



Highlights of [GAO-06-864T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing, and Terrorism Risk Assessment, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

After the events of September 11, 2001, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) assumed the function of passenger prescreening—or the matching of passenger information against terrorist watch lists to identify persons who should undergo additional security scrutiny—for domestic flights, which is currently performed by the air carriers. To do so, TSA has been developing Secure Flight. This testimony covers TSA's progress and challenges in (1) developing, managing, and overseeing Secure Flight; (2) coordinating with key stakeholders critical to program operations; (3) addressing key factors that will impact system effectiveness; and (4) minimizing impacts on passenger privacy and protecting passenger rights.

## What GAO Recommends

A prior GAO report recommended that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) direct TSA to take several actions to manage risks associated with Secure Flight's development, including finalizing system requirements, test plans, privacy and redress requirements, and program cost estimates, and establishing plans to obtain data needed to operate the system. DHS generally concurred with GAO's recommendations, but has not yet completed the actions it planned to take. TSA's rebaselining effort is reassessing program goals, requirements, and capabilities.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-864T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-864T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SECURITY

# Management Challenges Remain for the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program

## What GAO Found

For over 3 years, TSA has faced challenges in developing and implementing the Secure Flight program, and in early 2006, it suspended Secure Flight's development to reassess, or rebaseline, the program. TSA's rebaselining effort is currently under way, and final decisions regarding the future direction of the program have not been made. In our most recent report and testimony, we noted that TSA had made some progress in developing and testing the Secure Flight program, but had not followed a disciplined life cycle approach to manage systems development or fully defined system requirements. We also reported that TSA was proceeding to develop Secure Flight without a program management plan containing program schedule and cost estimates. Oversight reviews of the program had also raised questions about program management. Secure Flight officials stated that as they move forward with the rebaselined program, they will be following a more rigorous and disciplined life cycle process for Secure Flight. We support TSA's rebaselining effort, and believe that the agency should not move forward with the program until it has demonstrated that a disciplined life cycle process is being followed.

We also reported that TSA had taken steps to collaborate with Secure Flight stakeholders whose participation is essential to ensuring that passenger and terrorist watch list data are collected and transmitted to support Secure Flight. However, key program stakeholders—including the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Terrorist Screening Center, and air carriers—stated that they needed more definitive information about system requirements from TSA to plan for their support of the program.

In addition, we reported that several activities that will affect Secure Flight's effectiveness were under way or had not yet been decided. For example, TSA conducted name-matching tests that compared passenger and terrorist screening database information to determine what type of passenger data would be needed for Secure Flight's purposes. However, TSA had not yet made key policy decisions that could significantly impact program operations, including what passenger data it would require air carriers to provide and the name-matching technologies it would use.

Further, Secure Flight's system development documentation did not fully identify how passenger privacy protections were to be met, and TSA had not issued the privacy notices that described how it would protect passenger data once Secure Flight became operational. As a result, it was not possible to assess how TSA is addressing privacy concerns. Secure Flight officials stated that they plan to address privacy issues and finalize its redress policies in conjunction with rebaselining the program.