

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. transportation system, comprised of aviation, freight rail, highway, maritime, mass transit and passenger rail, and pipelines, moves billions of passengers and millions of tons of goods each year. Disrupted terrorist attacks involving rail and air cargo in 2010 demonstrate the importance of effective information sharing with transportation security stakeholders. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is the lead agency responsible for communicating security-related information with all modes. In response to the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, GAO assessed 1) the satisfaction of transportation stakeholders with the quality of TSA's transportation security information products, 2) satisfaction with mechanisms used to disseminate them, and 3) the extent to which TSA's roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. GAO surveyed 335 aviation, rail, and highway stakeholders (with an 82 percent response rate); reviewed agency planning documents; and interviewed industry associations, transportation stakeholders, and Department of Homeland Security officials. An electronic supplement to this report—[GAO-12-67SP](#)—provides survey results.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that TSA, among other actions, (1) address stakeholder needs regarding the quality of analysis in and availability of its products, (2) increase awareness and functionality of its information sharing mechanisms, and (3) define and document TSA's information sharing roles and responsibilities. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-12-44](#). For more information, contact Stephen M. Lord at (202) 512-4379 or lords@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY INFORMATION SHARING

Stakeholders Generally Satisfied but TSA Could Improve Analysis, Awareness, and Accountability

What GAO Found

Transportation stakeholders who GAO surveyed were generally satisfied with TSA's security-related information products, but identified opportunities to improve the quality and availability of the disseminated information. TSA developed a series of products to share security-related information with transportation stakeholders such as annual modal threat assessments that provide an overview of threats to each transportation mode—including aviation, rail, and highway—and related infrastructure. Fifty-seven percent of the stakeholders (155 of 275 who answered this question) indicated that they were satisfied with the products they receive. However, stakeholders who receive these products were least satisfied with the actionability of the information—the degree to which the products enabled stakeholders to adjust their security measures. They noted that they prefer products with more analysis, such as trend analysis of incidents or suggestions for improving security arrangements. Further, not all stakeholders received the products. For example, 48 percent (128 of 264) of the stakeholders reported that they did not receive a security assessment in 2010, such as TSA's annual modal threat assessment. Improving the analysis and availability of security-related information products would help enhance stakeholders' ability to position themselves to protect against threats.

Stakeholders who obtained security-related information through TSA's Web-based mechanisms were generally satisfied, but almost 60 percent (158 of 266) of stakeholders GAO surveyed had never heard of the Homeland Security Information Sharing Network Critical Sectors portal (HSIN-CS). DHS views HSIN as the primary mechanism for sharing security-related information with critical sectors, including transportation stakeholders. Forty-three percent of rail stakeholders, 28 percent of highway stakeholders, and 72 percent of aviation stakeholders—who consider TSA's aviation Web Boards as their primary information-sharing mechanism—had not heard of HSIN-CS. Among the 55 stakeholders that had logged on to HSIN-CS, concerns were raised with the ability to locate information using the mechanism. Increasing awareness and functionality of HSIN-CS could help ensure that stakeholders receive security information, including TSA products.

Defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities for information sharing among TSA offices could help strengthen information-sharing efforts. Officials from TSA's Office of Intelligence consider TSA's Transportation Sector Network Management offices to be key conduits for providing security-related information directly to stakeholders. However, officials from these offices differed in their understanding of their roles. For instance, officials told GAO that their role was to communicate policy and regulatory information, rather than threat-related information. While TSA officials look to the current Transportation Security Information Sharing Plan for guidance, it does not include key elements of the approach that TSA uses to communicate security-related information to stakeholders. For example, it does not describe the roles of TSA's Field Intelligence Officers, who facilitate the exchange of relevant threat information with local and private entities responsible for transportation security. Clearly documenting roles and responsibilities for sharing security-related information with transportation stakeholders could improve the effectiveness of TSA's efforts and help ensure accountability.