

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1017
By: Paxton
Transportation
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Texas Department of Transportation operates 12 travel information centers that provide travelers with rest areas and tourism information. The Legislative Budget Board's recent Texas State Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report indicates a decline in the use of such travel counselors and specifies that approximately one percent of the state's visitors contacted travel counselors while at travel information centers. Interested parties are concerned that the amount of state highway fund revenue generated by these centers may be less than what is needed to operate and maintain the centers. These parties recommend that the sources of funding generated from travel information centers be enhanced in order to increase the revenue available in the state highway fund for transportation projects. S.B. 1017 seeks to address these issues.

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. 1017 amends the Transportation Code to remove the specification that travel information centers statutorily required to be maintained and operated by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) be at the principal gateways to Texas. The bill authorizes TxDOT to enter into an agreement with a local government, including a regional planning commission created under applicable state law, for the operation of a travel information center that is located within the boundaries of the local government and to issue a request for proposals to private or nonprofit entities for the operation of a travel information center. The bill authorizes TxDOT to sell commercial advertising space at a travel information center if the advertising is not visible from the main traveled way of the highway. The bill requires TxDOT to set rates for such advertising and other services available at a travel information center at a level that generates receipts approximately sufficient to cover the cost of its travel and information operations. The bill prohibits TxDOT from engaging in such activity or another activity authorized under statutory provisions relating to travel information that would decrease the amount of federal highway funding available to TxDOT.

S.B. 1017 authorizes TxDOT, with respect to TxDOT's travel and information operations in selling promotional items to advertise the resources of Texas, to enter into an agreement for the acknowledgment of donations if the acknowledgment does not contain comparative or qualitative descriptions of the donor's products, services, facilities, or companies. The bill requires all proceeds from the sale of such promotional items to be deposited to the credit of a separate account in the state highway fund, rather than to the credit of the state highway fund generally. The bill includes in the deposit requirement all proceeds from the sale of commercial advertising space at a travel information center and all donations acknowledged under the bill's provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2013.