

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 161
By: Ellis
Transportation
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The 78th Legislature, Regular Session, 2005, enacted legislation authorizing the Texas Department of Transportation to issue the specialty license plates "God Bless Texas" and "God Bless America." The legislation required that the funds collected from the issuance of these license plates be deposited into the state highway fund and only be used for the Safe Routes to School Program. This program seeks to reduce congestion around schools, reduce injuries, increase physical activity, impart traffic safety knowledge, and help to promote and educate communities about safe routes to school.

By reallocating these specialty funds, the state may be able to leverage additional federal funding. The federal matching funds will ensure the expansion of this highly regarded program to other areas of Texas and will ensure a greater investment in non-infrastructure-related efforts of the program including more funding for education, encouragement, evaluation, and public awareness. The federal matching funds will also have the potential to impact the nationally recognized health and obesity crisis facing children.

S.B. 161 requires the proceeds from the two specialty plates described above be deposited to the credit of the share the road account in the state treasury for use by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to support the program. The bill authorizes TEA to use these funds to secure funds available under federal matching programs for the program and obesity prevention.

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

S.B. 161 amends the Transportation Code to add provisions to the law requiring the Texas Department of Transportation to issue specialty license plates that include the words "God Bless Texas" and "God Bless America" and setting the fee for the license plates at \$40. The bill requires the remainder of the fee for the license plates, after deduction of the department's administrative costs, to be deposited to the credit of the share the road account in the state treasury, rather than the state highway fund, to only be used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to support the Safe Routes to School Program of a designated statewide nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to promote bicyclist safety, education, and access through education and awareness programs and training, workshops, educational materials, and media events. The bill authorizes up to 25 percent of the remainder of the fee to be used to support the activities of the nonprofit organization in marketing and promoting the Safe Routes to School Program and the "God Bless Texas" and "God Bless America" license plates. The bill authorizes TEA to use the money received from the license plates to secure funds available under federal matching programs for safe routes to school and obesity prevention.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the act does not receive the necessary vote, the act takes effect September 1, 2009.