SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

DHS Is Developing and Testing Security Technologies, but Could Better Share Test Results

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has one research and development (R&D) effort focused on surface transportation, the Surface Transportation Explosive Threat Detection (STETD) program, which is developing technologies to secure mass transit systems (see figure). DHS guidance requires S&T to develop results-oriented milestones to track progress. GAO found, however, that S&T has not used milestones that fully adhered to DHS guidance. For example, most STETD program milestones did not clearly link to key activities described in program plans. As a result, DHS may not have the information needed to determine whether the STETD program is meeting its goals.

Examples of Technologies DHS S&T Is Developing to Secure Mass Transit

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<th>Standoff Detection</th>
<th>Real-Time Threat Detection</th>
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<td>A set of imaging sensors designed to scan crowds for hidden threat items on travelers.</td>
<td>Technology intended to automatically detect abandoned items that could be threats.</td>
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S&T, TSA, and stakeholders effectively collaborate, but TSA could better share test results with mass transit stakeholders. For example, S&T, TSA, and mass transit operators regularly collaborate on issues related to identifying mass transit capability gaps and testing security technologies to address those gaps. Nevertheless, GAO found TSA’s efforts to share information on existing technologies to secure mass transit could be improved. Specifically, TSA regularly assesses commercially available technologies, but does not routinely or comprehensively share its results with mass transit operators. For example, TSA’s reports on its testing of commercially available products would provide mass transit operators with technical assessment information. However, seven of the nine mass transit operators GAO spoke with asked for more technical assessment information on existing commercial technologies, indicating that they may not be receiving the TSA products that would provide this information. Sharing this information more routinely and comprehensively with mass transit operators would allow TSA to better inform them about the capabilities of technologies that could be acquired to secure their systems.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations: that S&T incorporate DHS milestone guidance for its STETD program, and that TSA develop a mechanism to routinely and comprehensively share security technology information with mass transit operators. DHS concurred with both recommendations.

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