

SUBJECT: Eliminating the fee charged for the Texas Airport Directory

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Phillips, Y. Davis, Fletcher, Harper-Brown, Lavender, Martinez, Pickett

0 nays

4 absent — Darby, Bonnen, McClendon, Rodriguez

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 21.067 requires the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to issue the Texas Airport Directory for a fee of at least \$5 per copy. The Texas Airport Directory provides basic information about the state’s approximately 400 public airports to pilots, who use it to determine the feasibility of travel to various destinations and to find information about food, lodging, and other services.

DIGEST: HB 71 would prohibit TxDOT from charging a fee for the Texas Airport Directory.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2011.

SUPPORTERS SAY: By requiring TxDOT to distribute the Texas Airport Directory for free, HB 71 would expand its circulation. The directory’s circulation dropped from 27,000 to 3,000 after the fee was introduced. Sales of the directory fell to 355 in fiscal 2009 and to 250 in fiscal 2010, and yielded only about \$1,500 in revenue in fiscal 2010. Although the directory is available for free online, pilots need printed copies of it in the cockpit.

HB 71 would implement a recommendation from a recent Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) review of the directory, which found that while 35 states have airport directories, only three charge a fee. According to the review, the fee significantly hinders the distribution of the directory because the state is unable to distribute large quantities to airports without

being paid in advance. The TTI also confirmed that the directory benefits economic development and tourism in Texas.

Claims that eliminating the current \$6 fee for the directory would have a fiscal impact are misguided. The administrative hassles of collecting and processing such small amounts handily outweigh the minimal fiscal benefit. Since TxDOT prints the directory in house, its costs are minimal. Any reduction in revenue caused by eliminating the fee could easily be absorbed within existing resources.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

The small fee that TxDOT charges for the directory offsets printing costs. If the fee were eliminated, the agency would have to use State Highway Fund 6 revenue to print the directory. Further, eliminating the fee could cause demand to surge, increasing printing costs. Although the costs associated with HB 71 would be minimal and could be easily absorbed within TxDOT's current funding, the Legislature should hesitate to authorize any further reductions to revenue in light of recent highway funding shortfalls.