



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

August 16, 2011

Ms. Sharon Alexander  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2011-11806

Dear Ms. Alexander:

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# 431535.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for photographs taken at the scene of a specified motor vehicle accident and the names of the construction companies performing work in relation to the specified accident. You state that the department will release the names of the construction companies. You claim that the requested photographs are excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted 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." Gov't Code § 552.111. Section 552.111 encompasses information that

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<sup>1</sup>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.

is protected by civil discovery privileges. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 647 at 3 (1996), 251 at 2-4 (1980). You contend the information in Exhibit B is excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 because it would be privileged from discovery under section 409 of title 23 of the United States Code. Section 409 provides as follows:

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, reports, surveys, schedules, lists, or data compiled or collected for the purpose of identifying [sic] 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. § 409. Federal courts have determined that section 409 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. Co.*, 965 F.2d 155, 160 (7th Cir. 1992); *Robertson v. Union Pac. R.R. Co.*, 954 F.2d 1433, 1435 (8th Cir. 1992).

You state the information in Exhibit B was collected and compiled by the department's Fatal Crash Review Team to evaluate the safety of U.S. Highway 277. You also state U.S. Highway 277 is part of the National Highway System under section 103 of title 23 of the United States Code and is therefore a federal-aid highway for the purposes of section 409 of title 23. You contend the information at issue would be privileged from discovery in civil litigation under section 409 and is therefore excepted from disclosure under section 552.111 of the Government Code. Based on your representations, we conclude the department may withhold the information in Exhibit B 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 [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), 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 must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cindy Nettles".

Cindy Nettles  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 431535

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)