

**Report To The General Assembly
On the Feasibility Of Implementing
A Program For
Corporate Sponsored License Plates**



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Report to the General Assembly on the Feasibility of Implementing a
Program for Corporate Sponsored License Plates

Submitted by the Office of the Illinois Secretary of State,

December 30, 2011

Introduction

On July 28, 2011, Governor Quinn signed Public Act 97-0221 (SB 1360) requiring the Illinois Secretary of State's Office to conduct a "feasibility study for the implementation of a program for corporate sponsored license plates." The legislation required that the report include, but not be limited to, the following information: (1) findings on how to maximize profits to the State of Illinois; (2) how to provide for a discounted registration fee for Illinois residents who display a corporate sponsored license plate; (3) whether there is corporate and public interest in such a program; and (4) the cost to the State of Illinois for implementation of such the program. (A copy of this Act is attached to this report as Exhibit A.)

Cost of Producing Corporate Plates in Illinois

The Secretary of State's office has produced numerous specialty license plates in the past several years, as mandated by the Illinois General Assembly, which has the exclusive authority to create new specialty plates through the legislative process. In the course of producing these plates, this office has determined that the current cost for producing any new category of specialty plate is approximately \$35,000. This amount covers the following production areas:

1. Certification process (labor, postage and forms) related to obtaining requests, depositing funds and mailing receipts;
2. Printing brochures, forms, applications and other materials;
3. Purchasing and shipping 1,000 new license plates; and
4. IT Programming costs for changes to plate inventory, renewal validation, vehicle registrations, and the Secretary of State's website.

The \$35,000 cost of production of a special plate does not provide any profit margin to the Secretary of State's Office, but merely covers the state's costs in offering a specialty plate to the public. As with special plates, designing and producing each new type of corporate plate would cost approximately \$35,000. This up-front cost would have to be paid by the sponsoring corporation for the state to break even.

Interest from Illinois' Corporations
and the Texas Experience

The Secretary of State's Office produced a short survey to be distributed to Illinois-based corporations to gauge interest in this type of promotion or advertising venue. In an effort to obtain the best cross section of corporations, the decision was made to use the 2011 Crain's Chicago Business list of the largest privately and publicly held companies in Illinois. This office felt that this list would allow us to contact companies that would have the advertising budget capable of generating interest in this type of venture and would represent many diverse companies. The list contained 420 corporations which included banks, manufacturing, real estate and construction companies, grocery store chains, restaurants, food distributors and newspapers, among others.

Of the 420 listings, 27 companies were removed by our office prior to sending the survey, including several large motor vehicle dealerships. The Secretary of State licenses and regulates motor vehicle dealerships in the state and this office did not want the survey to be misconstrued as something the Secretary of State's Office was requiring or advocating for from the dealerships. (A copy of the corporation mailing list is attached to this report as Exhibit B.)

In August of 2011, the Secretary of State's Office sent a letter and survey to the 393 corporations listed in Exhibit B. Among the questions posed to the corporations was (1) whether they would be interested in such a program being offered by the Secretary of State's Office, and (2) what cost would they be willing to incur for this type of advertising opportunity. (Copies of the letter and complete survey questions are attached to this report as Exhibits C and D respectively.)

This office received 59 completed survey responses, representing 15% of the surveyed population. Of those responses, 95% indicated they would not be interested in such a program. Only 3 companies indicated a potential interest in the program. These 3 responses represent 5% of the surveys that were returned, but only 0.7% of the companies surveyed.

The survey also asked for the reasoning if the corporation was not interested in a corporate sponsored license plate. There were various reasons provided by corporations for the negative response, but some consistent messages were noted. These included the high cost to the corporation (\$35,000 up-front, plus the cost of subsidizing the vehicle registration for each person who chose the plate, and providing an additional payment to the state each time the plates were issued), and the limited number of plates they would be willing to subsidize. (Of the three corporations that expressed an interest in this program, two said they were willing to pay no more than \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year, and one

said it was willing to pay no more than \$75,000 to \$100,000 per year to participate in the program.) In addition, a number of the corporations noted that license plate advertising would not reach the company's targeted audience.

