



G A O

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

---

June 18, 2002

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta  
The Secretary of Transportation

Subject: Department of Transportation Report on Transporting Hazardous Materials

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter is in response to the draft report we received on June 10<sup>th</sup> that the Department of Transportation (DOT) has prepared in accordance with the requirement in the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY 2002. As you know, section 352(b) of that act directs you, in consultation with the Comptroller General, to conduct a study of the effects on public health and safety, the environment, and the economy associated with the transportation of hazardous and radioactive materials. The act further specifies five matters to be addressed in the study and calls for a report to Congress within 6 months of the act's enactment—that is, by June 18, 2002.

We have had no substantive consultation with DOT on the study and only received a draft report for review 1 week prior to its scheduled delivery date to Congress, although we offered several times since January to consult with DOT on the scope and design of the study. Consequently, we have not had the opportunity to perform a comprehensive review of the report's contents or to make timely suggestions for possible modifications. Although the report provides detailed information on the transportation of hazardous and radioactive material, it does not fully address all of the matters raised by Congress.

The matters set forth in the appropriations act were challenging and difficult to address in the relatively short time provided by the act. The report provides extensive detail on public and private investments in maintaining the nation's transportation infrastructure to ensure the safe transportation of all cargo, including hazardous and radioactive materials, as well as on plans to enhance transportation safety. It further provides a broad overview of the numerous federal programs designed to improve federal, state, and local responses to accidents involving hazardous materials. However, the report does not directly address the study requirement to assess the adequacy of these programs and the additional costs and time required to ensure their adequacy.

The report also provides detailed information on incidents involving the transportation of hazardous materials, but it does not link this information to the condition of the routes on which those incidents occurred. Such an analysis would

have helped meet another important study requirement, namely, to examine the safety of specific transportation routes used or planned for hazardous and radioactive shipments. The report offers some important general considerations about how best to route hazardous materials and the limitations to rerouting. However, it does not discuss the actions that may be needed to ensure the safety of individual routes.

Please call me at (202) 512-2834 if you or your staff have any questions. We are sending copies of this letter to the appropriate congressional committees. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John H. Anderson, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a distinct 'A'.

John H. Anderson, Jr.  
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

(545020)