



Highlights of [GAO-10-650T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorist attacks on surface transportation facilities in Moscow, Mumbai, London, and Madrid caused casualties and highlighted the vulnerability of such systems. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is the primary federal agency responsible for security of transportation systems.

This testimony focuses on the extent to which (1) DHS has used risk management in strengthening surface transportation security, (2) TSA has coordinated its strategy and efforts for securing surface transportation with stakeholders, (3) TSA has measured the effectiveness of its surface transportation security-improvement actions, and (4) TSA has made progress in deploying surface transportation security inspectors and related challenges it faces in doing so. GAO's statement is based on public GAO products issued from January to June 2009, selected updates from September 2009 to April 2010, and ongoing work on pipeline security. For the updates and ongoing work, GAO analyzed TSA's pipeline risk assessment model, reviewed relevant laws and program management documents, and interviewed TSA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS in prior reports to strengthen surface transportation security. DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and is making progress in implementing them.

[View GAO-10-650T](#) or [key components](#).

For more information, contact Steve M. Lord at (202) 512-4379 or lords@gao.gov.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

TSA Has Taken Actions to Manage Risk, Improve Coordination, and Measure Performance, but Additional Actions Would Enhance Its Efforts

What GAO Found

DHS has taken actions to implement a risk management approach but could do more to inform resource allocation based on risk across the surface transportation sector—including the mass transit and passenger rail, freight rail, highway, and pipeline modes. For example, in March 2009, GAO reported that TSA had not conducted comprehensive risk assessments to compare risk across the entire transportation sector, which the agency could use to guide investment decisions, and recommended that TSA do so. TSA concurred, and in April 2010 noted planned actions. GAO has also made recommendations to strengthen risk assessments within individual modes, such as expanding TSA's efforts to include all security threats in its freight rail security strategy, including potential sabotage to bridges, tunnels, and other critical infrastructure. DHS concurred and is addressing the recommendations.

TSA has generally improved coordination with key surface transportation stakeholders, but additional actions could enhance its efforts. For example, GAO reported in April 2009 that although federal and industry stakeholders have taken steps to coordinate their freight rail security efforts, TSA was not requesting another federal agency's data that could be useful in developing regulations for high-risk rail carriers. GAO recommended that DHS work with its federal partners to ensure that all relevant information, such as threat assessments, is shared. DHS concurred with this recommendation and recently stated that TSA has met with key federal stakeholders regarding sharing relevant assessment information and avoiding duplication.

TSA has developed national strategies for each surface transportation mode, but using targeted, outcome-oriented performance measures could enable TSA to better monitor the effectiveness of these strategies and programs that support them. For example, GAO reported in June 2009 that TSA's mass transit strategy identified sectorwide goals, but did not contain measures or targets for program effectiveness. Such measures could help TSA track progress in securing transit and passenger rail systems. GAO also reported in April 2009 that TSA's freight rail security strategy could be strengthened by including targets for three of its four performance measures and revising its approach for the other measure, such as including more reliable baseline data to improve consistency in quantifying results. GAO recommended in both instances that TSA strengthen its performance measures. DHS concurred and noted planned actions. Preliminary findings from GAO's ongoing review of pipeline security show that TSA has taken some actions to monitor progress, but could better measure pipeline security improvements. GAO expects to issue a report by the end of 2010.

GAO reported in June 2009 that TSA had more than doubled its surface transportation inspector workforce and expanded the roles and responsibilities of surface inspectors, but faced challenges balancing aviation and surface transportation priorities and had not completed a workforce plan to direct current and future program needs. TSA has initiated but not yet finished a staffing study to identify the optimal size of its inspector workforce.