AVIATION SECURITY

TSA and Airport Stakeholders Have Enhanced Airport Public Area Security, but a Plan Is Needed for Future Collaboration

What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) took several actions in response to the 2013 Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) shooting and the Gerardo Hernandez Airport Security Act of 2015. Specifically, TSA took several actions to better address airport security in public areas, including strengthening and mandating active shooter training drills and installing duress alarms at screening checkpoints, among other things. In response to the Act, TSA updated guidance for reporting suspicious behavior and revised directives identifying responsibilities for local law enforcement coverage of passenger screening checkpoints and nearby public areas, among other actions.

In response to subsequent airport public area security incidents, such as those in Fort Lauderdale in 2017 and Brussels and Istanbul in 2016, TSA has taken additional actions. Specifically, TSA issued the Public Area Security National Framework in 2017, in coordination with various aviation security stakeholders. The framework categorized 11 best practices and non-binding recommendations for improving security of public areas, including sharing information and preventing attacks. Aviation security stakeholders have also implemented various actions consistent with these best practices, including establishing airport operations centers and deploying enhanced law enforcement teams to serve as a visible deterrent in airport public areas (see figure). In response to the TSA Modernization Act, TSA established a public area security working group in March 2019 to engage with stakeholders such as airport operators and industry associations and update and validate the best practices cited in the 2017 framework. This group met twice in 2019, but TSA has not outlined specific plans for engaging this group in the future. Developing a plan outlining the roles and responsibilities of the working group members, the mechanisms through which the working group will collaborate, and the frequency of when the working group will meet, would better position TSA to ensure the best practices cited by stakeholders remain relevant and emerging threats are proactively identified.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that TSA develop a plan for future stakeholder engagement on the security of airport public areas. DHS concurred with the recommendation.

Enhanced Law Enforcement Teams Patrol Public Areas at the Los Angeles International Airport to Provide a Visible Deterrent