

Highlights of [GAO-05-356](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Among its efforts to strengthen aviation security, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is developing a new passenger prescreening system—known as Secure Flight. As required by Congress, TSA is planning to assume, through Secure Flight, the prescreening function currently performed by the air carriers. This report assesses the (1) status of Secure Flight’s development and implementation, (2) factors that could influence the effectiveness of Secure Flight, (3) processes used to oversee and manage the Secure Flight program, and (4) efforts taken to minimize the impacts on passengers and protect passenger rights. In conducting this assessment, we addressed the 10 specific areas of congressional interest related to Secure Flight outlined in Public Law 108-334.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) direct TSA to take several actions to manage risks associated with Secure Flight’s development, including (1) finalizing requirements and test plans, privacy and redress requirements, and program cost estimates; and (2) establishing plans to achieve connectivity to obtain data, and performance goals and measures. DHS generally concurred with GAO’s findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-356.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen A. Berrick (202)-512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Secure Flight Development and Testing Under Way, but Risks Should Be Managed as System Is Further Developed

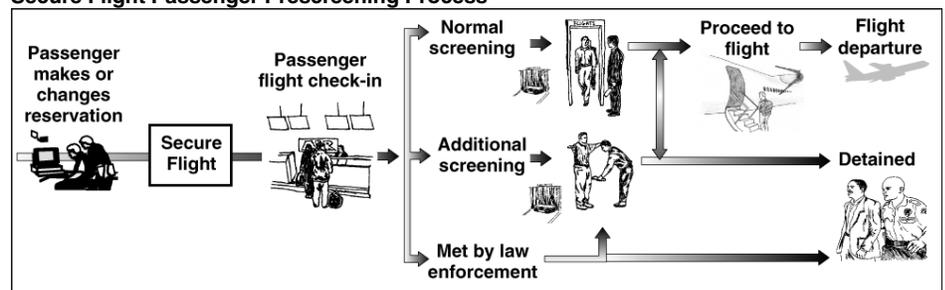
What GAO Found

TSA is making progress in addressing each of the key areas of congressional interest related to the development and implementation of Secure Flight, including developing and testing the system. However, TSA has not yet completed these efforts or fully addressed these areas, due largely to the current stage of the system’s development. For example, while TSA has drafted a concept of operations and system requirements, it has not finalized these key documents or completed test activities that will need to be accomplished before Secure Flight becomes operational. Until requirements are defined, operating policies are finalized, and testing is completed—scheduled for later in the system’s development—we cannot determine whether Secure Flight will fully address these areas of interest.

TSA also initiated a number of actions designed to improve the ability of Secure Flight to identify passengers who should undergo additional security scrutiny, in place of the prescreening currently conducted by air carriers. Specifically, TSA officials stated that recently completed initial testing identified improvements over the current prescreening system, and TSA plans to use intelligence analysts to increase the accuracy of data matches. However, the effectiveness of Secure Flight in identifying passengers who should undergo additional security scrutiny has not been fully determined. For example, TSA has not resolved how passenger data will be transmitted from air carriers to TSA to support Secure Flight operations. Further, the ability of Secure Flight to make accurate matches between passenger data and data contained in the terrorist screening database is dependent on the quality of the data used, which has not been determined.

TSA has also strengthened the oversight and management of Secure Flight, and has established relationships with key program stakeholders. However, air carriers expressed concerns regarding the uncertainty of system requirements, and the impact these requirements may have on the airline industry in terms of system modifications and costs. Additionally, TSA has taken steps to minimize potential impacts on passengers and to protect passenger rights during Secure Flight testing. However, TSA has not yet clearly defined the privacy impacts of the operational system or all of the actions TSA plans to take to mitigate potential impacts.

Secure Flight Passenger Prescreening Process



Source: GAO analysis of TSA data.