



Highlights of [GAO-03-616T](#), a testimony before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Why GAO Did This Study

This testimony responds to the request of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States for information on GAO's work in transportation security. It addresses (1) transportation security before September 2001; (2) what the federal government has done since September 11th to strengthen transportation security, particularly aviation, mass transit, and port security; and (3) what long-term institutional challenges face the federal agencies responsible for transportation security. The testimony is based on a body of work that GAO has performed over the years.

What GAO Recommends

This testimony does not contain recommendations. However, GAO reports and testimonies on aviation, transit, and port security and on management issues are listed at the end of the statement. Many of these reports and testimonies contain GAO recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-616T

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834 or dillinghamg@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Post-September 11th Initiatives and Long-Term Challenges

What GAO Found

Before September 2001, GAO's work in transportation security focused largely on aviation security, which was then the responsibility of the Federal Aviation Administration, within the Department of Transportation. This work often demonstrated the existence of significant, long-standing vulnerabilities in aviation security. Among these vulnerabilities were airport screeners' inadequate detection of threats when screening passengers and their carry-on bags prior to their boarding aircraft; the absence of any requirement to screen checked baggage on domestic flights; inadequate controls for limiting access to secure areas at airports; and inadequate security for air traffic control computer systems and facilities.

Since September 2001, securing the nation's transportation systems from terrorist attacks has assumed great urgency. The Congress and the administration have reorganized the federal agencies responsible for transportation security, transferring them to the new Department of Homeland Security, and the agencies are attempting to enhance security without unduly inhibiting the movement of goods and people. The Transportation Security Administration, which was created in November 2001 and has assumed overall responsibility for transportation security, has made considerable progress in addressing aviation security challenges. By the end of December 2002, the agency had hired and deployed a workforce of over 60,000, including passenger and baggage screeners and federal air marshals, and was screening about 90 percent of all checked baggage for explosives. In addition, local mass transit agencies have assessed vulnerabilities, increased training for emergency preparedness, and conducted emergency drills. The Coast Guard has also performed initial risk assessments of ports, established new security guidelines, and initiated a comprehensive assessment of security conditions at 55 U.S. ports. The Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service have actions under way to strengthen port security. Nevertheless, air cargo shipments, general aviation airports, and mass transit systems remain vulnerable to attack, and an effective port security environment may be many years away.

The Departments of Transportation and Homeland Security face long-term transportation security challenges that include (1) developing a comprehensive transportation risk management approach; (2) ensuring that transportation security funding needs are identified and prioritized and that costs are controlled; (3) establishing effective coordination among the many public and private entities responsible for transportation security; (4) ensuring adequate workforce competence and staffing levels; and (5) implementing security standards for transportation facilities, workers, and security equipment. We have issued reports and made recommendations that address many of these challenges, and in response some actions are under way.