



Highlights of [GAO-08-651T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) mission is to protect the nation's transportation network. Since its inception in 2001, TSA has developed and implemented a variety of programs and procedures to secure commercial aviation and surface modes of transportation. Other DHS components, federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector also play a role in transportation security. GAO has examined (1) the progress TSA and other DHS components have made in securing the nation's aviation and surface transportation systems, and the challenges that remain, and (2) crosscutting issues that have impeded TSA's efforts in strengthening security. This testimony is based on GAO reports and testimonies issued from February 2004 to February 2008 and ongoing work regarding the security of the nation's aviation and surface transportation systems, as well as selected updates to this work conducted in April 2008. To conduct this work, we reviewed documents related to TSA security efforts and interviewed TSA and transportation industry officials.

## What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made a number of recommendations to DHS and TSA to strengthen their efforts to secure the transportation network. DHS and TSA generally agreed with the recommendations and are making progress on implementing them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-651T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

# TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

## Efforts to Strengthen Aviation and Surface Transportation Security Continue to Progress, but More Work Remains

### What GAO Found

DHS, primarily through TSA, has made progress in securing the aviation and surface transportation networks, but more work remains. With regard to commercial aviation, TSA has undertaken efforts to strengthen airport security; hire, train, and measure the performance of its screening workforce; prescreen passengers against terrorist watch lists; and screen passengers, baggage, and cargo. With regard to surface transportation modes, TSA has taken steps to develop a strategic approach for securing mass transit, passenger and freight rail, commercial vehicles, and highways; establish security standards for certain transportation modes; and conduct threat, criticality, and vulnerability assessments of surface transportation assets, particularly passenger and freight rail. TSA also hired and deployed compliance inspectors and conducted inspections of passenger and freight rail systems.

While these efforts have helped to strengthen the security of the transportation network, DHS and TSA still face a number of key challenges in further securing these systems. For example, regarding commercial aviation, although TSA has made significant progress in its development of an advanced passenger prescreening system, known as Secure Flight, challenges remain, including unreliable program cost and schedule estimates, among other things. In addition, TSA's efforts to enhance perimeter security at airports may not be sufficient to provide for effective security. For example, TSA has initiated efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of security-related technologies, such as biometric identification systems, but has not developed a plan for guiding airports with respect to future technology enhancements. While TSA is pursuing the procurement of several checkpoint technologies to address key existing vulnerabilities, it has not deployed technologies on a wide-scale basis, and has not yet developed and implemented technologies needed to screen air cargo. Further, TSA's efforts to develop security standards for surface transportation modes have been limited to passenger and freight rail, and TSA has not determined what its regulatory role will be with respect to commercial vehicles or highway infrastructure.

A number of crosscutting issues have impeded DHS's and TSA's efforts to secure the transportation network, including the need to strengthen strategic planning and performance measurement, and more fully adopt and apply risk-based principles in the pursuit of its security initiatives.