

Program Guidelines - Freight Grade Separation Feasibility Studies

Introduction & Program Objectives

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the region-wide voluntary association of 133 local governments and local elected officials in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas, with a service area of 12,500 square miles and includes more than 7 million residents. H-GAC is governed by a 36-member Board of Directors composed of local elected officials, who serve on the governing bodies of member local governments. H-GAC is also the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region serving 8 counties of Brazoria County, Chambers County, Fort Bend County, Galveston County, Harris County, Liberty County, Montgomery County, and Waller County.

The H-GAC region faces significant safety and efficiency challenges, with roughly 1,200 at-grade public crossings grouped around freight corridors, ports, and historic urban neighborhoods. Blocked crossings pose safety hazards and delays for daily commuters, pedestrians, and cyclists. Past initiatives, such as the TxDOT Houston-Beaumont Freight Rail Study, have emphasized the urgent need for infrastructure upgrades, particularly recommending grade separation solutions that can significantly improve safety and streamline freight rail movement. Now, with the enactment of funding sources such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Senate Bill 1555 by the Texas Legislature, there is an opportunity to address long-standing conflicts between rail infrastructure and other transportation modes within our system.

Rail and Road separation feasibility studies are part of the MPO's Freight Grade Separation Planning program operating under H-GAC's freight program. The Grade Separation Planning program has been approved in the 2026-2027 UPWP. This program is meant to serve our region as an additional opportunity to fund planning activities of projects that involve one or more existing adjacent at-grade rail-highway crossings. The projects must be located within the 8-county MPO region. This Call for Projects features an online application process, which is described in this program guide. This guide also includes funding requirements and the evaluation and selection process.

Important Dates

Project Submission Period	September 14 th – October 9 th
Virtual Information Session	September 24 th , 1 pm – 3 pm
Online Submission Portal Closes	October 9 th at 5 pm
Evaluate Submittals	October 23 rd
Finalize Draft Prioritized List	October 30 th

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Purpose and Need for Program

H-GAC is launching the strategic Freight Grade Separation Planning program to support the development of solutions at rail-roadway crossings by conducting planning-level feasibility studies in the H-GAC region. The Grade Separation Feasibility Plans will provide the groundwork for transformative improvements that ensure safer, faster, and more reliable transportation in our region. The feasibility plans are intended to aid in the following:

- Regional coverage of rail and road grade separation studies that lead to the identification of regional needs
- Continuing potential projects in the pipeline for the next phase in the project development
- Competing for additional funding opportunities to progress project development
 - RTP (project development process)
 - TIP (project selection process)
 - Statewide and Federal grant programs
 - Local funding opportunities

Application Process

Funding applications will be evaluated and awarded on a competitive basis. The application deadline is **5 pm Friday, October 9, 2026**. Applicants must submit the information detailed in this document. See the “Selection Criteria” section for more details about selection criteria. All information is available on public platforms, such as the Federal Railroad Administration's website or the H-GAC Data Hub. To request a feasibility study of rail/road grade separation for consideration in the program, please submit your application request through the online form located on the H-GAC Website. Once the application period closes, H-GAC staff will evaluate responses and rank the crossing locations. Applicants of the selected location will be notified and allowed to enter into a service agreement with H-GAC and the selected consultant. If you have any questions, please email Sydni Ligon, Freight Principal Planner, at Sydni.ligons@h-gac.com.

Eligibility and Requirements

The project sponsor must be a political subdivision of the state (e.g., counties, cities, special districts, and school districts) that has jurisdiction over the project's location and authority to undertake the project. For projects that cross multiple jurisdictions or involve special district applicants, such as TIRZ, provide a letter of coordination with all parties considered owners of the infrastructure and/or right-of-way. Entities that do not have jurisdiction but instead have only maintenance responsibility for the project location are not eligible to serve as the sole project sponsor; however, they are encouraged to co-sponsor the application or provide supporting

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documentation. There is no limit to the number of applications that project sponsors can submit for this Program Call for Projects.