This final response is perhaps the most revealing with regard to why there is a lack of corporate interest in subsidizing vehicle license plates. Large corporations tend to have very sophisticated marketing programs. If the corporation is going to spend significant sums of money on a marketing campaign, those funds will be specifically targeted, both demographically and geographically. Advertisements are placed in magazines and on television shows based on the demographics of the audience. Newspapers are selected because of their geographic distribution. A corporate sponsored license plate program gives the sponsoring corporation no control over who buys the plates, where they live, or where they drive. Such an endeavor would be a very expensive shot in the dark. This explains the structure of the corporate license plate program in the one state that has such a program.

Texas is the only state in the nation that offers corporate sponsored license plates. However, none of the nine corporations that sponsor license plates in Texas subsidizes the license plate fee in exchange for the vehicle owner agreeing to display the corporate logo on their license plate. Only four of the nine offer any type of incentive to purchase the plates:

- Texas Roadhouse had a contest for most creative customized plate. The winner received reimbursement for the cost of the plate.
- Mighty Fine Burgers offers \$100 in coupons to purchasers of its plates.
- Ignite Steam Energy and Re/Max make charitable donations upon the purchase of plates.
- No incentives could be found for Ford, Vestas, Dr. Pepper, Our Energy or Freebirds Burritos plates. (Information regarding these incentives is attached to this report as Exhibit E.)

The need for an incentive to entice vehicle owners into purchasing corporate plates is reflected in research conducted by the State of Florida (see below), and in the sales figures for corporate plates in Texas. As of August of 2011, Texas had sold only 489 corporate license plates over a nearly 2-year period. The sale of these plates has raised less than \$27,000 for the Texas General Revenue Fund beyond the base registration fees for the plates.

Surveying Interest by the General Public
and the Florida Experience

In the course of researching the viability of a corporate sponsored license plate program, Florida conducted a survey via email of 20,000 people who had voluntarily supplied email addresses to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Only 5% of those receiving the survey responded. Approximately 60% of those who responded (or 3% of the total number surveyed) said they would consider purchasing a license plate with a corporate logo for a reduced registration fee. Approximately 40% of respondents said that savings in registration fees would be their primary consideration in determining whether to purchase a corporate license plate. Almost half of those surveyed responded that they would require a savings of \$10 to \$40 on the registration fee before they would consider a corporate license plate. In Florida, the annual registration fee for passenger vehicles weighing up to 5,000 lbs is between \$45.65 and \$71.15, depending upon the weight of the vehicle. With an average plate price of \$58.40, these required savings range from 17% to 68% of the cost of the plates. (A copy of the Florida survey is attached to this report as Exhibit F.)

Two bills were introduced in the Florida legislature in 2011 regarding this issue, Senate Bill 716 and House Bill 743. The Florida legislation required a company to pay an up-front cost of at least \$5,000 for the creation of the license plate. Additionally, the corporation had to present “evidence of its ability to pay \$75 per vehicle owner for a minimum of 5,000 vehicles.” (This equals \$375,000 – far in excess of the amount any Illinois corporation was willing to invest in this endeavor.) While neither piece of legislation received approval, they did generate a great deal of discussion about such a program. For example, groups with specialty license plates in Florida objected to the legislation. They argued that creation of a corporate sponsored license plate program would decrease the sales of their specialty license plates, thus adversely impacting the revenues received from the sale of those plates. At one point Florida considered offering a pilot program to their constituents, but then determined it was not an endeavor deemed worth pursuing from an operational and fiscal standpoint.

If this office were to conduct a survey of Illinois vehicle owners regarding the concept of corporate sponsored license plates, it is possible we would receive a response similar to the one received in Florida. Approximately 3% of Florida vehicle owners surveyed, and a majority of those responding to the survey, were willing to consider purchasing a corporate sponsored plate, but they would do so only if there was a significant reduction in the cost of the plate. Since neither Texas nor Illinois has been able to identify any corporations willing to make a sizeable commitment to the cost of supplying subsidized corporate sponsored license plates, the size of the demand for those plates loses most of its relevance.

**Maximizing Profits for the State of Illinois and Providing for a Discounted
Registration Fee for a Corporate Sponsored License Plate Program**

The legislation requiring this report instructed this office to include “findings on how to maximize profits to the State” when implementing a program of corporate sponsored license plates. While we fully understand the need for the State of Illinois to look for new and innovative ways to generate revenue, the research conducted for this report demonstrates that corporate sponsored license plates would not generate the types of profits that would make it a worthwhile endeavor. As outlined earlier in this report, Texas is the only other state that has implemented such a program and the money generated has been minimal to date. Therefore, we are not able to present findings on how to maximize profits from such a program.

