

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-278](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Threats to public areas of airports have increased in recent years. TSA is responsible for civil aviation security, which includes ensuring the security and safety of aircraft and the traveling public. In November 2013, an armed individual entered the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and killed a Transportation Security Officer. Subsequent domestic and international attacks in airport public areas further emphasized the need to better secure these areas. In response, Congress has taken action—including passage of the 2015 Gerardo Hernandez Act and the 2018 TSA Modernization Act—to address incident planning and response at airports and the security of public areas of transportation facilities, including airports.

GAO was asked to assess actions taken to secure the public areas of TSA-regulated airports. This report (1) describes actions TSA has taken in response to the LAX shooting and the Gerardo Hernandez Act, and (2) examines additional actions taken in response to subsequent security incidents and the TSA Modernization Act.

GAO reviewed TSA reports issued after airport attacks; the Gerardo Hernandez Act and TSA Modernization Act; and other TSA documents related to securing public areas. GAO also conducted interviews with and obtained information from TSA and officials from a nongeneralizable sample of 6 TSA-regulated airports, selected based on factors such as size and location.

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.

View [GAO-20-278](#). For more information, contact William Russell at (202) 512-8777 or RussellW@gao.gov

February 2020

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.

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



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-278