To be eligible for funding, the project location must meet the following criteria.

- Study must be a planning feasibility study or plan; H-GAC will not develop signed engineering work. Sponsors can submit study requests for the following:
 - A single crossing intersection or,
 - A corridor, with no fewer than five (5) and no more than ten (10) crossing locations aligned along a rail subdivision.
- The submitted crossing(s) may be classified as either off-system or on-system. If the crossing is on-system, the local sponsor must provide a letter of support from the TxDOT Houston District Transportation Planning Office.
- Study locations must have the ability to be completed within one (1) calendar year.
- Project must address a roadway and rail crossing (at-grade) intended for vehicular and multimodal use. Pedestrian-only crossings will not be considered at this time.
- Project must demonstrate through the evaluation process detailed below in “Selection Criteria” the potential to provide safety and congestion relief to the project area.
- Crossing location(s) cannot have had a feasibility study in the past 10 years. Crossings with feasibility studies within 10 years of application submission date will be disqualified.

Eligible Funding Costs

H-GAC Planning Funds will fund feasibility studies at one hundred percent (100%). No local match is required. The funding provided will be used to conduct a planning-level feasibility study of the selected locations. This will include the following:

- Project management and Administration
- Data Collection and Existing Conditions Review
- Technical analyses and concept development
- Project Cost Estimates
- Benefit Assessment and
- Implementation Planning

Program funding may not be used for the following:

- Final Design and/or detailed engineering drawings
- Environmental Impact Assessments
- Utility relocation or construction costs
- Construction inspection or permitting fees

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Selection Criteria

The selection criteria below will be used to evaluate the submitted crossing locations and determine the order of studies to be provided through the 2027-2028 Program years. There are two categories for submitting a study request: individual crossing and corridor. The number of feasibility studies depends on the available budget. Any additional studies resulting from the call for projects will be carried over to the next UPWP years. Each category will be scored on the selection criteria. Table 1 details the criteria for individual crossings and Table 2 details the criteria for corridors. The criteria below include the evaluation factor, the weight assigned to each factor, a brief description of the information required for the application, and the score assessed for each factor. Federal and State government data, cited in footnotes, will be used to evaluate proposed locations for each factor. Appendix I provides definitions for additional clarification.

Table 1: Criteria Descriptions and Supporting Documents for Individual Crossing Submissions

Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
No. of tracks ¹	Requested Data: Number of tracks intersecting roads. Applicants can submit text of up to 3 characters to allow only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/
Trains per day (both through and switching movements) ²	Requested Data: Number of trains per day that cross/use the intersecting railroads. This number should also include the number of switching trains. Applicants can submit text of up to 3 characters to allow only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/
Reported Blocked crossings ³	Requested Data: Number of reported blockages over 12 months. Data provided should reflect the 2025 calendar year. Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters to allow only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the FRA Blocked Crossing Portal,

¹ Track data reported in Crossing Inventory Listing <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/>

² Train ADT found in the crossing Inventory

³ Reports the amount of time a crossing is blocked. Page 4, Blocked Crossing Portal, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-01/FRA%20Report%20to%20Congress_Blocked%20Crossing%20Portal.pdf

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
	https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-01/FRA%20Report%20to%20Congress_Blocked%20Crossing%20Portal.pdf
Emergency service	Requested Data: Are Fire, EMS, or Police stations located within 1/4 mile of the crossing? Applicant can submit a narrative limited to 300 words to allow for further detail that should be considered during evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of an emergency service station.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any emergency stations. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can use data that is in-house.
Proximity to school	Requested Data: Is the crossing within ¼ mile from a school? Applicants can submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a school.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any schools. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can use in-house data.
Crash History ⁴	Requested Data: Provide the number of incidents, fatalities, and serious injuries that occurred at rail crossings within the past 12 months. Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters, allowing only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the FRA Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Incident, Fatalities, and Injuries list - https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Highway-Rail-Grade-Crossing-Incidents-Fatalities-a/bda5-32at/
High Injury Network	Requested Data: Is the crossing located on a designated high-injury network (HIN)? Applicants can submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note: The additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not on a HIN.</i>

