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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-592T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The security of the nation's commercial aviation system has been a long-standing concern. Following the events of September 11, 2001, Congress enacted numerous aviation security improvements designed to strengthen aviation security, including the development of a passenger prescreening system and the federalization of airport screeners. Despite these changes, challenges continue to face the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) efforts to improve aviation security. GAO was asked to summarize the results of previous and ongoing aviation security work. These include: (1) the development of CAPPS II to assist in identifying high-risk passengers, (2) the management of passenger and baggage screening programs, (3) the operations of the Federal Air Marshal Service, and (4) other aviation security related efforts, such as cargo, that remain a concern.

## What GAO Recommends

In prior reports and testimonies, listed at the end of this statement, GAO has made recommendations to improve aviation security and to strengthen various security efforts underway. We also have several ongoing reviews assessing certain issues addressed in this testimony that will be published under separate reports at a later date.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-592T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-592T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman J. Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or [rabkinn@gao.gov](mailto:rabkinn@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SECURITY

### Improvements Still Needed in Federal Aviation Security Efforts

#### What GAO Found

Numerous challenges continue to face TSA in its efforts to improve the nation's aviation security system. First, key activities in the development of CAPPS II have been delayed and TSA has not yet completed important system planning activities. TSA is behind schedule in testing and developing initial increments of CAPPS II due to delays in obtaining needed passenger data for testing from air carriers because of privacy concerns and has not established a complete plan identifying specific system functionality to be delivered, the schedule for delivery, and estimated costs. TSA also has not fully addressed seven of eight issues identified by Congress as key elements related to the development, operation, and public acceptance of CAPPS II. Additionally, three other major challenges—international cooperation, program mission expansion, and identity theft—need to be adequately addressed to ensure CAPPS II's successful implementation.

Second, TSA continues to face challenges in hiring, deploying, and training its screener workforce. Staffing shortages and TSA's hiring process continue to hinder its ability to fully staff screening checkpoints without using additional measures, such as mandatory overtime. Further, TSA continues to have difficulty deploying and leveraging screening equipment and technologies because of competing priorities in a tight budget environment.

Third, the rapid expansion of the Federal Air Marshal Service has encountered a number of operational and management problems. To accommodate the expansion, the Service revised and abbreviated its training curriculum. The Service developed an advanced training course for newly hired marshals to provide additional skills but funding cutbacks have delayed completion of this training for all air marshals. Most recently, budget constraints have not permitted the Service to reach its target staffing levels and are delaying efforts to develop its field location infrastructure and its automated system to schedule air marshal missions.

Fourth, DHS and TSA face other challenges as they continue to address threats to the nation's aviation system. Significant challenges include developing measures to counter the growing concerns over portable surface-to-air missiles, improving airport perimeter and access controls, and addressing security concerns related to air cargo and general aviation.

#### Screening Passengers and Cargo are Aviation Security Concerns.



Source: FAA.



Source: Cargo King, Ltd.