

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-395](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

NTSB investigates accidents across all modes of transportation and issues recommendations intended to prevent similar accidents. In 2019, NTSB published its latest Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements. It identified 10 transportation safety issues with 268 underlying safety recommendations.

The National Transportation Safety Board Reauthorization Act of 2018 included a provision for GAO to examine NTSB's methodology for evaluating and selecting recommendations for inclusion in the Most Wanted List. This report discusses (1) NTSB's methodology for developing its Most Wanted List and (2) how NTSB addressed statutory requirements and how its methodology aligned with components for systematic decision-making, among other objectives. GAO reviewed NTSB documentation for its process of selecting issues for the Most Wanted List. GAO also interviewed NTSB officials to understand the rationale behind the selection methodology and how the process was applied. GAO compared the methodology to essential components for systematic decision-making and the statutory requirement that NTSB publish a publicly available methodology report that describes NTSB's consideration of key elements.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends NTSB improve how it documents and communicates decisions for its Most Wanted List. NTSB agreed with both recommendations.

View [GAO-20-395](#). For more information, contact Dan Bertoni at (202) 512-2834 or BertoniD@gao.gov

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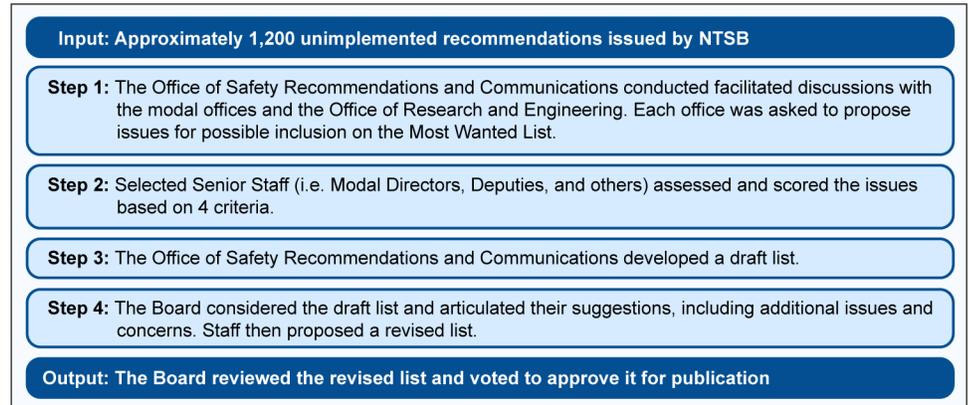
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

More Detail Could Increase the Understanding of Selections for the Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements

What GAO Found

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) developed a multiphase approach to select issues for its 2019–2020 Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements (see figure). NTSB designed the selection process to encourage collaboration and to consider the expertise of NTSB's four modal offices (Aviation Safety, Highway Safety, Marine Safety, and Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials) and its Office of Research and Engineering. Like past lists, each issue must be supported by one or more open safety recommendations. The process also allowed NTSB's board members and others discretion in suggesting changes to the issues proposed for inclusion on the Most Wanted List. NTSB uses the list to raise awareness of its recommendations and to advocate their adoption since the NTSB cannot require implementation of its recommendations.

National Transportation Safety Board's Selection Process for Its 2019–2020 Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements



Source: GAO analysis of Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements documentation. | GAO-20-395

NTSB published a methodology report, in response to the requirements in the National Transportation Safety Board Reauthorization Act of 2018, that detailed the methodology to evaluate and select issues for the list. GAO found that the design of NTSB's methodology met the essential components for designing a systematic decision-making framework. When implementing that methodology, however, NTSB did not fully document how staff, when evaluating the issues, considered its own established criteria nor fully communicated the rationale for why its selected issues were "ripe for action" now—a key component of the list. While GAO was able to determine the rationale for NTSB's evaluation and selection decisions, NTSB's guidance does not require NTSB to fully document or communicate its decision, and NTSB does not do so. Greater transparency in how issues are evaluated and selected could enhance users' understanding of the list and help ensure the list continues to rally the support and resources needed to tackle difficult and long-standing transportation safety challenges.