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Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

June 23, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Transportation

Dear Secretary Duffy:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the Department of Transportation (DOT) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ DOT's recommendation implementation rate was 70 percent. As of June 2026, DOT has 204 open recommendations, including 22 priority recommendations.² Since our June 2025 letter, DOT has implemented three priority recommendations.³ I appreciate DOT's continued commitment to addressing our priority recommendations, which will better position the department to more effectively and efficiently achieve its mission.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a High Risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Transportation*, [GAO-25-108054](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2025). In our 2025 letter, we identified 21 priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the three that were implemented, the priority status was removed from two recommendations, and we added six new priority recommendations.

- **Addressing workforce gaps.** DOT relies on a skilled and specialized workforce to ensure the safety of our transportation systems. However, DOT has not consistently assessed and addressed skills and staffing gaps for mission-critical positions. We recommended that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) collect more comprehensive information to inform its workforce [assessments of mission-critical skill gaps](#) across the agency. In addition, we recently reported that the number of air traffic controllers has declined over the past decade, leading to staffing shortages at critical facilities, while the number of flights has increased. We recommended that FAA assess its processes to further improve its efforts to [recruit, hire, and train air traffic controllers](#). By taking these actions, FAA could ensure that it has sufficient staff—with the requisite skills—to effectively mitigate risks to aviation safety.
- **Improving grant management.** DOT provides billions of dollars in grant funding each year to eligible entities to build and improve infrastructure throughout the United States. Our work has highlighted the need for DOT to look across its modal administrations to improve its grant programs and processes. For example, we [recommended](#) that DOT issue a department-wide directive for all of its discretionary grant programs, including requirements to document key decisions and align grant programs' policy priorities with DOT's application evaluation and selection process. Further, our recent work evaluating DOT's implementation of grant funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) made [recommendations](#) that DOT provide complete information to Congress on IIJA grant funding status and assess risks that awardees, including state and local governments, face in signing grant agreements. Taking these actions would increase transparency, improve accountability for grant program decisions, and more clearly communicate information to Congress and the public.
- **Integrating emerging technologies.** Emerging technologies, such as drones and automated vehicles, are growing in use. DOT is responsible for ensuring the safe integration of these technologies into the nation's transportation systems. Our work has highlighted the need for FAA and DOT to develop comprehensive plans to achieve results, meet milestones, and track progress. For example, we [recommended](#) that FAA develop a comprehensive strategy for drone integration and that FAA develop and implement specific milestones to integrate drones into a future [information-centric airspace](#). Further, we [recommended](#) that DOT develop and implement a comprehensive plan to better manage departmental initiatives related to automated vehicles. Such planning efforts are key to addressing risks and ensuring safe transportation systems for all.

Workforce planning gaps across DOT, including those highlighted above, are part of the government-wide [strategic human capital management](#) issue area on GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ Two other government-wide High Risk areas have direct implications for DOT and its operations: [improving IT acquisitions and management](#) and [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#).

⁴This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2025).

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status, can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁵ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Heather Krause, Managing Director of the Physical Infrastructure team, at KrauseH@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

cc: The Honorable Steven G. Bradbury, Deputy Secretary, DOT
Bryan Bedford, Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration
Sean McMaster, Administrator, Federal Highway Administration
Derek D. Barrs, Administrator, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
Stephen M. Carmel, Administrator, Maritime Administration
Jonathan Morrison, Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Paul J. Roberti, Administrator, Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
Gary Middleton, Director, Audit Relations and Program Improvement, Office of the Secretary, DOT

⁵We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing GAO's priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.