

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-11](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

To secure the southwest border between ports of entry, Border Patrol uses approximately 5,200 miles of roads, most of which are owned by other entities, both private and public. CBP estimates spending \$12.5 million in fiscal year 2016 to maintain and repair roads Border Patrol uses for its operations, including roads CBP does not own.

GAO was asked to review Border Patrol's use and maintenance of roads for its border security operations. This report examines the extent to which (1) CBP has processes and authorities to access and maintain roads for its security operations and (2) CBP's operations are affected by its use of public roads it cannot maintain, and options CBP could consider to address any needed maintenance. GAO selected three southwest border sectors to visit based on the sectors' total mileage of non-owned roads and number of apprehensions of illegal border crossers. GAO interviewed officials from Border Patrol, and from selected federal, state, local, tribal, and private and community organizations. The information collected from these entities is not generalizable, but provides valuable insights.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP develop policy and guidance for documenting arrangements with landowners, as needed, and share the arrangements with its sectors; document and communicate the process and criteria for prioritizing funding of non-owned operational roads; and assess the feasibility of options, including data needs, for addressing the maintenance of non-federal public roads. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-18-11](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY

Actions Needed to Enhance CBP's Maintenance of Roads Used for Its Operations

What GAO Found

U.S. Border Patrol, within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), generally has access to public roads and has certain processes and authorities to use other federal, state, local, tribal, and private owned roads for its operations. CBP may enter into arrangements or agreements to address maintenance of certain federal, state, local, and private roads, but CBP has not consistently documented these arrangements, or shared them with all relevant Border Patrol sector officials. This could hinder maintenance efforts and, therefore, Border Patrol's access to the roads. Six of the nine southwest Border Patrol sectors reported that they do not document all road maintenance arrangements and agreements. Developing a policy and guidance for documenting maintenance arrangements and agreements, as needed, could help all sectors more consistently work with landowners to address road maintenance. CBP has two categories for the roads it maintains: (1) roads that CBP owns and has a right to maintain (owned operational roads) and (2) roads that CBP does not own, but may maintain through a license or permit (non-owned operational roads). Border Patrol has established a process for prioritizing maintenance of owned operational roads, but it has not clearly documented the process and criteria for non-owned operational roads, or shared this information with sector officials. Moreover, no sector official GAO spoke with reported being aware of the process and criteria. By clearly documenting and communicating the process and criteria it uses to prioritize non-owned operational roads, Border Patrol could enable sectors to more adequately plan for and better anticipate funding to meet road maintenance needs.

Conditions on a Road in Arizona Used by Border Patrol



Source: U.S. Border Patrol. | GAO-18-11

Border Patrol sector officials reported negative effects from using public roads in poor condition that they cannot maintain, such as limited road access and poor relations with local governments and border communities that attribute the poor road conditions to Border Patrol's regular use. However, the full extent of these effects is unknown due to lack of data on Border Patrol's use of non-owned roads. While CBP officials discussed options for addressing maintenance of non-federal public roads, including a specific appropriation or a grant program, it has not assessed the feasibility of these or other options. Assessing the feasibility of options, including a review of data needed to show Border Patrol's reliance on non-owned roads, including public roads, could lead to a possible solution for enhancing Border Patrol's operations and its community relationships.