

- SUBJECT:** Allowing for development of certain local government rail projects
- COMMITTEE:** Transportation — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Morrison, Martinez, Burkett, Israel, Minjarez, Phillips, Pickett, S. Thompson, Wray
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Y. Davis, E. Thompson
- 2 present not voting — Goldman, Simmons
- WITNESSES:** For — Upendra Sahu, Brazoria Fort Bend Rail District; W. A. "Andy" Meyers, Fort Bend County; Ravi Singhania, Port Freeport; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Joe Arnold, BASF; Daniel Womack, Dow Chemical; Jim Short, Fort Bend County; Sean Stockard, the Economic Development Alliance for Brazoria County)
- Against — None
- On — Vincent May
- BACKGROUND:** Observers suggest that the deepening of Port Freeport, located in Brazoria County, could result in increased trade from recent improvements to the Panama Canal. Some have raised concerns that current infrastructure, including rail service, may not be sufficient to fully accommodate the increase and to move cargo efficiently from the port.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 2557 would allow certain counties acting through a county commissioners court or local government corporation to adopt an order authorizing the county and a navigation district wholly or partly within the county to develop rail facilities as a qualifying public-private infrastructure project. The county could issue bonds for rail facilities secured by a pledge of revenue from the facilities.

The bill would apply to a county that had a population of at least 300,000, was adjacent to a county with a population of at least four million, and had created a rural rail transportation district with an adjacent county (Brazoria County and Fort Bend County). Each county would have to adopt the order for the district to exercise its powers.

The bill would revise the definition of "rail facilities" to include an "intelligent transportation system," defined as:

- innovative technological transportation systems, including elevated freight transportation facilities, near or within the state highway system or that connect ports to the state highway system;
- communications or information processing systems that improve the efficiency and security of freight movement, including on dedicated intelligent freight lanes; or
- a transportation facility or system that increases truck freight efficiencies within an intermodal facility or hub.

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, 2017.