The legislation requiring this report also instructs this office to determine “how to provide for a discounted registration fee for Illinois residents who display a corporate-sponsored license plate.” In light of the other findings of this study, it was determined that expending the resources necessary to design the mechanics of a discount registration fee program would be premature. If the General Assembly decides it wants this information, notwithstanding the results of our other research, we will provide the information as quickly as possible.

Additional Consideration

In addition to the issues this office is required to consider in this report, we direct the General Assembly’s attention to an additional consideration. The question of what messages can and cannot be included on Illinois special license plates has been the subject of contentious debates and federal

litigation. To date, the federal courts have determined that no organization or interest group has the right to compel Illinois to produce a special plate bearing a message related to the cause advocated by that group. One of the primary reasons for this judicial holding is that the messages on specialty license plates are reasonably viewed as having the State's stamp of approval because specialty license plates cannot come into being without legislative and gubernatorial authorization.

If the General Assembly were to adopt a program of corporate sponsored license plates, in which the corporations are chosen by the Secretary of State or some third party vendor (as in Texas), the General Assembly would no longer be putting its imprimatur on the message displayed on the plate. Thus, allowing corporations to advertise on license plates could lead to corporations – both for-profit or not-for-profit – attempting to use this program to advertise not only their products, but also their social or political messages. Political and issue oriented messages that have been successfully placed on license plates in other states include everything from the Confederate Flag to religious symbols.

Conclusion

While the Office of the Secretary of State recognizes that some will find appealing the concept of raising sorely needed funds by selling advertising space on our license plates to corporations, the results of the research conducted by this office and the experience of the only state to implement such a program unfortunately lead to the conclusion that this concept is not a viable option. Therefore, we must recommend against pursuing a corporate sponsored license plate program in Illinois.

EXHIBIT A

Public Act 097-0221

SB1360 Enrolled

LRB097 06606 HEP 46691 b

AN ACT concerning transportation.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 5. The Illinois Vehicle Code is amended by adding Section 3-696 as follows:

(625 ILCS 5/3-696 new)

Sec. 3-696. Corporate-sponsored license plate study. The Secretary of State shall complete a feasibility study for the implementation of a program for corporate-sponsored license plates. The study shall include, but not be limited to, findings on how to maximize profits to the State, how to provide for a discounted registration fee for Illinois residents who display a corporate-sponsored license plate; public interest in such a program; and the cost to the State for implementation of such a program. The Secretary of State shall report the findings of the feasibility study to the General Assembly no later than January 1, 2012.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.

Effective Date: 7/28/2011

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EXHIBIT C



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

JESSE WHITE • Secretary of State

August 2011

Dear Corporate Executive,

Pursuant to Public Act 97-0221 (Senate Bill 1360), the Illinois Secretary of State is being required to conduct a survey of Illinois corporations to gauge their interest in creating a corporate sponsored license plate program.

The proposal would allow a corporation to display its corporate logo on the front and rear license plates of Illinois vehicles. The corporation would have to pay to produce and distribute a minimum of 1,000 license plates, which is approximately \$35,000. If a resident chose to display a corporate-sponsored license plate, he or she would receive a discount from the current \$99 vehicle registration fee. For example, if the corporate-sponsored license plate allowed a resident to receive a \$25 discount from his or her registration, the resident would only pay \$74 for vehicle registration. A corporation who sponsors a license plate would be responsible for paying the \$25 discount for all plates displaying the corporation's logo.

In addition to paying for the production of license plates and the registration discount fee, businesses may be required to pay an additional fee to the State of Illinois. The amount of this fee is unknown as it would be set by the Illinois General Assembly should there be interest in such a program.

Completing the survey does not commit your organization to any agreement with the State of Illinois or the Secretary of State regarding a corporate license plate. This survey is ONLY to judge corporate interest for such an idea.

Please take a few minutes to answer the survey questions. Please use the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope to return your survey NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2011.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. C. Dannenberger".

