TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Efforts to Strengthen Aviation and Surface Transportation Security Continue to Progress, but More Work Remains

DHS, primarily through TSA, has made progress in securing the aviation and surface transportation networks, but more work remains. With regard to commercial aviation, TSA has undertaken efforts to strengthen airport security; hire, train, and measure the performance of its screening workforce; prescreen passengers against terrorist watch lists; and screen passengers, baggage, and cargo. With regard to surface transportation modes, TSA has taken steps to develop a strategic approach for securing mass transit, passenger and freight rail, commercial vehicles, and highways; establish security standards for certain transportation modes; and conduct threat, criticality, and vulnerability assessments of surface transportation assets, particularly passenger and freight rail. TSA also hired and deployed compliance inspectors and conducted inspections of passenger and freight rail systems.

While these efforts have helped to strengthen the security of the transportation network, DHS and TSA still face a number of key challenges in further securing these systems. For example, regarding commercial aviation, although TSA has made significant progress in its development of an advanced passenger prescreening system, known as Secure Flight, challenges remain, including unreliable program cost and schedule estimates, among other things. In addition, TSA’s efforts to enhance perimeter security at airports may not be sufficient to provide for effective security. For example, TSA has initiated efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of security-related technologies, such as biometric identification systems, but has not developed a plan for guiding airports with respect to future technology enhancements. While TSA is pursuing the procurement of several checkpoint technologies to address key existing vulnerabilities, it has not deployed technologies on a wide-scale basis, and has not yet developed and implemented technologies needed to screen air cargo. Further, TSA’s efforts to develop security standards for surface transportation modes have been limited to passenger and freight rail, and TSA has not determined what its regulatory role will be with respect to commercial vehicles or highway infrastructure.

A number of crosscutting issues have impeded DHS’s and TSA’s efforts to secure the transportation network, including the need to strengthen strategic planning and performance measurement, and more fully adopt and apply risk-based principles in the pursuit of its security initiatives.

What GAO Found

In prior reports, GAO made a number of recommendations to DHS and TSA to strengthen their efforts to secure the transportation network. DHS and TSA generally agreed with the recommendations and are making progress on implementing them.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made a number of recommendations to DHS and TSA to strengthen their efforts to secure the transportation network. DHS and TSA generally agreed with the recommendations and are making progress on implementing them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-651T. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.