

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104713](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal-aid highway program is the primary source of federal funding for projects that build and preserve the nation's roads and bridges. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act authorized an average of about \$54.6 billion annually for this program. FHWA apportions this program's funding to state DOTs and provides oversight and technical assistance to them. State DOTs are generally responsible for implementing these federal-aid highway construction projects and are authorized by statute to contract with private engineering firms (engineering consultants) to help them do so.

The Explanatory Statement accompanying the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 included a provision for GAO to review state DOTs' use of engineering consultants for federally funded projects. This report describes (1) state DOTs' use of engineering consultants on federal-aid highway construction projects and the factors that affect their decisions to do so, and (2) how FHWA oversees state DOTs' use of engineering consultants on federal-aid highway construction projects, among other things.

GAO surveyed all state DOTs (which include all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico for 52 total); reviewed applicable statutes and regulations, and documentation from FHWA division offices and state DOTs in eight selected states; and interviewed officials from FHWA, state DOTs, and stakeholders in these selected states. GAO selected these states to obtain variation in the number of federal-aid lane-miles and geographic locations, and other factors.

View [GAO-22-104713](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2384 or RepkoE@gao.gov.

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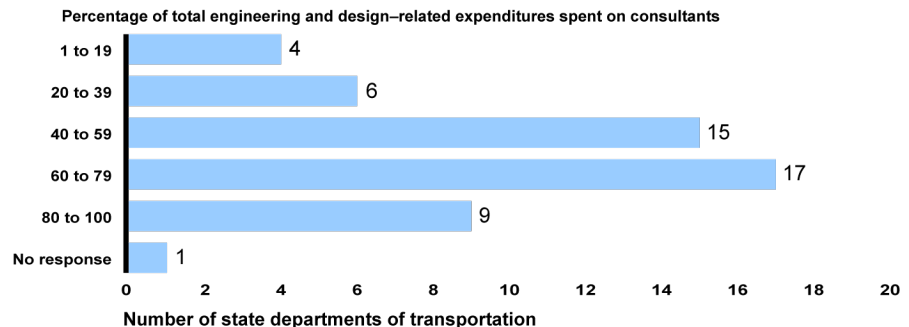
FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAYS

Information on State Use and Oversight of Engineering Consultants

What GAO Found

In a survey GAO administered, state departments of transportation (state DOT)—in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico—reported using engineering consultants to assist them on federal-aid highway construction projects. The most important factors affecting state DOTs' decisions to use these consultants were related to the size and skills of their workforces. State DOT officials reported using engineering consultants on a variety of federal-aid highway construction projects, such as for bridge replacement. Moreover, half of state DOTs reported that they spent at least 60 percent of their engineering and design-related expenditures for these projects on engineering consultants. (See figure.) Almost all state DOTs (50 of 52) reported that factors related to state DOT workforce size and skills were very or moderately important in their decisions whether to use engineering consultants. For example, New Hampshire DOT officials said they used engineering consultants to supplement their staff and expedite project delivery during the summer construction season.

State Department of Transportation-Reported Use of Engineering Consultants on Federal-Aid Highway Construction Projects in the States' Most Recent Fiscal Year



Source: GAO survey of state departments of transportation. | [GAO-22-104713](#)

Note: For more details, see figure 1 in [GAO-22-104713](#).

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) primarily oversees state DOTs' use of engineering consultants on federal-aid highway construction projects by ensuring that they have written policies and procedures for their use under federally funded contracts, and by assessing risks. Officials from FHWA division offices in eight selected states said they reviewed and approved state DOTs' written policies and procedures related to their use of engineering consultants, as required by regulation. GAO reviewed selected state DOTs' written policies and procedures and found they generally addressed items required by regulation related to engineering consultant contracts. FHWA also annually assesses risks to state DOTs' use of engineering consultants. According to FHWA's most recent assessments, state DOTs' use of engineering consultants generally poses a low risk to their respective federal-aid highway construction projects. FHWA officials also said that state DOTs addressed the few risks related to the use of engineering consultants that division offices had identified in assessments. For example, in response to an FHWA assessment, the California DOT established a new procedure to ensure conflict of interest decisions are documented.