



Highlights of [GAO-08-140T](#), testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

## 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, including passenger and freight rail, mass transit, highways, commercial vehicles, and pipelines. Other DHS components, federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector also play a role in transportation security. GAO examined (1) the progress DHS and TSA have made in securing the nation's aviation and surface transportation systems, and (2) challenges that have impeded the department's efforts to implement its mission and management functions. This testimony is based on issued GAO reports and testimonies addressing the security of the nation's aviation and surface transportation systems, including a recently issued report (GAO-07-454) that highlights the progress DHS has made in implementing its mission and management functions.

## 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 have taken steps to implement some of them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-140T](#). 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 are Under Way, but Challenges Remain

### What GAO Found

In August 2007, GAO reported that DHS had made moderate progress in securing the aviation and surface transportation networks, but that more work remains. Specifically, of the 24 performance expectations GAO identified in the area of aviation security, GAO reported that DHS had generally achieved 17 of these expectations and had generally not achieved 7 expectations. With regard to the security of surface modes of transportation, GAO reported that DHS generally achieved three performance expectations and had generally not achieved two others. DHS and TSA have made progress in many areas related to securing commercial aviation. For example, TSA has undertaken efforts to strengthen airport security; provide and train a 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, highways, and pipelines; 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, TSA has faced difficulties in developing and implementing its advanced passenger prescreening system, known as Secure Flight, and has not yet completed development efforts. In addition, TSA's efforts to enhance perimeter security at airports may not be sufficient to provide for effective security. TSA has also initiated efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of security-related technologies, such as biometric identification systems, but has not developed a plan for implementing new technologies to meet the security needs of individual airports. TSA has also not yet effectively deployed checkpoint technologies to address key existing vulnerabilities, and has not yet developed and implemented technologies needed to screen air cargo. Further, while TSA has initiated efforts to develop security standards for surface transportation modes, these efforts have been limited to passenger and freight rail, and have not addressed commercial vehicles or highway infrastructure, including bridges and tunnels. GAO also reported that a number of issues have impeded DHS's efforts in implementing its mission and management functions, including not always implementing effective strategic planning, or fully adopting and applying a risk management approach with respect to transportation security.