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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-52](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 10 million people in the United States are of limited English proficiency (LEP), in that they do not speak English at all or do not speak English well. These persons tend to rely on public transit more than English speakers. Executive Order 13166 directs federal agencies to develop guidance for their grantees on making their services accessible to LEP persons. The Department of Transportation (DOT) issued its guidance in 2001, with revised guidance pending issuance. This report reviews (1) the language access services transit agencies and metropolitan planning organizations have provided, and the effects and costs of these services; (2) how DOT assists its grantees in providing language access services; and (3) how DOT monitors its grantees' provision of these services.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of DOT (1) ensure that DOT's revised LEP guidance is directly distributed to all DOT grantees; (2) consider providing additional assistance to grantees in providing language access; and (3) more fully incorporate the revised guidance in current review processes, and establish consistent norms for what constitutes a language access deficiency.

DOT generally concurred with the findings and recommendations in this report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-52.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Kate Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

Translated report summaries are available in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean at www.gao.gov/special.pubs/translations.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Better Dissemination and Oversight of DOT's Guidance Could Lead to Improved Access for Limited English-Proficient Populations

What GAO Found

Transit agencies and metropolitan planning organizations provide a variety of language access services, predominantly in Spanish, but the effects and costs of these services are largely unknown. Types of services provided included, among other things, translated brochures and signs; multilingual telephone lines; bilingual drivers; and interpreters at public meetings. However, few agencies we visited had conducted an assessment of the language needs in their service areas, or had conducted an evaluation of their language access efforts. As a result, it is unclear whether agencies' efforts are comprehensive enough to meet the needs of LEP persons, and community groups in the areas we visited saw important gaps in agencies' services. In addition, although those costs are largely unknown, several agencies saw providing language access as a cost of doing business, not as an additional cost. However, if efforts were to be expanded to include additional services or languages, agency officials told us that costs could become prohibitive.

DOT assists grantees in providing language access through its guidance and other activities, but DOT has made limited efforts to ensure that grantees are aware of the available assistance, which was not often accessed by the agencies we visited. This assistance includes DOT's guidance—which provides a five-step framework for how to provide meaningful language access—as well as workshops and peer-exchange programs that include language access practices, and training courses that touch on language issues. DOT also participates in a federal LEP clearinghouse, www.lep.gov. However, few agencies we visited had accessed these resources. Several local officials stated that easily accessible training and assistance specific to language access and examples of how to implement DOT's guidance could help them more effectively provide access to LEP populations.

Transit agencies' and metropolitan planning organizations' provision of language access services are monitored through in-depth civil rights compliance reviews and two broader reviews—triennial reviews of transit agencies and planning certification reviews. However, these reviews do not have consistent criteria for determining whether an agency is deficient in providing such services. Furthermore, these reviews do not fully reflect Executive Order 13166 or DOT's guidance. Without thorough and consistent monitoring that takes into account the guidance, local agencies' language access activities will likely remain varied and inconsistent.

Examples of Translated Signs in Orange County, California



Source: Orange County Transportation Authority.