



Highlights of GAO-04-504T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

AVIATION SECURITY

Challenges Delay Implementation of Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System

Why GAO Did This Study

The security of U.S. commercial aviation is a long-standing concern, and substantial efforts have been undertaken to strengthen it. One such effort is the development of a new Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II) to identify passengers requiring additional security attention. The development of CAPPS II has raised a number of issues, including whether individuals may be inappropriately targeted for additional screening and whether data accessed by the system may compromise passengers' privacy. GAO was asked to summarize the results of its previous report that looked at (1) the development status and plans for CAPPS II; (2) the status of CAPPS II in addressing key developmental, operational, and public acceptance issues; and (3) additional challenges that could impede the successful implementation of the system.

What GAO Recommends

In a recent report (GAO-04-385), GAO recommended that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) develop project plans, including schedules and estimated costs; a plan for completing critical security activities; a risk mitigation strategy for system testing; policies governing program oversight; and a process by which passengers can correct erroneous information. DHS generally concurred with the report and its recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-504T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman J. Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or rabkinn@gao.gov or David Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Key activities in the development of CAPPS II have been delayed, and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has not yet completed important system planning activities. TSA is currently behind schedule in testing and developing initial increments of CAPPS II, due in large part to delays in obtaining needed passenger data for testing from air carriers because of privacy concerns. TSA also has not established a complete plan identifying specific system functionality that will be delivered, the schedule for delivery, and estimated costs. The establishment of such plans is critical to maintaining project focus and achieving intended results within budget. Without such plans, TSA is at an increased risk of CAPPS II not providing the promised functionality, of its deployment being delayed, and of incurring increased costs throughout the system's development.

TSA also has not completely addressed seven of the eight issues identified by the Congress as key areas of interest related to the development, operation, and public acceptance of CAPPS II. Although TSA is in various stages of progress on addressing each of these eight issues, as of January 1, 2004, only one—the establishment of an internal oversight board to review the development of CAPPS II—has been completely addressed. However, concerns exist regarding the timeliness of the board's future reviews. Other issues, including ensuring the accuracy of data used by CAPPS II, stress testing, preventing unauthorized access to the system, and resolving privacy concerns have not been completely addressed, due in part to the early stage of the system's development. See table below for a summary of TSA's status in addressing the eight key legislative issues.

Status of TSA in Addressing Key Legislative Issues as of January 1, 2004

Fully addressed	Yes	No	Fully addressed	Yes	No
Oversight board	✓		Unauthorized access prevention		✓
Accuracy of data		✓	Policies for operation and use		✓
Stress testing		✓	Privacy concerns resolved		✓
Abuse prevention		✓	Redress process		✓

Source: GAO

GAO identified three additional challenges TSA faces that may impede the success of CAPPS II. These challenges are developing the international cooperation needed to obtain passenger data, managing the possible expansion of the program's mission beyond its original purpose, and ensuring that identity theft—in which an individual poses as and uses information of another individual—cannot be used to negate the security benefits of the system. GAO believes that these issues, if not resolved, pose major risks to the successful deployment and implementation of CAPPS II.