

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-470](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Over 326,000 passengers and crew entered the United States through 241 international airports on an average day in fiscal year 2016, according to CBP. In 2007, CBP started its Model Ports program to improve the international arrivals process for travelers to the United States by implementing technology to facilitate entry and expanding public-private partnerships, among other things. GAO was asked to review this program and subsequent airport travel and tourism facilitation initiatives at the 17 busiest U.S. international airports associated with the president's National Travel and Tourism Strategy.

This report examines (1) how CBP and stakeholders have implemented airport travel and tourism facilitation initiatives, (2) how CBP and stakeholders manage staff to facilitate the traveler entry process, and (3) the extent to which CBP has mechanisms to monitor and report wait times at U.S. international airports. GAO collected data on the implementation of travel and tourism facilitation initiatives and analyzed CBP officer staffing and wait time data at the 17 airports from fiscal years 2014 through 2016. GAO also visited a nongeneralizable sample of 11 airports, selected based on traveler volume and variety of implemented initiatives, among other factors, and interviewed CBP, airport, and airline officials at 15 of the 17 airports.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP report airport wait time data for different categories of travelers. CBP concurred with the recommendation and identified planned actions to address the recommendation.

View [GAO-17-470](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512- 8777 or [gambler@gao.gov](mailto:gambler@gao.gov).

March 2017

## INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVELERS

### CBP Collaborates with Stakeholders to Facilitate the Arrivals Process, but Could Strengthen Reporting of Airport Wait Times

## What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security, and airport and airline stakeholders jointly implement travel and tourism initiatives at U.S. international airports to facilitate the arrival of travelers. These initiatives include Automated Passport Control self-service kiosks that allow eligible travelers to complete a portion of the CBP inspection process before seeing a CBP officer, and Mobile Passport Control that allows eligible travelers to submit their passport and other information to CBP via an application on a mobile device. Various airport-specific factors can affect whether and how CBP and stakeholders implement travel and tourism facilitation initiatives at each airport. These factors include the size and layout of the airport facility, the infrastructure needed to support initiatives, the willingness and ability of the airport stakeholders to pay for initiatives or infrastructure to support them, as applicable, and stakeholder discretion in how to implement initiatives. CBP has two airport travel facilitation goals: (1) improving customer service levels for international arrivals and (2) maintaining or reducing wait times—and has implemented mechanisms to assess and obtain feedback on the traveler experience.

CBP allocates and manages staff using various tools, and stakeholders provide resources to help facilitate the traveler entry process. For example, CBP uses its Workload Staffing Model to determine the staffing requirements and help make allocation decisions for CBP officers at ports of entry, including airports. CBP also uses its Enterprise Management Information System to monitor and make immediate staffing changes to meet any traveler volume and wait time concerns at airports. Airport and airline stakeholders can also enter into agreements to pay for CBP officers to work overtime during peak travel hours or outside regular operational hours.

CBP monitors airport wait times and reports data on its public website to help travelers plan flights, including scheduling connecting flights, but the reported data have limited usefulness to travelers. Currently, CBP does not report wait times by traveler type, such as U.S. citizen or foreign visitor. Rather, CBP reports average hourly wait times for all travelers on arriving international flights. By reporting wait times for all categories of travelers combined, CBP is reporting wait times that are lower than those generally experienced by visitors. According to GAO's analysis of CBP wait time data for the 17 busiest airports from May 2013 through August 2016, the average wait time was 13 minutes for U.S. citizens and 28 minutes for visitors, while the combined reported average wait time was 21 minutes. Reporting wait times by traveler type could improve the usefulness of CBP's wait time data to travelers by providing them with more complete and accurate data on their wait times. This could help inform their flight plans and could provide additional transparency to allow CBP to work with stakeholders to determine what, if any, changes are needed, to improve the traveler experience and better manage wait times.

This is a public version of a For Official Use Only—Law Enforcement Sensitive report that GAO issued in February 2017. Information DHS deemed For Official Use Only—Law Enforcement Sensitive has been redacted.