



Highlights of [GAO-08-456T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) funding for aviation security has totaled about \$26 billion since fiscal year 2004. This testimony focuses on TSA's efforts to secure the commercial aviation system through passenger screening, air cargo, and watch-list matching programs, and challenges remaining in these areas. GAO's comments are based on GAO products issued between February 2004 and April 2007, including selected updates in February 2008. This testimony also addresses TSA's progress in developing the Secure Flight program, based on work conducted from August 2007 to January 2008. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed systems development, privacy, and other documentation, and interviewed Department of Homeland Security (DHS), TSA, and contractor officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS in prior reports to strengthen screening operations and air cargo security. DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and is making progress in implementing them. GAO is making new recommendations to DHS to incorporate best practices in Secure Flight cost and schedule estimates; fully implement the program's risk management, testing, and information security requirements; and consider additional performance measures to evaluate redress processes. DHS and TSA generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-456T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Transportation Security Administration Has Strengthened Planning to Guide Investments in Key Aviation Security Programs, but More Work Remains

What GAO Found

DHS and TSA have undertaken numerous initiatives to strengthen the security of the nation's commercial aviation system, including actions to address many recommendations made by GAO. TSA has focused its efforts on, among other things, more efficiently allocating, deploying, and managing the Transportation Security Officer (TSO) workforce—formerly known as screeners; strengthening screening procedures; developing and deploying more effective and efficient screening technologies; strengthening domestic air cargo security; and developing a government operated watch-list matching program, known as Secure Flight. Specifically, TSA developed and implemented a Staffing Allocation Model to determine TSO staffing levels at airports that reflect current operating conditions, and proposed and implemented modifications to passenger checkpoint screening procedures based on risk information. However, GAO reported that some assumptions in TSA's Staffing Allocation Model did not accurately reflect airport operating conditions, and that TSA could improve its process for evaluating the effectiveness of proposed procedural changes. In response, TSA developed a plan to review Staffing Allocation Model assumptions and took steps to strengthen its evaluation of proposed procedural changes. TSA has also explored new passenger checkpoint screening technologies to better detect explosives and other threats and has taken steps to strengthen air cargo security, including conducting vulnerability assessments at airports and compliance inspections of air carriers. However, TSA has not developed an inspection plan that included performance goals and measures to determine whether air carriers transporting cargo into the United States were complying with security requirements. In response to GAO's recommendations, TSA has since established a working group to strengthen its compliance activities. Finally, TSA has instilled more discipline and rigor into Secure Flight's systems development, including preparing key documentation and strengthening privacy protections.

While these efforts should be commended, GAO has identified several areas that should be addressed to further strengthen aviation security. For example, TSA has made limited progress in developing and deploying checkpoint technologies due to planning and management challenges. Further, TSA continues to face some program management challenges in developing Secure Flight. Specifically, TSA has not (1) developed program cost and schedule estimates consistent with best practices; (2) fully implemented its risk management plan; (3) planned for system end-to-end testing in test plans; and (4) ensured that information security requirements are fully implemented. If these challenges are not addressed effectively, the risk of the program not being completed on schedule and within estimated costs is increased, and the chances of it performing as intended are diminished. DHS and TSA lack performance measures to fully evaluate the effectiveness of current processes for passengers who apply for redress due to inconveniences experienced during the check-in and screening process. Without such measures, DHS and TSA lack a sound basis to monitor the effectiveness of the redress process.