



L.A. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE PROJECT

Current Proposal Addresses Space Needs, but Some Security and Operational Concerns Would Remain

Highlights of [GAO-05-158](#), a report to the Chairmen, Committee on Environment and Public Works and Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the early 1990s, the General Services Administration (GSA) and the federal judiciary have been carrying out a multibillion dollar courthouse construction initiative to address the judiciary's growing space needs. To plan for and make funding decisions on projects, Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, and GSA have relied on a rolling 5-year plan prepared annually by the judiciary that prioritizes new courthouse projects based on an urgency score. The urgency score is based on the year a courthouse runs out of space, the number of judges without courtrooms, security concerns, and operational inefficiencies.

In recent years, the L.A. courthouse had the highest urgency score in the judiciary's 5-year plan. At a cost of approximately \$400 million, the new courthouse is expected to be one of the most expensive projects in the federal government's courthouse construction program to date.

In light of the project's significance, GAO was asked: (1) To what extent does GSA's current L.A. courthouse project proposal address the underlying conditions that led to Los Angeles's high urgency score and (2) what construction and other costs, if any, may be required to meet judiciary and related needs in Los Angeles? The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and GSA provided technical comments on this report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-158.

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

What GAO Found

GSA's current proposal to construct a new courthouse in Los Angeles, while expanding the judiciary's use of the existing Roybal Federal Building, would address some but not all of the underlying conditions that led to Los Angeles's high urgency score. For example, it would address the judiciary's need for additional space and alleviate some security concerns. There would be space to accommodate the 47 current district and magistrate judges and the 14 additional judges expected by 2011, with room to expand, if needed, for additional judges. The new building would also improve security by providing additional holding cells and separate prisoner walkways and elevators. However, the operational and security concerns related to housing a trial court in multiple buildings (split court) that was a significant factor in Los Angeles's high urgency score would remain. For example, U.S. Marshals Service officials said that a split court would require them to duplicate much of their security equipment and personnel necessary for fulfilling its mission of protecting the courthouses.

The Current L.A. Courthouse Proposal Addresses Some Conditions Underlying the Urgency Score

| Urgency score criterion | Extent to which current proposal addresses the criterion |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Year courthouse runs out of space | ● |
| Number of judges without courtrooms | ● |
| Security concerns | ◐ |
| Operational inefficiencies | ◐ |

● Fully addressed ◐ Partially addressed ○ Not addressed

Source: GAO.

To meet judiciary and related needs in Los Angeles, the federal government will likely incur additional construction and operational costs beyond the estimated \$400 million for the new courthouse. Like other courthouse projects in recent years, GSA officials acknowledge that there is a potential for the L.A. Courthouse to incur future escalation in construction costs due to changes during the design and construction phases, such as increases in raw material and labor costs. Furthermore, additional construction costs will also be incurred to meet the judiciary's space needs over the long term. Preliminary estimates by GSA show that these costs may exceed \$100 million. For example, GSA will need to build four additional magistrate courtrooms in the Roybal building and renovate the current courthouse to convert courtrooms into office space for the U.S. Attorneys and other federal agencies. GSA also plans a long-term expansion project to construct seven more courtrooms to meet judiciary space needs by 2031. Judiciary officials also acknowledge that a split court would result in additional operational costs due to duplicate offices and staff in the Roybal building and the new courthouse.