



Highlights of [GAO-08-1024T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since its inception in November 2001, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has focused much of its efforts on aviation security, and has developed and implemented a variety of programs and procedures to secure the commercial aviation system. TSA funding for aviation security has totaled about \$26 billion since fiscal year 2004. This testimony focuses on TSA's efforts to secure the commercial aviation system through passenger screening, strengthening air cargo security, and watch-list matching programs, as well as challenges that remain. It also addresses crosscutting issues that have impeded TSA's efforts in strengthening security. This testimony is based on GAO reports and testimonies issued from February 2004 through July 2008 including selected updates obtained from TSA officials in June and July 2008.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in prior reports and testimony to strengthen screening operations, air cargo security, and the implementation of the Secure Flight program. DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and has taken action to implement a number of them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1024T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Transportation Security Administration Has Strengthened Planning to Guide Investments in Key Aviation Security Programs, but More Work Remains

What GAO Found

DHS and TSA have undertaken numerous initiatives to strengthen the security of the nation's commercial aviation system, including actions to address many recommendations made by GAO. TSA has focused its efforts on, among other things, more efficiently allocating, deploying, and managing the Transportation Security Officer (TSO) workforce—formerly known as screeners; strengthening screening procedures; developing and deploying more effective and efficient screening technologies; strengthening domestic air cargo security; and developing a government operated watch-list matching program, known as Secure Flight. For example, in response to GAO's recommendation, TSA developed a plan to periodically review assumptions in its Staffing Allocation Model used to determine TSO staffing levels at airports, and took steps to strengthen its evaluation of proposed procedural changes. TSA also explored new passenger checkpoint screening technologies to better detect explosives and other threats, and has taken steps to strengthen air cargo security, including increasing compliance inspections of air carriers. Finally, TSA has instilled more discipline and rigor into Secure Flight's systems development, including preparing key documentation and strengthening privacy protections.

While these efforts should be commended, GAO has identified several areas that should be addressed to further strengthen security. For example, TSA made limited progress in developing and deploying checkpoint technologies due to planning and management challenges. In addition, TSA faces resource and other challenges in developing a system to screen 100 percent of cargo transported on passenger aircraft in accordance with the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. GAO further identified that TSA faced program management challenges in the development and implementation of Secure Flight, including developing cost and schedule estimates consistent with best practices; fully implementing the program's risk management plan; developing a comprehensive testing strategy; and ensuring that information security requirements are fully implemented.

A variety of crosscutting issues have affected DHS's and TSA's efforts in implementing its mission and management functions. For example, TSA can more fully adopt and apply a risk-management approach in implementing its security mission and core management functions, and strengthen coordination activities with key stakeholders. For example, while TSA incorporated risk-based decision making when modifying checkpoint screening procedures, GAO reported that TSA's analyses that supported screening procedural changes could be further strengthened. DHS and TSA have strengthened their efforts in these areas, but more work remains.