ERNEST C. DANNENBERGER
Director, Vehicle Services

EXHIBIT D

CORPORATE LICENSE PLATE SURVEY FOR BUSINESSES

Pursuant to Public Act 97-0221 (Senate Bill 1360), the Illinois Secretary of State is being required to conduct a survey of Illinois corporations to gauge their interest in creating a corporate sponsored license plate program.

Completing this survey does not commit your organization to any agreement with the Illinois Secretary of State regarding a corporate license plate. This survey is ONLY to judge corporate interest for such an idea.

Please answer the following questions and return the answers in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you.

1. Would your corporation be interested in paying for a corporate logo to be placed on a minimum of 1,000 vehicle license plates registered in Illinois?

_____ Yes _____ No

2. If your corporation is not interested in advertising on license plates, please explain why.

3. Production, distribution and part of the annual registration renewal costs of 1,000 sets of license plates would be paid by the corporation annually in exchange for the placed advertisement on the front and rear license plate. What would be an acceptable amount your organization would be willing to pay for this type of advertising?

_____ \$50,000-\$75,000 annually
_____ \$75,001-\$100,000 annually
_____ \$100,001-\$125,000 annually
_____ \$125,001-\$150,000 annually
_____ \$150,001 or more annually

Name of Your Company: _____

Name of Individual Completing Survey: _____
(optional)

EXHIBIT E

Search 

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STREAM ENERGY LAUNCHES “IGNITE” TEXAS LICENSE PLATE PROGRAM

Non-profit Captain Hope’s Kids to benefit from specialty plate sales

(Dallas, Texas April 12, 2011) – [Stream Energy](#), the world’s largest network marketer of energy, has announced pre-registration for a specialty Texas license plate emblazoned with the logo of [Ignite](#), Stream Energy’s network marketing arm. The [six-character plates](#) will be available for delivery starting in late May through My Plates in partnership with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. A variety of number/letter combinations are already available using a layaway plan. For more information and to order, call 888-7MY-PLATES (888-769-7528).

A portion of the revenues for each purchased license plate will benefit Stream Energy’s community partner, [Captain Hope’s Kids](#), which provides critical needs to homeless children in the Dallas area. For each Ignite plate purchased, \$5.50 to \$29.50 will be sent to the non-profit, depending on the plate term selected. (No revenue will be paid to Stream Energy or Ignite.)

“We believe deeply in the cause of Captain Hope’s Kids,” said Stream Energy [Chairman Rob Snyder](#). “This organization helps families when they are most in need, when they find themselves at a deep crossroads. We are very pleased to arrange this innovative program.”

The announcement of the license plate program follows a \$15,000 donation made from Stream Energy March 5th, at the conclusion of [Ignition](#), Stream Energy’s annual national convention.

Captain Hope’s Kids touches the lives of more than 30,000 children from homeless families every year. [Chairman Rob Snyder](#) added, “Families with children make up 47 percent of the homeless population in the Dallas metropolitan area. Captain Hope’s Kids provides needed goods and services – and Stream Energy is committed to helping this organization.” Captain Hope’s Kids works with 40 service providers to provide critically needed items to homeless children.

Mighty Fine Burgers adds custom license plates

Burger chain is part of effort by state to raise money.

By **Brian Gaar**

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Published: 7:50 p.m. Monday, Nov. 8, 2010

Mighty Fine Burgers has cooked up its own license plate.

The Austin burger chain is one of a handful of companies that paid to have their logos embossed on Texas plates, a first-in-the-nation effort by the state to raise money.

The corporate plates were rolled out in November 2009 with real estate company RE/Max International. A number of other companies have since signed on and have plates available or will in the future, said Kim Drummond, spokeswoman for My Plates, the state's exclusive vendor for specialized license plates.

They include automaker Ford Motor Co. and the wind energy company Vestas, among others who have paid \$5,000 for each design, she said.

My Plates, which also sells custom plates for nonprofits and Texas universities, has sold more than 28,000 license plates in all, raising about \$2.1 million for the state's general revenue fund, Drummond said. That general revenue fund gets 35 percent of every license plate sold.

Depending on a plate's customization level and expiration date, drivers pay from \$55 to \$595 for a personalized 10-year plate.

The Mighty Fine-embossed plates were available for order as of Monday, according to the site.

For customers who order the cheeseburger-adorned plates, Mighty Fine is offering \$100 in store currency for every year they keep the plates on their vehicles, said Allison Dreiband, a spokeswoman for K&N Management, which owns Mighty Fine.

