



Highlights of [GAO-09-496](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Established in 1998, the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC)—administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)—awards grants to states and localities to provide transportation to help low-income individuals access jobs. In 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) reauthorized the program and made changes, such as allocating funds by formula to large and small urban and rural areas through designated recipients, usually transit agencies and states.

SAFETEA-LU also required GAO to periodically review the program. This second report under the mandate examines (1) the extent to which FTA has awarded JARC funds for fiscal years 2006 through 2008, and how recipients are using the funds; (2) challenges faced by recipients in implementing the program; and (3) FTA's plans to evaluate the program. For this work, GAO analyzed data and interviewed officials from FTA, nine states, and selected localities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOT (1) determine actions FTA or Congress could take to address challenges agencies have encountered and (2) ensure that program evaluations use generally accepted survey design and data analysis methodologies. DOT officials reviewed a draft of this report and commented that the report should include additional information on FTA's progress in implementing and evaluating the program; this information has been incorporated throughout the report. [View GAO-09-496 or key components.](#) For more information, contact David Wise, (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov.

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

Progress and Challenges in Implementing and Evaluating the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program

What GAO Found

FTA is making progress in awarding funds and has awarded about 48 percent of the \$436.6 million in JARC funds apportioned for fiscal years 2006 through 2008 to 49 states and 131 of 152 large urbanized areas. Recipients plan to use the funds primarily to operate transit services. However, about 14 percent of fiscal year 2006 funds lapsed. According to FTA officials, these funds lapsed for several reasons. For example, some applicants did not meet administrative requirements in time to apply for funds. FTA officials are working with states and localities to reduce the amount of funds that lapse in the future. Recipients plan to use 65 percent of fiscal year 2006 funds to operate transit services, 28 percent for capital projects, and 7 percent for administrative costs.

States and local authorities GAO interviewed cited multiple challenges in implementing the JARC program; a common concern is that, overall, the effort required to obtain JARC funds is disproportionate to the relatively small amount of funding available. One challenge cited by recipients was that FTA's delay in issuing final guidance and the process to identify designated recipients reduced the time available to secure funds before the funds expired. In addition, although recipients considered the coordinated planning process beneficial, many cited factors that hindered coordination, including lack of resources and the reluctance of some stakeholders to participate. Moreover, although the JARC program requires human service providers to be included as stakeholders, other transportation planning requirements do not, complicating the coordinated planning process. Some designated recipients also expressed concerns about identifying stable sources of matching funds and duplicative efforts in administering JARC with other FTA programs. These challenges have delayed applications for funds and project implementation, and contributed to the lapse in fiscal year 2006 funds.

Although FTA has not completed an evaluation of the JARC program under SAFETEA-LU, recipients we spoke with indicated that projects have benefited low-income individuals by providing a means to get to work. Since 2000, FTA has refined its approach for evaluating the program and currently has two studies under way to evaluate the JARC program under SAFETEA-LU. However, both studies may have limitations that could affect FTA's assessment of the program. One of these studies—due in September 2009—will evaluate projects using FTA's performance measures; specifically, the number of rides provided and number of jobs accessed. However, collecting reliable data for these measures is problematic, particularly for the number of jobs accessed. The other study—due in the spring of 2010—will include results of a survey of JARC recipients and individuals using JARC services and will focus on the program's impact on those using the services. However, this study will use a methodology similar to that used in a prior study which had limitations in the survey instrument design and data analysis. FTA does not have a comprehensive process in place to assess whether its researchers use generally accepted survey design and data analysis methodologies.