



Highlights of [GAO-08-889](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the early 1990s, the General Services Administration (GSA) and the federal judiciary (judiciary) have been carrying out a multibillion-dollar courthouse construction initiative. In downtown Los Angeles, California, one of the nation's busiest federal district courts (L.A. Court), the federal judiciary has split its district, magistrate, and bankruptcy judges between two buildings—the Spring Street Courthouse and the Edward R. Roybal Federal Building and Courthouse. In 2000 the judiciary requested and GSA proposed building a new courthouse in downtown Los Angeles in order to increase security, efficiency, and space. In response, Congress authorized and appropriated about \$400 million for the project. GAO was asked to provide information on the construction of the L.A. courthouse. This report answers: (1) What is the status of the construction of a new federal courthouse in Los Angeles? (2) What effects have any delays in the project had on its costs and court operations? (3) What options are available for the future of the project? GAO reviewed project planning and budget documents, visited the key sites in Los Angeles, and interviewed GSA and judiciary officials. In its comments, the judiciary indicated that the report reflects the project's general sequence of events and circumstances, and GSA partially agreed with the report's findings related to the delays.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-889](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

FEDERAL COURTHOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Estimated Costs to House the L.A. District Court Have Tripled and There Is No Consensus on How to Proceed

What GAO Found

GSA initially estimated in 2000 that the L.A. Court could take occupancy of a new courthouse in fiscal year 2006, but occupancy has been delayed by 8 years to fiscal year 2014 at the earliest. GSA has spent \$16.3 million designing a new courthouse and \$16.9 million acquiring and preparing a new site for it in downtown Los Angeles. Since no construction has occurred, about \$366.45 million remains appropriated for the construction of a 41-courtroom L.A. Courthouse. Project delays were caused by GSA's decision to design a larger courthouse than what was authorized by Congress, slow decision making by GSA and the judiciary to reduce scope and stay on budget, unforeseen cost escalations, and low contractor interest that caused GSA to cancel the entire 41-courtroom courthouse project.

Due to the delays, estimated costs for housing the L.A. Court have nearly tripled to over \$1.1 billion, rendering GSA's currently authorized 41-courtroom courthouse unachievable and causing the L.A. Court's problems to persist. Because current cost estimates exceed authorized and appropriated amounts, GSA will need to obtain congressional approval to move forward on any plan. Meanwhile, almost half of the courtrooms in the L.A. Court's Spring Street building do not meet the judiciary's standards for size or security, and the U.S. Marshals have chosen not to use the prisoner passageways that exist in the building because they are too dangerous and inefficient. The L.A. Court also estimates that current courtroom and support space shortages will continue to worsen over time.

GAO's analysis showed that four options exist for the L.A. Courthouse project, which require balancing needs for courtroom space, congressional approval, and additional estimated appropriations of up to \$733 million. First, GSA has proposed building a 36-courtroom, 45-chamber courthouse to house all district and senior judges and adding 4 more courtrooms in the Roybal building to house all magistrate and bankruptcy judges. The L.A. Court supports this option, but it is the most expensive of the remaining options. Second, GSA has proposed constructing a new 20-courtroom, 20-chamber building and adding 12 more courtrooms to the Roybal building. GSA could begin construction with existing funds, but the L.A. Court opposes this option. Third, GSA has proposed housing the L.A. court in the existing buildings by adding 13 courtrooms to the Roybal building and upgrading security at the Spring Street building. GSA could begin work on the project with existing funds but the L.A. Court also opposes this option. Finally, another option, given the lack of consensus and adequate funding, is to restart the planning process. Under this option, the remaining \$366.45 million appropriated for the courthouse could continue to be available for meeting the judiciary's needs in Los Angeles or be used for other purposes through a transfer or rescission. While GAO takes no position on this or the other three options, it is clear the current process is deadlocked.