Securing the nation’s transportation system is fraught with challenges. The transportation system crisscrosses the nation and extends beyond our borders to move millions of passengers and tons of freight each day. The extensiveness of the system as well as the sheer volume of passengers and freight moved makes it both an attractive target and difficult to secure. Addressing the security concerns of the transportation system is further complicated by the number of transportation stakeholders that are involved in security decisions, including government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, and thousands of private sector companies. Further exacerbating these challenges are the financial pressures confronting transportation stakeholders. For example, the sluggish economy has weakened the transportation industry’s financial condition by decreasing ridership and revenues. The federal government has provided additional funding for transportation security since September 11, but demand has far outstripped the additional amounts made available. It will take a collective effort of all transportation stakeholders to meet existing and future transportation challenges.

Since September 11, transportation stakeholders have acted to enhance security. At the federal level, TSA primarily focused on meeting aviation security deadlines during its first year of existence and DOT launched a variety of security initiatives to enhance the other modes of transportation. For example, the Federal Transit Administration provided grants for emergency drills and conducted security assessments at the largest transit agencies, among other things. TSA has recently focused more on the security of the maritime and land transportation modes and is planning to issue security standards for all modes of transportation starting this summer. DOT is also continuing their security efforts. However, the roles and responsibilities of TSA and DOT in securing the transportation system have not been clearly defined, which creates the potential for overlap, duplication, and confusion as both entities move forward with their security efforts.

GAO recommends that DHS and DOT use a mechanism, such as a memorandum of agreement, to clarify and delineate DOT’s and TSA’s roles and responsibilities in transportation security matters. DHS and DOT generally agreed with the report’s findings; however, they disagreed with the recommendation. Based on the uncertainty in the entities’ roles and responsibilities that transportation stakeholders surfaced to us, we continue to believe our recommendation is valid and would help address transportation security challenges.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Peter Guerrero at (202) 512-2834 or guerrerop@gao.gov.