



Highlights of [GAO-08-139T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, House Committee on Homeland Security,

Why GAO Did This Study

Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) mission is to protect the nation's transportation network. Since its inception in 2001, TSA has developed and implemented a variety of programs and procedures to secure commercial aviation. GAO examined (1) the progress DHS and TSA have made in securing the nation's commercial aviation system, and (2) challenges that have impeded the Department's efforts to implement its mission and management functions. This testimony is based on issued GAO reports and testimonies addressing the security of the nation's commercial aviation system, including a recently issued report ([GAO-07-454](#)) that highlights the progress DHS has made in implementing its mission and management functions.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made a number of recommendations to DHS and TSA to strengthen their efforts to secure the commercial aviation system. DHS and TSA generally agreed with the recommendations and have taken steps to implement some of them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-139T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

DHS Has Made Progress in Securing the Commercial Aviation System, but Key Challenges Remain

What GAO Found

In August 2007, GAO reported that DHS had made moderate progress in securing the commercial aviation system, but that more work remains. Specifically, DHS generally achieved 17 of the 24 performance expectations that GAO identified in the area of aviation security but had generally not achieved 7 of them. DHS and TSA have made progress in many areas related to securing commercial aviation. For example, to meet congressional mandates to screen airline passengers and 100 percent of checked baggage, TSA initially hired and deployed a federal workforce of over 50,000 passenger and checked baggage screeners and installed equipment at the nation's more than 400 commercial airports to provide the capability to screen all checked baggage using explosive detection systems. TSA has since turned its attention to, among other things, strengthening passenger prescreening; more efficiently allocating, deploying, and managing the transportation security officer (TSO)—formerly known as screener—workforce; strengthening screening procedures; developing and deploying more effective and efficient screening technologies; and improving domestic air cargo security.

While these efforts have helped strengthen the security of the commercial aviation system, DHS and TSA still face a number of key challenges in further securing this system. For example, TSA has faced difficulties in developing and implementing its advanced passenger prescreening system, known as Secure Flight, and has not yet completed development efforts. In addition, DHS's efforts to enhance perimeter security at airports may not be sufficient to provide for effective security. TSA has also initiated efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of security-related technologies, such as biometric identification systems, but has not developed a plan for implementing new technologies to meet the security needs of individual airports. TSA has also not yet effectively deployed checkpoint technologies to address key existing vulnerabilities, and has not yet developed and implemented technologies needed to screen air cargo. GAO also reported that a number of issues have impeded DHS's efforts in implementing its mission and management functions, including not always implementing effective strategic planning or fully adopting and applying a risk management approach with respect to commercial aviation security.