



Highlights of [GAO-03-500](#), a report to the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

# TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH

## Actions Needed to Improve Coordination and Evaluation of Research

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA) within the Department of Transportation (DOT) is responsible for coordinating and ensuring the evaluation of DOT research programs to promote the efficient use of departmental research funds, which in fiscal year 2002 totaled over \$1 billion. RSPA is also responsible for conducting multimodal research that cuts across different modes of transportation. The House Committee on Appropriations directed GAO to examine RSPA's coordination and evaluation of research within DOT and the status of its own multimodal research.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOT and RSPA develop strategies to identify potential research duplication and ensure that the results of all DOT transportation research activities—including those conducted by RSPA—are evaluated. Further, GAO recommended that RSPA assess the effectiveness of its research coordination efforts by developing appropriate performance measures.

DOT reviewed a draft of this report and generally agreed with its contents but did not comment on the report's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-500](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-500)

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Kate Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or [siggerudk@gao.gov](mailto:siggerudk@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

RSPA has met some, but not all, legislative and DOT requirements pertaining to the coordination of departmental research efforts. For example, while RSPA develops an annual plan and meets monthly with other DOT research officials, RSPA does not review the status of all DOT research activities. Thus, it cannot determine whether duplication of research efforts within DOT does or does not occur. Additionally, RSPA has not developed standards against which to measure its performance in coordinating research within DOT. Moreover, RSPA has not fully met all legislative and DOT requirements to measure research results and oversee research evaluations across DOT. RSPA officials cited a lack of ready information on DOT research activities budget constraints and a lack of authority over other DOT agencies as reasons why they served primarily an information-sharing role, rather than as an overseer and manager of the coordination and evaluation processes.

#### Extent to Which RSPA Meets Coordination and Evaluation Requirements

Coordination requirements	Extent to which RSPA meets requirements	Evaluation requirements	Extent to which RSPA meets requirements
<b>Legislative requirements</b>		<b>Legislative requirements</b>	
Develop an annual surface transportation research and technology development plan.	●	Measure the results of federal transportation research activities and how they impact the performance of the surface transportation systems of the United States.	○
Coordinate surface transportation research and technology development activities to avoid duplication.	◐		
<b>DOT requirement</b>		<b>DOT requirement</b>	
Develop processes to routinely share research activities, problems, solutions, and information.	●	Oversee the DOT research and technology development program and develop more efficient, effective, and participative ways to evaluate and measure program effectiveness and progress across all operating administrations and other selected projects.	◐
Review the status of all research projects across operating administrations and identify potential duplication.	○		

- Fully meets requirements
- ◐ Partially meets requirements
- Does not meet requirements

Sources: TEA-21, DOT Order 1120.39, and GAO.

Since 1999, RSPA has budgeted \$37 million to conduct four major research programs with applicability to more than one mode of transportation—for example, using technology to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions and transportation dependence on petroleum. According to the Associate Administrator for Innovation, Research, and Education, RSPA's current multimodal research programs are scheduled for completion by the end of fiscal year 2004 and have had a variety of positive results. However, RSPA does not have an evaluation process to systematically evaluate the results of its multimodal research programs.