"We think it's going to take off," Dreiband said. "We've actually had a lot of interest already, even though we haven't started promoting it yet."

The 3-year-old chain has four Austin locations.

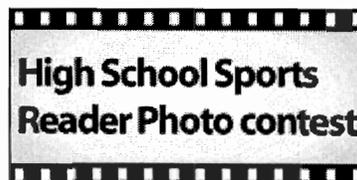
bgaar@statesman.com; 912-5932

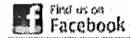
Find this article at:

<http://www.statesman.com/business/mighty-fine-burgers-adds-custom-license-plates-1032391.html>

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TX - CORPUS CHRISTI Managing Partner, Michael Schmidt

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Corpus Christi, TX 78416
ph: 361-854-9505
fx: 361-854-9520

HOURS

Mon: 3:00PM-10:00PM	Fri: 11:00AM-11:00PM
Tue: 3:00PM-10:00PM	Sat: 11:00AM-11:00PM
Wed: 3:00PM-10:00PM	Sun: 11:00AM-10:00PM
Thu: 3:00PM-10:00PM	

MENU

GENERAL INFO

WHAT'S HAPPENIN'

MAP & DIRECTIONS

SPECIALS

Be Creative and Win!

Calling all Texas residents! Do you want a cool custom Texas Roadhouse license plate? Look no further because your wish is our command! From October 4th-31st we are holding a license plate message contest to see which Roadie fan is the most creative! Visit www.myplates.com/go/txroadhouse and select Luxury or Custom personalization and create your own message to be viewed on your Texas license plate. Once you order your available license plate choose a term to enter your customization into our contest! Each entry will be judged 50% on creativity and 50% on relatedness to Texas Roadhouse. The winner will receive their custom license plate completely reimbursed!

*Some restrictions apply.

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[Create a Plate](#) [How it Works](#) [Charity Plates](#) [Coming Soon](#) [About Us](#)



Our plates are street legal and officially licensed by Texas Department of Motor Vehicles.

News & Press

My Plates Launches First Corporate License Plate in Texas RE/MAX of Texas Gets Its Own Official DMV License Plate

NOVEMBER 20, 2009 (Austin, TX) – RE/MAX is first. My Plates in partnership with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles announces the launch of Texas' first corporate branded license plate.

My Plates is a public/private program created by the state legislature to offer Texans more choices in the color and design of their license plates, and one of those choices is corporate branded plates. Executives at RE/MAX of Texas immediately understood the potential of the plates and acted quickly to design their own background.

RE/MAX of Texas COO and General Counsel Charles El-Moussa, says, "One of the reasons the red, white and blue RE/MAX Balloon is one of the most recognizable business logos in the world is that our agents understand the power of brand marketing. These plates are like mobile billboards all over Texas that give us a unique platform to start conversations about why more buyers and sellers use RE/MAX than any other real estate company in Texas —and around the world."

The RE/MAX network in Texas is comprised of approximately 5,000 members affiliated with 300 offices across the state.

My Plates President, Steve Farrar, says Texans can feel doubly good about the money raised through plate sales, "RE/MAX plates will benefit two causes: Children's Miracle Network®, the charity chosen by RE/MAX, and the state general revenue fund that pays for services for all Texans."

The State of Texas receives revenue from the sale of every My Plates' design, including the RE/MAX plate, with a guaranteed minimum return of \$25 million dollars over five years.

To purchase a RE/MAX plate or any of the 20 colorful My Plates' designs, you can go to www.myplates.com. Just pick your design, spell your message, and order. The plate arrives in about three weeks for pick up at your county tax office. You can even put them on motorcycles, trailers, RVs and private buses.

My Plates come in colors and designs to reflect every personality. From hot pink and burnt orange to western and vintage themes, the plates range from \$55 to \$195 for a one-year plate. Prices depend on how many letters and numbers you need to spell out the combination you want on your plate. If you purchase a five- or ten-year plate, the per-year price can be less than \$30/yr. Create your plate at www.myplates.com. You can also call My Plates at 1-888-7MY-PLAT(ES). Monday to Friday 8a-6p.

