



Highlights of [GAO-07-718](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Intermodal transportation enables freight and passengers to cross between different modes of transportation efficiently and can improve mobility, reduce congestion, and cut costs. In 1991 Congress called for a National Intermodal Transportation System and created the Office of Intermodalism within the Department of Transportation (DOT). However, as GAO and others have reported, there are barriers to planning and implementing intermodal projects. GAO's report examines (1) barriers that inhibit intermodal transportation; (2) actions DOT has taken to address these barriers and support Congress' goal; and (3) additional actions, if any, that DOT could take to better address barriers. GAO analyzed information from DOT and transportation experts and talked with transportation officials from various states and localities throughout the country.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Transportation direct one office or administration to lead and coordinate intermodal efforts at the federal level by improving collaboration and the availability of intermodal guidance and resources.

DOT agreed to consider GAO's recommendation and provided technical comments that GAO incorporated, as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-718.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud, 202-512-2834, siggerudk@gao.gov.

INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION

DOT Could Take Further Actions to Address Intermodal Barriers

What GAO Found

Three key barriers inhibit intermodal transportation, according to federal, state, and local officials and published studies: limited federal funding targeted to such projects, in part due to statutory requirements; limited collaboration among the many entities and jurisdictions involved; and limited ability to evaluate the benefits of such projects. For example, officials in one state reported difficulty in securing funds to repair roads connecting port and rail facilities to nearby highways, because the nationwide benefits from increasing freight mobility were both difficult to quantify and not considered in the local transportation planning process. These three barriers impede state and local agencies' ability to carry out intermodal projects and limit DOT's ability to implement Congress' goal of a national intermodal transportation system.

DOT—through several of its operating administrations and the Office of Intermodalism—has taken a number of actions to address each barrier and support Congress' goal, but these actions fall short of creating a coordinated approach. Actions taken include distributing guidance on obtaining funding, creating working groups to improve collaboration, and developing a framework for a national freight policy. In addition, DOT proposed a reorganization in 1995 to enhance its approach to intermodal transportation and improve collaboration, but Congress did not approve it. While DOT has taken actions to address intermodal barriers and Congress' goal, no one office is coordinating these actions across the department. The Office of Intermodalism, which has responsibility for initiating and coordinating federal intermodal policy, is primarily focused on research and analysis. Furthermore, DOT is limited in its ability to address funding issues, due to the federal funding structure of transportation programs.

GAO's analysis of published studies and discussions with state and local officials surfaced some actions that DOT could take to better address barriers: increasing collaboration between DOT's own operating administrations and improving the availability of intermodal guidance and resources. In addition, designating one office or operating administration to be responsible for coordinating these and other DOT efforts to address barriers would help in moving toward Congress' vision of a National Intermodal Transportation System. However, DOT and the Congress also face other transportation challenges, including the financial condition of the Highway Trust Fund, the lack of assurance that projects that best meet mobility needs are being selected and funded, and the increase in congestion on all transportation modes. These challenges led GAO to suggest in prior work that DOT and Congress reassess all transportation modes to determine the appropriate federal role and funding strategies, and develop ways to monitor investments. Actions to improve intermodal transportation would need to be considered in the context of these current challenges.