⁴ Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Incident, Fatalities, and Injuries list - <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Highway-Rail-Grade-Crossing-Incidents-Fatalities-a/bda5-32at/> n

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
	Supporting documentation: Provide a link and page number to the plan showing that the roadway intersecting the railway is on a high-injury network.
Public Destinations	Requested data: Is the submitted crossing within ¼ mile of community services? <i>(see definitions for what qualifies as a public destination)</i> Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a public destination.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼-mile buffer around the submitted location and the location of any public destination. The submitting entity should use in-house data.
Freight generator	Requested data: Is the submitted crossing located within ¼-mile from a freight generator? <i>(see definitions for what qualifies as a freight generator)</i> Applicants can submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note: The additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a freight generator.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any freight generator. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can utilize in-house data.
Distance to nearest grade separation	Requested data: Are there any parallel grade separations within ½-mile of the submitted crossing? Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note: The additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.50 miles of a road/rail at-grade crossing.</i> Supporting documentation: Provide details in a PDF showing a GIS file with a ½-mile buffer around the submitted location and the location of any at-grade road/rail crossing. The submitting entity should use in-house data.
AADT Score	Requested data: Provide data on the vehicle volumes on the intersection roadway. (12 mo. period) Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters to allow only numbers.

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
	Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/
Functional Classification	Requested data: Provide the street classification identified on any Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan. Applicants can submit a narrative of up to 100 words to support their application. Supporting documentation: Provide a PDF with a GIS map showing the functional classification. This evaluation will utilize the TxDOT functional classification to standardize the review.

Table 2: Criteria Descriptions and Supporting Documents for Corridor Submissions

Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
No. of tracks ⁵	Requested Data: Provide the total number of tracks intersecting roads at each crossing in the corridor. <i>Example – 2 tracks (DOT# 448609E), 2 track (DOT# 448610Y) and 1 track (DOT# 448612M) = 3 total tracks within corridor</i> Applicants can submit text of up to 3 characters, allowing only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/
Trains per day (both through and switching movements) ⁶	Requested Data: Provide the total number of trains per day that move within the corridor. This number should also include switching trains. Applicants can submit text of up to 3 characters, allowing only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/
Reported Blocked crossings ⁷	Requested Data: Provide the total number of reported blockages over 12 months at crossings within the corridor. Data provided should reflect the 2025 calendar year.

⁵ Track data reported in Crossing Inventory Listing <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/>

⁶ Train ADT found in the crossing Inventory

⁷ Reports the amount of time a crossing is blocked. Page 4, Blocked Crossing Portal, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-01/FRA%20Report%20to%20Congress_Blocked%20Crossing%20Portal.pdf

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
	Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters, allowing only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the FRA Blocked Crossing Portal, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-01/FRA%20Report%20to%20Congress_Blocked%20Crossing%20Portal.pdf Or data provided by a train detection system
Emergency service	Requested Data: How many crossings in the corridor are within 1/4 mile of a Fire, EMS, or Police station? Please specify each emergency service station and its closest crossing DOT number. The applicant may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of an emergency service station.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any emergency stations. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can use in-house data.
Proximity to school	Requested Data: How many crossings within the corridor are within ¼ mile from a school? Please specify each school and its closest crossing DOT number. Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a school.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any schools. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can use in-house data.
Crash History ⁸	Requested Data: Provide the total number of incidents, fatalities, and serious injuries that have occurred at rail crossings within the corridor over the past 12 months. Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters, allowing only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the FRA Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Incident, Fatalities, and Injuries list-

