

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2644

By: Kent

Culture, Recreation & Tourism
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Bankhead Highway was the first transcontinental auto road to be built across the southern United States. Its route stretches from Washington, D.C. to San Diego, California, and spans the breadth of Texas from Texarkana to El Paso. The Bankhead was created under the Wilson administration as part of the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 to facilitate civilian auto travel and commerce across the South and to serve as an overland military deployment route in the event of an attack on the Pacific Coast.

The Bankhead was the primary East-West route across North Texas for several decades and was ultimately replaced as a through-route by modern interstate highways. Today, much of the original Bankhead route is still in existence, serving as the old main street of dozens of Texas communities, including many that have long been bypassed by interstate routes. There are a number of historic structures and sites along the length of the route, but little has been done to commemorate the Bankhead or to encourage tourism along it. Additionally, many of the communities along the route have experienced economic decline and have limited options and resources with which to rejuvenate themselves.

Other states have successfully converted sections of the Bankhead and its contemporaries into corridors for heritage tourism. A model example is the Lincoln Highway, the Bankhead's sister road that crosses the northern United States. Its route is signposted in several states and it serves as a popular historic alternative to interstate highways among cross-country travelers. This kind of tourism is a particular boon to small towns and to those small businesses concentrated in historic business districts. If travelers in Texas are aware of the Bankhead Highway and able to follow a marked historic route, they are more likely to visit the communities along the road and stimulate local economies. Legislation is needed to ensure that the Bankhead Highway is not forgotten and that its value is better maximized as both a cultural resource and an engine for economic development.

C.S.H.B. 2644 requires the Texas Historical Commission to cooperate with the Texas Department of Transportation to identify, designate, interpret, and market the Bankhead Highway as a Texas historic highway.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2644 amends the Government Code to require the Texas Historical Commission to cooperate with the Texas Department of Transportation to identify, designate, interpret, and market the portion of the Bankhead Highway located in Texas as a Texas historic highway. The bill authorizes the commission and the department, in order to supplement revenue for the above purposes, to pursue federal funds dedicated to highway enhancement.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 2644 differs from the original by amending the Government Code, rather than the Transportation Code as in the original. The substitute requires the Texas Historical Commission to cooperate with the Texas Department of Transportation, rather than requiring the department to cooperate with the commission as in the original, to identify, designate, interpret and market the Bankhead Highway as a Texas historic highway. The substitute removes references in the original to the project or program and instead refers to the purposes under provisions of the bill.