



Highlights of [GAO-09-57](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The nation's highway transportation system is vast and open—vehicles and their operators can move freely and with almost no restrictions. Securing the U.S. highway infrastructure system is a responsibility shared by federal, state and local government, and the private sector. Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has primary responsibility for ensuring the security of the sector. GAO was asked to assess the progress DHS has made in securing the nation's highway infrastructure. This report addresses the extent to which federal entities have conducted and coordinated risk assessments; DHS has developed a risk-based strategy; and stakeholders, such as state and local transportation entities, have taken voluntary actions to secure highway infrastructure — and the degree to which DHS has monitored such actions. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed risk assessment results and TSA's documented security strategy, and conducted interviews with highway stakeholders.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS establish a mechanism to enhance coordination of risk assessments; TSA address limitations in its documented security strategy for highway infrastructure; and that TSA develop a mechanism to monitor security measures for critical highway infrastructure. DHS and TSA concurred with these recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-57](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

## HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

### Federal Efforts to Strengthen Security Should Be Better Coordinated and Targeted on the Nation's Most Critical Highway Infrastructure

#### What GAO Found

Federal entities have several efforts underway to assess threat, vulnerability, and consequence—the three elements of risk—for highway infrastructure; however, these efforts have not been systematically coordinated among key federal partners and the results are not routinely shared. Several component agencies and offices within DHS and the Department of Transportation (DOT) are conducting individual risk assessment efforts of highway infrastructure vulnerabilities, and collectively have completed assessments of most of the critical highway assets identified in 2007. However, key DHS entities reported that they were not coordinating these activities or sharing the results. According to the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, TSA is responsible for coordinating risk assessment programs. Establishing mechanisms to enhance coordination of risk assessments among key federal partners could strengthen and validate assessments and leverage limited federal resources.

DHS, through TSA, has developed and implemented a strategy to guide highway infrastructure security efforts, but the strategy is not informed by available risk assessments and lacks some key characteristics GAO has identified for effective national strategies. In May 2007, TSA issued the Highway Modal Annex, which is intended to serve as the principal strategy for implementing key programs for securing highway infrastructure. While its completion was an important first step to guide protection efforts, GAO identified a number of limitations that may influence its effectiveness. For example, the Annex is not fully based on available risk information, although DHS's Transportation Systems -Sector Plan and the National Infrastructure Protection Plan call for risk information to be used to guide all protection efforts. Lacking such information, DHS cannot provide reasonable assurance that its current strategy is effectively addressing security gaps, prioritizing investments based on risk, and targeting resources toward security measures that will have the greatest impact. GAO also identified a number of additional characteristics of effective national strategies that were missing or incomplete in the current Highway Modal Annex.

Federal entities, along with other highway sector stakeholders, have taken a variety of actions to mitigate risks to highway infrastructure; however, DHS, through TSA, lacks a mechanism to determine the extent to which voluntary security measures have been employed to protect critical assets. Specifically, highway stakeholders have developed publications and training, conducted research and development activities, and implemented specific voluntary protective measures for infrastructure assets, such as fencing and cameras. However, TSA does not have a mechanism to monitor protective measures implemented for critical highway infrastructure assets, although TSA is tasked with evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of federal initiatives to secure surface transportation modes. Without such a monitoring mechanism, TSA cannot determine the level of security preparedness of the nation's critical highway infrastructure.