



Highlights of [GAO-03-263](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

About one-third of terrorist attacks worldwide target transportation systems, and transit systems are the mode most commonly attacked. In light of the history of terrorism against mass transit and the terrorist attacks on September 11, GAO was asked to examine challenges in securing transit systems, steps transit agencies have taken to improve safety and security, and the federal role in transit safety and security. To address these objectives, GAO visited 10 transit agencies and surveyed a representative sample of transit agencies, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

To provide transit agencies greater flexibility in paying for transit security enhancements, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Transportation consider seeking a legislative change to allow all transit agencies to use federal urbanized area formula funds for security-related operating expenses. GAO also makes several other recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation.

The Department of Transportation generally agreed with the report's findings and agreed to carefully consider GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-263.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Peter Guerrero, at (202) 512-2834 or guerrero@gao.gov.

MASS TRANSIT

Federal Action Could Help Transit Agencies Address Security Challenges

What GAO Found

Transit agencies have taken a number of steps to improve the security of their systems since September 11, such as conducting vulnerability assessments, revising emergency plans, and training employees. Formidable challenges, however, remain in securing transit systems. Obtaining sufficient funding is the most significant challenge in making transit systems as safe and secure as possible, according to GAO survey results and interviews with transit agency officials. Funding security improvements is problematic because of high security costs, competing budget priorities, tight budget environments, and a provision precluding transit agencies that serve areas with populations of 200,000 or more from using federal urbanized area formula funds for operating expenses. In addition to funding challenges, certain characteristics of transit agencies make them both vulnerable to attack and difficult to secure. For example, the high ridership and open access of some transit systems makes them attractive for terrorists but also makes certain security measures, like metal detectors, impractical. Moreover, because all levels of the government and the private sector are involved in transit decisions, coordination among all the stakeholders can pose challenges.

While transit agencies are pursuing security improvements, the federal government's role in transit security is expanding. For example, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) launched a multipart security initiative and increased funding of its safety and security activities after September 11. In addition, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act gave the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) responsibility for the security of all transportation modes, including transit. TSA anticipates issuing national standards for transit security. As the federal government's role expands, goals, performance indicators, and funding criteria need to be established to ensure accountability and results for the government's efforts.



At a planned emergency drill, firefighters practice rescuing passengers from a Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority subway car.

Source: GAO.