



Highlights of [GAO-08-487T](#), a testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Why GAO Did This Study

Since its inception, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has focused much of its efforts on aviation security, and has developed and implemented a variety of programs and procedures to secure commercial aviation. More recently, TSA has taken actions to secure the nation's surface transportation modes. TSA funding for aviation security has totaled about \$26 billion since fiscal year 2004, and for surface transportation security activities, about \$175 million since fiscal year 2005. This testimony focuses on TSA's efforts to secure the commercial aviation system—through passenger screening, air cargo, and watch-list matching programs—and the nation's surface transportation modes. It also addresses challenges remaining in these areas. GAO's comments are based on GAO products issued from February 2004 through April 2008 including selected updates obtained in February through April 2008.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in prior reports and testimony to strengthen screening operations, air cargo security, and the implementation of the Secure Flight program. DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and has taken action to implement a number of them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-487T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Transportation Security Administration Has Strengthened Planning to Guide Investments in Key Aviation and Surface Transportation Security Programs, but More Work Remains

What GAO Found

DHS and TSA have undertaken numerous initiatives to strengthen the security of the nation's transportation system, including actions to address many recommendations made by GAO. With respect to aviation security, TSA has focused its efforts on, among other things, more efficiently allocating, deploying, and managing the Transportation Security Officer (TSO) workforce—formerly known as screeners; strengthening screening procedures; developing and deploying more effective and efficient screening technologies; strengthening domestic air cargo security; and developing a government operated watch-list matching program, known as Secure Flight. For example, in response to GAO's recommendation, TSA developed a plan to periodically review assumptions in its Staffing Allocation Model, and took steps to strengthen its evaluation of proposed procedural changes. TSA has also explored new passenger checkpoint screening technologies to better detect explosives and other threats, and has taken steps to strengthen air cargo security, including conducting compliance inspections of air carriers. Finally, TSA has instilled more discipline and rigor into Secure Flight's systems development, including preparing key documentation and strengthening privacy protections. With regard to surface transportation security, TSA has, among other things, taken steps to develop a strategic approach for securing mass transit, passenger and freight rail, commercial vehicles, and highways; established security standards for certain transportation modes; and conducted threat, criticality, and vulnerability assessments of surface transportation assets, particularly related to passenger and freight rail.

While these efforts should be commended, GAO has identified several areas that should be addressed to further strengthen transportation security. For example, TSA has made limited progress in developing and deploying checkpoint technologies due to planning and management challenges. In addition, TSA has not revised screening exemptions for air cargo transported into the United States that may leave the air cargo system unacceptably vulnerable. GAO further identified that TSA experienced some program management challenges in the development of Secure Flight, including developing cost and schedule estimates consistent with best practices; fully implementing the program's risk management plan; developing a comprehensive testing strategy; and ensuring that information security requirements are fully implemented. In addition, DHS and TSA lack performance measures to fully evaluate the effectiveness of current processes for passengers who apply for redress due to inconveniences experienced during the check-in and screening process. GAO recently made recommendations to address these issues. Additionally, although TSA has recently taken actions in a number of areas to help secure surface modes of transportation, particularly passenger and freight rail, the agency has not fully defined its role with respect to securing other transportation modes, such as commercial vehicles and highway infrastructure. We are continuing to assess TSA's efforts to secure surface modes of transportation as part of our ongoing work and will report on our results later this year.