- **Enterprise Document Management System (EDMS)**. EDMS, led by an integrated project team that includes the Transformation Program Office, the Records Division, and the Office of Information Technology, allows USCIS to maintain and access digitized images. It is the first step in moving USCIS from paper-based processes to review of electronic files for adjudications.

- **Adjudication-Ready Scanning for Certain Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Cases**. In early June, the Vermont Service Center (VSC) began reviewing digitized files to adjudicate certain TPS cases.

- **Case Management System for International Adoption Cases.** On July 5, 2007, USCIS is scheduled to deploy a digital case management system for the e-filing and paperless adjudication of international adoption cases.

Also, the Transformation Program Office is revising USCIS forms to improve the ability to collect and use biographic and other information from customers.

The Ombudsman agrees that these are worthwhile goals for USCIS. USCIS' antiquated computer systems are a constant obstacle to delivering timely and efficient immigration benefits services. The continuous revisions to long-term planning detract from short-term initiatives that could yield long-term benefits and provide important relief to USCIS customers and staff well before the seven-year life cycle for transformation. In its search for a 100 percent IT solution, the agency often appears to overlook many commercially available "off the shelf" solutions that could meet the vast majority of its current requirements and solve most of the existing case management problems. It is too easy for USCIS to excuse inefficient procedures and stall replacing antiquated systems in anticipation of a seven-year fix.

RECOMMENDATION AR 2007 -- 01

The Ombudsman recommends that the Transformation Program Office:

(1)   Publish transformation timelines, goals, and regular updates on the public USCIS website. The Ombudsman is concerned that transformation is proceeding largely without input from customers, Congress, and the public. The lack of transparency enables USCIS to modify deadlines and goals without producing meaningful results.

(2)   Establish transparency as a goal for USCIS processing and services. The agency provides minimal information to customers who often have long pending applications and petitions. The agency could make its processes more transparent, which would reduce inquiries to the National Customer Service Center (NCSC) and the need for INFOPASS appointments, as well as make available USCIS resources for adjudicative functions.