

Highlights of [GAO-11-165](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The unprecedented growth at 26 military installations across the country due to the implementation of several concurrent Department of Defense (DOD) initiatives is expected to stress transportation needs for surrounding communities. The Defense Access Roads program, while small when compared to other transportation funding sources, provides a means for DOD to pay a share of the cost of highway improvements due to unusual and sudden DOD-generated activities.

In response to a congressional request to review the program, GAO (1) assessed the use of the program to mitigate transportation needs and (2) identified additional steps that may be necessary to address unmet transportation needs. GAO conducted extensive interviews with 26 growth installations and visited installations and state authorities in Maryland, Texas, and Virginia to discuss transportation issues.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD in coordination with the Department of Transportation (1) update, clarify, and communicate the program's guidelines to all stakeholders to promote more effective program utilization, and (2) ensure regular meetings of appropriate high-level leaders to identify existing federal transportation funding resources and develop a strategy for giving priority consideration to defense-affected communities. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-11-165](#) or key components. For more information, contact Brian J. Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE

High-Level Federal Interagency Coordination Is Warranted to Address Transportation Needs beyond the Scope of the Defense Access Roads Program

What GAO Found

The Defense Access Roads program is providing some assistance in mitigating transportation needs in communities surrounding growth installations, but program usage has been limited, in part, by a lack of knowledge of the program, outdated regulations, and unclear guidance on how to navigate the program's complex process. DOD has certified 20 transportation projects at 11 of the 26 military installation locations since 2004. Of the 20 certified projects, 11 have been funded at about \$125 million. Considering funding delays and construction time frames, most of the approved projects to date are unlikely to provide relief in the near term. The procedures of the Defense Access Roads program are complex, involving multiple federal, state, and local stakeholders. The guidance describing the program's procedures and, specifically, the application of the criteria, is difficult to follow and some regulations and guidance are outdated. Despite program outreach efforts and positive experiences with program administrators, military officials from 11 installations said that more information would be helpful to clarify the program's procedures. Without program guidance that clearly details the program's procedures and is effectively communicated to all stakeholders, the program may not be used to its fullest extent.

GAO identified an additional step that may be necessary to meet the large pool of the transportation needs that are not being met by the Defense Access Roads program—greater high-level federal interagency coordination. Aside from the Defense Access Roads program, other sources of funding exist that can be used to help mitigate unmet needs in the defense-affected communities. Local and state agencies generally have the responsibility for constructing and maintaining highways and are the recipients of billions of dollars from federal sources, such as grants from the Department of Transportation or through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. GAO found that some of the transportation projects at several of the military growth locations have been funded by the states in which they are located and others are recipients of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. Because this assistance is coming from diverse sources and is largely uncoordinated among the stakeholders involved, it is unclear to what extent priority consideration is being given to the defense-affected communities as prescribed by Executive Order 12788. This presidential order provided for a federal committee—the Economic Adjustment Committee—bringing together 22 agencies, under the leadership of the Secretary of Defense or his designee to, among other things, support various programs designed to assist communities most affected by defense activities. As chair of the committee, DOD has the opportunity to convene full committee meetings and exercise high-level leadership needed to ensure that federal agencies are affording priority consideration to defense-affected communities. However, the committee has only rarely convened and has at no time discussed transportation needs affecting all 26 growth locations. Without this leadership, it is unlikely that the federal agencies can provide the effective interagency and intergovernmental coordination and potential funds needed to help address the unmet transportation needs of defense-affected communities.