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TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

DHS Should Communicate the National Strategy's Alignment with Related Strategies to Guide Federal Efforts

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent years, the nation's transportation systems facilitated over 5 trillion miles of passenger travel annually while moving billions of tons of cargo. The scale and scope of these systems make them targets for terrorist attacks. Congress directed DHS to work jointly with DOT to develop, revise, and update a biennial National Strategy for Transportation Security that governs federal transportation security efforts.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 includes a provision for GAO to evaluate the extent to which the most recent strategy is reflected in relevant federal transportation security efforts. This report examines the extent to which the 2018 strategy (1) guides relevant federal transportation security efforts, including resource allocation, and (2) incorporates input across transportation modes and risk information, among other things.

To conduct this work, GAO reviewed relevant transportation security documentation, interviewed officials within DHS and DOT on the development and use of the strategy, evaluated interagency collaboration during the development of the national strategy, and analyzed the national strategy's incorporation of risk information.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS should, in consultation with DOT, communicate to key stakeholders how the National Strategy for Transportation Security aligns with related strategies to guide federal efforts. DHS concurred with the recommendation.

View GAO-20-88. For more information, contact William Russell at (202) 512-8777 or russellw@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The 2018 National Strategy for Transportation Security generally does not guide federal efforts due in part to its unclear alignment with several strategies that also inform federal transportation security efforts. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—primarily through the Transportation Security Administration (TSA)—developed the national strategy, consistent with congressional direction, to govern federal transportation security efforts. However, TSA and Department of Transportation (DOT) officials all identified some degree of redundancy or overlap regarding the role of the strategy in light of other transportation security strategies such as the National Strategy for Aviation Security. Agencies reported using the national strategy for reference, context, and general coordination, but not for driving program activities. Agencies instead use separate strategies and plans to guide program and resource decisions. Similarly, agencies in DHS and DOT (key stakeholders of the strategy) use various strategy documents to allocate resources for federal efforts, which the strategy may inform. However, DHS has not communicated how the strategy aligns with related strategies to guide these efforts. By doing so, federal stakeholders would be better positioned use the national strategy as part of a whole-of-government approach to preventing terrorist attacks.

Figure: Examples of Transportation Modes in which Federal Agencies Have Security Responsibilities
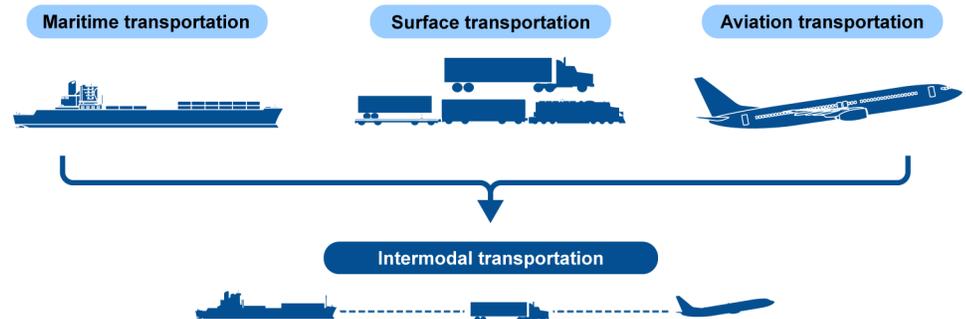
Source: GAO summary of transporation activities identified in the 2018 National Strategy for Transportation Security. | GAO-20-88

TSA effectively incorporated input from stakeholders and considered risk information to develop the 2018 National Strategy for Transportation Security. TSA iteratively updated the biennial strategy by incorporating input across transportation modes and feedback from stakeholders in a manner that generally met GAO's leading practices for collaboration. For example, TSA clearly communicated roles and responsibilities regarding the strategy development process for participating agencies. In addition, the strategy compiles risks identified for each transportation mode in other strategic planning documents. TSA strategy development officials stated that they also included emergent risk information, for example cybersecurity risks. The security risks identified in these risk assessments, in general, aligned with the risk-based priorities highlighted in the strategy.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**