Contact Kim Miller Drummond at 512.423.4237 or kim@myplates.com for interviews with:

- RE/MAX executives/agents who can explain the importance of the plates as a business tool.
- My Plates program leaders - fun facts about the program and lots of background info
- Jpegs of My Plates' RE/MAX plate, high resolution for publication
- My Plates Brochure – if you received this release electronically, the brochure is attached

BACKGROUND:

The Texas state legislature is the first in the U.S. to create a public/private program to get creative with license plates to raise money for the state. The program has been popular because it costs taxpayers nothing and offers all Texans a fun choice in customizing their cars. In August 2009, TxDOT awarded the contract to operate the My Plates program to a joint venture between Pinnacle Technical Resources of Dallas (www.pinnacle1.com) and Etech, Inc. of Nacogdoches (www.etechnic.com). My Plates operates in partnership with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV). TxDMV is a new state agency that oversees the state's motor vehicle services, including the registration of passenger vehicles and the sale of license plates.

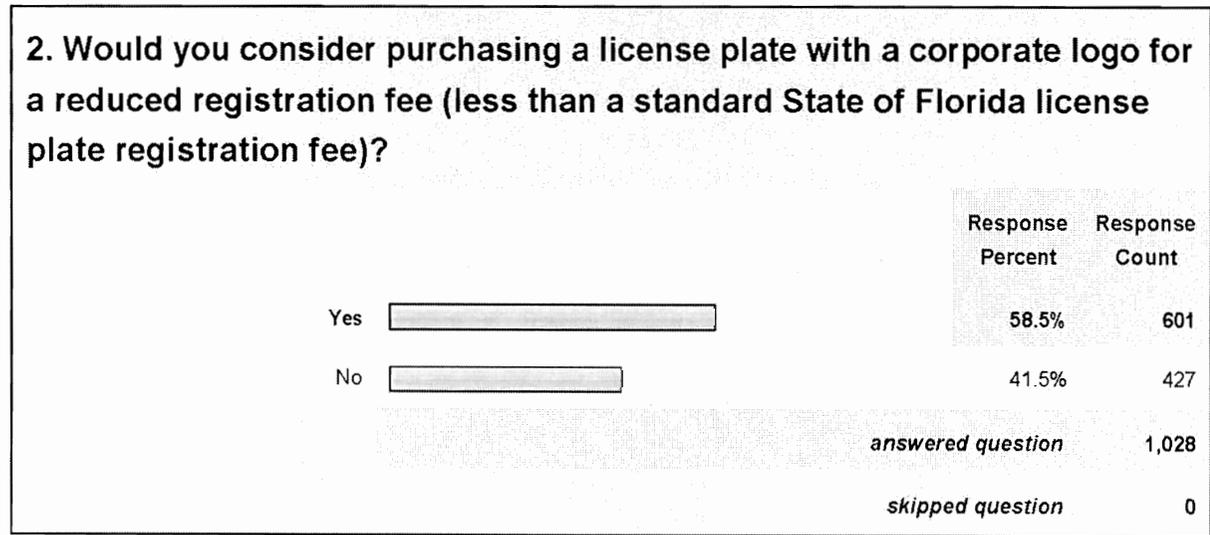
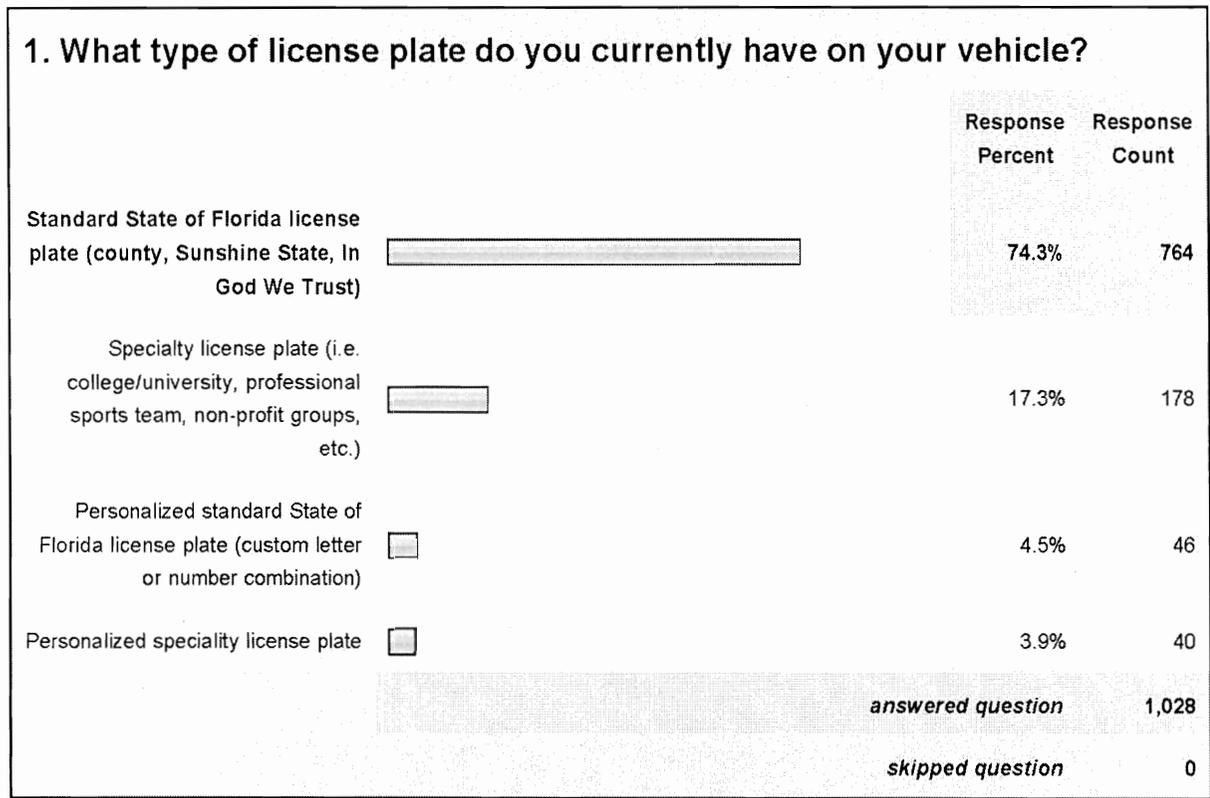
My Plates designs and markets new specialty license plates in partnership with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. My Plates' goal is to create a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship designed to maximize revenues for the state through the sale of My Plates specialty plates. My Plates is dedicated to providing Texans with greater choices in specialty plate designs, a unique way to add personality to your vehicle, and unmatched customer service. My Plates is a joint venture of Pinnacle Technical Resources of Dallas (www.pinnacle1.com) and Etech, Inc. of Nacogdoches (www.etechnic.com). www.myplates.com.

