

SUBJECT: Allowing emergency communication districts to use state travel program

COMMITTEE: Government Reform — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Uresti, Otto, Y. Davis, Frost, Gonzales, Hunter, Veasey  
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Rod Paine, National Travel Systems; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Shayne Woodard, Texas 9-1-1 Alliance)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Richard Muscat, Bexar Metro 9-1-1 Network District)

BACKGROUND: The State Travel Management Program (STMP) at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission (TBPC) was created by the 70th Legislature in 1987 to provide centralized management and coordination of state agency travel.

Local Government Code, secs. 271.081-271.083 and Government Code, secs. 2155.202 and 2175.001(1) provide the legal authority for certain non-state entities to participate in the TBPC Cooperative Purchasing Program. These entities include local governments, MHMR community centers, and assistance organizations. Co-op participants may use the STMP to make travel arrangements.

In the state of Texas, 9-1-1 emergency telecommunication services are provided three different ways: by home-rule cities; by emergency communication districts; and, in those areas of the state not covered by a home-rule city or an emergency communication district, by the Commission on State Emergency Communications (CSEC). More than 52 percent of the state's population is served by the 24 existing communications districts covering about 30 counties. These districts are run by independent governing boards, cover primarily metropolitan areas, and are not subject to appropriation for funding.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 3047 would allow a board member or employee of an emergency communication district to use the TBPC contract for travel services for the purpose of obtaining reduced airline fares and travel agent fees. The traveler could use this service only for official district travel business.

Any costs to TBPC would be recouped by fees charged to the participating districts, and fees would be deposited into an airline fares account in the general revenue fund. TBPC could adopt rules and amend contracts to administer this proposal.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** CSHB 3047 would give emergency communication districts the same opportunity that state agencies and counties have to save taxpayer money when paying for airline tickets and other travel expenses. The program could prove especially useful for saving money on high, last-minute fares when employees were called away on emergency business. Citizens want tax money spent on essential public services, not on overhead and administrative expenses for travel.

The bill also would provide more savings on travel expenses for the state and counties because the pool of likely users would increase by adding this group. The TBPC would be in a better position to negotiate with airlines and other travel service providers for more favorable rates, providing better discounts than individual entities could obtain alone. Joining a state pool would be better than forming a pool with other communication districts because a participant with a larger group, such as the state, probably would receive lower travel rates.

**OPPONENTS SAY:** Although saving tax money is important, CSHB 3047 would blur the line between these districts and state government. Emergency communication districts could instead leverage their buying power for airline tickets and travel services by forming their own negotiating pools rather than using a state agency.

**NOTES:** HB 3047 as introduced referred only to emergency communication districts. The substitute refers to both emergency communication districts and communication districts.

The companion bill, SB 1663 by Eltife, passed the Senate on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on April 26 and has been referred to the House Government Reform Committee.