

- SUBJECT:** Statewide interoperability standards for transponder toll collection
- COMMITTEE:** Transportation — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Hamric, Edwards, Harper-Brown, Laney, Mercer
0 nays
2 absent — Garza, Hill
- WITNESSES:** For — Rick Herrington, North Texas Tollway Authority; James T. Pugh, Harris County Toll Road Authority
Against — None
- BACKGROUND:** Transportation Code, ch. 362 deals with turnpikes and toll projects. Sec. 361.255 defines a transponder as a device placed on or within an automobile capable of transmitting information used to assess or collect tolls.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1340 would add Transportation Code, ch. 362, subchapter D on toll road/turnpike transponder systems, aimed at ensuring interoperability (uniform functionality) among all governmental toll road entities.
- The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) would have to adopt interoperability standards compatible with transponder technology used by the North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA, in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex) and the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA). All toll entities issuing transponders for toll payment would have to comply with TxDOT rules when selecting transponder technology. The rules would not apply to entities that were developing toll collection systems before the rules took effect.
- In developing standards, TxDOT would have to consider recommendations of a five-member Statewide Interoperability Standards Advisory Committee (SISAC). The Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) could adopt rules governing SISAC, as well as for implementing the standards, and would appoint SISAC's members: one each representing NTTA and HCTRA, one representing a regional mobility authority (RMA), and two representing

TxDOT. SISAC would develop a strategy for an interoperability plan as well as recommendations on standards. By January 1, 2005, SISAC would have to report its findings to TTC, TxDOT, and the governor, lieutenant governor, and House speaker.

The bill would apply to TxDOT and other public entities authorized to operate toll highways or toll roads, including municipalities, counties, districts, RMAs, and turnpike and tollway authorities.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Transponders such as EZ Tag allow turnpike users to pay tolls electronically, much like a prepaid long-distance calling card, and use express lanes without stopping or slowing down to pay at toll booths. NTTA and HCTRA have developed transponder payment systems and are upgrading them so that their transponders can be used on each other's roads. As TxDOT and RMAs expand the number of toll projects under way, transponder interoperability among government toll entities becomes more important.

CSHB 1340 would ensure uniformity across toll entities by integrating transponder technology. It would promote seamless operation of transponders as motorists traverse the state, allowing them to pay tolls using the same transponder on multiple turnpike systems. With the state's two preeminent toll authorities already leading the way in electronic toll payment, it makes sense for the state standards to accommodate their approaches so that they are not affected adversely.

Combined with the input of an expert panel, the new standards would assure transponder users of other toll entities (current and future) that they could use all the state's toll facilities easily. Having TTC adopt TxDOT's final rules, rather than requiring full compatibility with systems already in use, would ensure competition and maintain the state's best interests in selecting transponder technology for statewide use.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1340 is unnecessary. TxDOT could convene public hearings or could consult with a group of experts or NTTA and HCTRA officials to advise it on rulemaking without creating a formal committee. Each toll authority should decide how its transponders best would interface with other entities.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The proposed advisory committee would be stacked in favor of TxDOT. It should have broader representation from other state agencies, particularly the Department of Public Safety.

CSHB 1340 would not allow toll entities to charge administrative fees for transactions using other entities' transponders, which the original version of the bill would have allowed. This could hurt smaller entities that might not be able to afford high-tech systems, especially during startup.

TxDOT's transponder technology standards also should apply to any private entities that might develop toll facilities.

NOTES:

The committee substitute changed the filed version of HB 1340 by adding the SISAC provisions; removing authority for toll entities to charge administrative fees for transactions using other entities' transponders; and adding tollway authorities to the definition of "governmental entity."