by forcing parties seeking information relating to the litigation to obtain it through discovery procedures. *See* Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4-5 (1990). If the opposing party in

pending litigation has seen or had access to information relating to the litigation, through discovery or otherwise, then there is no interest in withholding that information from the public under section 552.103. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Furthermore, the applicability of section 552.103 ends once the related litigation concludes. *See* Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records 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 records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

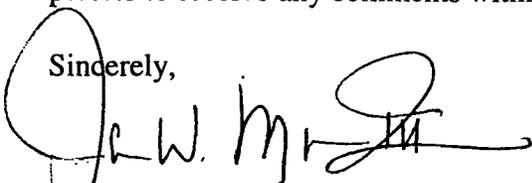
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J.W. Morris III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 176386

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Rogelio Rivera, P.E.
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(w/o enclosures)