TxDMV is responsible for the registration, titling and credentialing of personal and commercial vehicles. It also licenses vehicle dealers and issues operating authority for commercial motor vehicles and buses. TxDMV also is home to the Auto Burglary and Theft Prevention Authority (ABTPA), which awards grants to law enforcement agencies to reduce auto theft and increase public awareness and education. To learn more, go to www.TxDMV.gov.

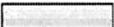
RE/MAX of Texas has a network of approximately 5,000 members affiliated with 300 offices across the state. Under the RE/MAX franchise name, these independently owned and operated offices provide residential and commercial real estate services. Since its inception in 1977, the RE/MAX organization in Texas has experienced thirty consecutive years of growth, attracting Sales Associates who lead the industry in professional designations, experience and productivity. www.remalex.com.

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EXHIBIT F



3. What would be your primary consideration for the purchase of a corporate license plate?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Savings in registration fees 	42.8%	440
Type of corporate sponsor 	19.4%	199
Would not consider a corporate license plate 	37.8%	389
<i>answered question</i>		1,028
<i>skipped question</i>		0

4. What level of savings would be required before you would consider a corporate license plate?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than \$10 	5.4%	56
\$10 to \$25 	28.3%	291
\$26 to \$40 	18.6%	191
More than \$40 	14.6%	150
Would not consider a corporate license plate 	33.1%	340
<i>answered question</i>		1,028
<i>skipped question</i>		0

5. If you have a specialty license plate, how likely are you to switch to a corporate license plate, if they became available?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Highly Unlikely 	15.7%	161
Unlikely 	7.8%	80
Likely 	15.0%	154
Highly Likely 	7.8%	80
Do not have a specialty license plate 	53.8%	553
	<i>answered question</i>	1,028
	<i>skipped question</i>	0