⁸ Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Incident, Fatalities, and Injuries list - <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Highway-Rail-Grade-Crossing-Incidents-Fatalities-a/bda5-32at/n>

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
	https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Highway-Rail-Grade-Crossing-Incidents-Fatalities-a/bda5-32at/
Community Centers	Requested data: How many crossings within the corridor are within ¼ mile of community services? Please specify the community service and the closest DOT number (<i>see definitions for what qualifies as a community center</i>) Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for evaluation. <i>Please note that the additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a community center.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS file with a ¼-mile buffer around the submitted location and the location of any community center. The submitting entity should use in-house data.
Freight generator	Requested data: How many crossings within the corridor are located within ¼-mile of a freight generator? Please specify the type of freight generator and its closest rail DOT number (<i>see definitions for what qualifies as a freight generator</i>) Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note: The additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.25 miles of a freight generator.</i> Supporting documentation: Evidence can be provided as a PDF showing a GIS map with a ¼ buffer around the submitted location and the location of any freight generator. Data can be found using the H-GAC ACE tool, or an entity can utilize in-house data.
Distance to nearest grade separation	Requested data: Are there any parallel grade separations within ½-mile of any crossing within the corridor? Please specify how many are located along the corridor. Applicants may submit a narrative limited to 300 words to provide additional detail for consideration during evaluation. <i>Please note: The additional information provided will only be considered if the submitted location is not within 0.50 miles of a road/rail at-grade crossing.</i> Supporting documentation: Provide details in a PDF showing a GIS file with a ½-mile buffer around the submitted location and the location of any at-grade road/rail crossing. The submitting entity should use in-house data.

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Factor	Description and Supporting Documentation
AADT Score	Requested data: Provide data on the total average vehicle volumes on the intersecting roadways at the crossing within the corridor. (12 mo. period) Applicants can submit a text of up to 3 characters to allow only numbers. Supporting documentation: Please submit a PDF printout of the data found in the Crossing Inventory Listing https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Crossing-Inventory-Listing/ejv6-cpdh/

Score Evaluation

Individual projects and corridors submitted will be scored based on the weighted score model outlined in Table 3, Evaluation Criteria Weighted Score Model, as follows.

1. Weight Assignment: Each factor is assigned a weight that reflects its importance in the overall evaluation, ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (very important).
2. Scoring: Each submitted crossing location is evaluated and scored against the defined factors. Scoring is a combination of numerical (e.g., 1-3 scale) and categorical (e.g., "Yes" or "No") scores.
3. Weighted Score Calculation: For each factor, the score is multiplied by its corresponding weight to get a weighted score. The overall score for each option is then calculated by adding up these weighted scores.
$$[\text{Weighted Score} = \sum (\text{Score} \times \text{Weight})]$$
4. Decision Making: The projects will be ranked and prioritized based on the score they receive. Up to 10 (ten) project locations will be selected for the first round of feasibility studies.

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Table 3: Evaluation Criteria Weighted Score Model

