



Highlights of [GAO-05-922T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent years, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has faced serious financial and budgetary problems as well as continuing challenges related to the safety and reliability of its transit services. At the same time, ridership is at an all-time high, and WMATA continues to provide critical services and considerable benefits to the Washington region and to the federal government.

This statement discusses (1) WMATA's responsibilities for serving the interests of the federal government, including the agency's role in transporting federal employees and visitors to the nation's capital and in supporting homeland security for the Washington metropolitan region; (2) the current funding challenges facing WMATA and the options proposed to address these challenges; (3) preliminary information on some of the entities that currently provide oversight of WMATA and the focus of their recent reviews; and (4) some considerations and options in instituting spending safeguards and oversight of any additional federal assistance provided to WMATA, should Congress decide to provide such assistance.

GAO discussed this testimony with WMATA and FTA officials, who provided comments and additional information that GAO incorporated as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-922T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Kate Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

MASS TRANSIT

Preliminary Views on Options for Additional Fiscal Oversight of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

What GAO Found

WMATA transports a substantial share of the federal workforce and provides an important means of transportation to special events that occur in Washington, D.C., as the nation's capital. WMATA's Metro Transit Police assists federal law enforcement agencies by providing expertise in civil disturbance management and explosives detection and by training first responders in emergency management techniques specific to transit environments. WMATA's Metrorail and Metrobus are the preferred means of transportation in an emergency scenario requiring evacuation, and both the regional and the District of Columbia emergency transportation plans rely heavily on them.

A regional funding panel estimated WMATA's budgetary shortfall at \$2.4 billion for fiscal years 2006 through 2015 if WMATA were to fund many of the projects in its 10-year capital improvement plan. This shortfall may be even greater because the panel's shortfall calculation did not include the costs of providing specialized transportation for persons with disabilities, as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act. To deal with WMATA's funding shortfall, the regional panel concluded that the region needs to develop a dedicated source of revenue for WMATA (e.g., local sales tax) and that the federal government needs to provide significant contributions because of the benefits it receives from WMATA. However, given the large federal budget deficit and competing claims on federal resources, GAO believes WMATA may also need to reexamine its own spending priorities.

As part of its ongoing work on WMATA's oversight entities, GAO found that WMATA is subject to oversight from multiple entities that, since 2003, have issued hundreds of reports—which vary in scope—on a broad range of topics. These entities include WMATA's Auditor General, an independent external auditor, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and industry peer review panels. The entities have made recommendations to WMATA, which WMATA has generally implemented or plans to implement. As part of its ongoing work, GAO plans to analyze these reviews in more detail to determine if they comprehensively identify and address WMATA's overall management and operational challenges. GAO's ongoing work will also cover other FTA reviews and safety reviews of WMATA's operations.

Congress, the administration, and GAO have long recognized the benefits of having spending safeguards and management oversight for entities that receive federal funding. If Congress decides to provide WMATA with additional federal funding, there needs to be reasonable assurance that the funds will be spent effectively. We identified several options for additional oversight that could be incorporated into legislation that provides additional federal funding to WMATA, including having WMATA officials periodically report to Congress on how the funding is being spent; specifying the types of projects for which federal funds could be used; and requiring that any additional federal funding be subject to FTA's oversight programs.