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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-435](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Border Patrol, a component of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency, a part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), aims to apprehend persons who illegally enter the United States between official ports of entry, including potential terrorists, aliens, and contraband smugglers, thereby deterring or stopping illegal activity. The Patrol operates permanent and tactical (temporary) interior traffic checkpoints on major and secondary U.S. roads, mainly in the southwest border states where most illegal entries occur, as part of a multi-layer strategy to maximize detection and apprehension of illegal entrants. This report addresses (1) the role of interior checkpoints in the Patrol's strategy; (2) what is known about checkpoint costs and benefits; and (3) how checkpoints are evaluated and what performance measures indicate regarding their effectiveness.

What GAO Recommends

To better gauge the effects of border control efforts, GAO recommends that the CBP Commissioner (1) develop additional performance measures for productivity and effectiveness of interior checkpoints, and (2) include data on checkpoint performance, and improvements that might be made, in CBP's Performance and Annual Report. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-435.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or StanaR@GAO.GOV.

BORDER PATROL

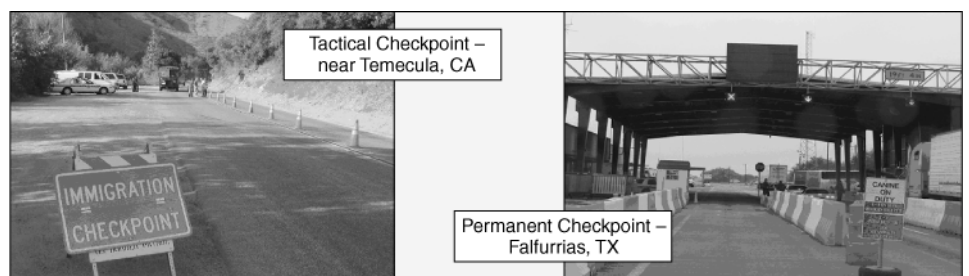
Available Data on Interior Checkpoints Suggest Differences in Sector Performance

What GAO Found

The Border Patrol operates 33 permanent traffic checkpoints in 8 of its 9 sectors in the southwest border states, supported by tactical checkpoints. While permanent checkpoints have the advantage of physical infrastructure, tactical ones have the mobility to block routes used to evade permanent ones and to respond to intelligence on illegal activity. A third type of checkpoint operates in the Tucson, Ariz., sector, where the Patrol has been legislatively prohibited from funding construction of checkpoints since fiscal year 1999. This restriction has prevented checkpoint construction. The Patrol also began closing or relocating checkpoints in the sector every 7 days at the instruction of congressional staff in June 2002, and was legislatively required to relocate checkpoints on the same schedule in FY 2003 and 2004, and an average of once every 14 days in FY 2005. Three of six checkpoints in the sector had to close for 7/14 days, as safety considerations made it too hazardous to relocate them.

Local law enforcement and business and community leaders we interviewed from communities near interior traffic checkpoints said that benefits resulting from checkpoint operations included reductions in crime and vandalism. Although a few cited traffic delays, most were supportive of checkpoint operations. However, some others were concerned about the impact of the checkpoints on traffic congestion and quality of life in their communities.

The Border Patrol does not routinely evaluate the effectiveness of checkpoint operations, or their costs. The Patrol includes limited traditional performance measures in its Performance and Annual Report, such as apprehensions and contraband seized. GAO developed an apprehension per agent work year measure to assess performance. The data suggest that the performance of the Tucson sector interior checkpoints dropped starting in FY 2002, and more in FY 2003, after the Border Patrol began relocating or closing them on a regular basis. Three other sectors we visited that did not have to relocate or close checkpoints experienced no comparable decrease in apprehensions per agent work year during the same time period. Other factors not measured or accounted for might also have contributed to these outcomes, but the Border Patrol's limited measures do not capture or assess them. A broader range of performance measures, when considered with other indicators, could be useful to CBP and the Congress as they consider ways to improve the effectiveness of interior traffic checkpoints and border security efforts.



Source: GAO.