Factor	Weight	Individual Score	Corridor Score
No. of tracks	2	≥5 = 3 pts 3-4 = 2 pts <2 = 1 pts	≥5 = 3 pts 3-4 = 2 pts <=2 = 1 pts
Trains per day (both through and switching movements)	5	≥50 = 3 pts 26-49 = 2 pts 1-25 = 1 pts	≥50 = 3 pts 26-49 = 2 pts 1-25 = 1 pts
Reported Blocked crossings	3	≥61 = 3 pts 16-60 = 2 pts 1-15 = 1 pts	≥61 = 3 pts 16-60 = 2 pts 1-15 = 1 pts
Emergency Services	4	Yes = 3 pts No = 1 pts	1-4 = 1pts 5-7 = 2pts >=8 = 3pts
Proximity to school	5	Yes = 3 pts No = 1 pts	1-4 = 1pts 5-7 = 2pts >=8 = 3pts
Crash History	5	>10 = 3 pts 5-10 = 2 pts <5 = 1 pt	>10 = 3 pts 5-10 = 2 pts <=5 = 1 pt
High Injury Network	3	Yes = 3 pts No = 1 pts	Not evaluated
Community Services	1	Yes = 3 pts No = 1 pts	1-4 = 1pts 5-7 = 2pts >=8 = 3pts
Proximity to freight generator	2	Yes = 3 pts No = 1 pts	1-4 = 1pts 5-7 = 2pts >=8 = 3pts
Distance to nearest grade separation	4	Yes = 1 pts No = 3 pts	Yes = 1 pts No = 3 pts
What are the vehicle volumes on the intersection roadway? Provide AADT Score for the past 12 months.	3	≥20k/day = 3 pts 1k-20k/day = 2 pts <1k/day = 1 pts	≥20k/day = 3 pts 1k-20k/day = 2 pts <1k/day = 1 pts
Road Classification	3	Major/Minor Arterial = 3 Major/Minor Collector = 2 Local = 1	Not evaluated

Implementation Reporting

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Funding from this program is intended to advance projects beyond the planning stages. Entities with awarded projects are encouraged, upon completion of their studies, to update H-GAC on their progress toward construction. Activities undertaken by the entities may include preliminary engineering, environmental review, stakeholder engagement, and other steps to position the project for future implementation and funding opportunities.

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Appendix I

Definitions

Emergency Service Stations – the public organizations that respond to and deal with emergencies when they occur, especially those that provide police, ambulance, and firefighting services.

School – Public or private preschool, primary, elementary, middle, or high schools. Also includes institutions of higher learning.

Freight Generator – Any business, facility, or location that produces, receives, or otherwise causes commercial goods to be transported within the supply chain and transportation network. Can include but is not limited to manufacturing plants, distribution centers, and intermodal facilities (Ports, rail yards, cargo airports).

Community Centers – facilities operated by nonprofit community-based organizations for providing recreational, social, or educational services to the general public. This definition is from the U.S. Code (42 USC § 9877(1)). Can include, but is not limited to, community libraries, recreation centers, community gardens, hospitals, emergency shelters, and religious centers.

Functional Classification- Key characteristics of each roadway type are defined in the TxDOT Design manual [Table 3-1](#) Roadway Functional Classification System.

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Table 3-1: Roadway Functional Classification System

Functional Classification	Network Importance	Characteristics
Interstates / Freeways Expressways	Corridors of national importance providing long-distance travel	- Limited Access - Through traffic movements - Long-distance traffic movements - distance traffic movements - Primary freight routes - Possible transit network support - No pedestrian or bicycle traffic - Guided primarily by FHWA design standards
Principal Arterial	Corridors of regional importance connecting large activity centers ¹	- Non-access controlled - Through traffic movements - Long distance traffic movements - Primary freight routes - Some segments may include pedestrian and bicycle movements.
Minor Arterial	Corridors of local importance connecting activity centers ¹	- Connections between local areas and network principal arterial roadways - Connections for through traffic between arterial roadways - Access to public transit and through movements - Pedestrian and bicycle movements
Major Collector	Roadways providing connections between arterials to local roads and streets	- Traffic with trips ending in a specific area - Access to commercial and residential centers - Access to public transportation - Pedestrian and bicycle movements
Minor Collector	Roadways providing connections between major collectors to local roads and streets	- Fewer lanes, lower ADTs and more access points than major collectors - Access to public transportation - Pedestrian and bicycle movements
Local	All other roads	- Direct property access – residential and commercial - Pedestrian and bicycle movements
Notes:		
1. An activity center is a concentrated area with a high density of diverse land uses and activities that generate significant traffic. These areas often include a mixture of commercial, recreational, institutional, entertainment, and tourism facilities. Examples include transit stations, shopping malls, park-and-ride facilities, business districts, and University campuses.		