



Highlights of [GAO-06-855T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Highways, Transit, and Pipelines, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Mobility—that is, the movement of passengers and goods through the transportation system—is critical to the nation’s economic vitality and the quality of life of its citizens. However, increasing passenger travel and freight movement has led to growing congestion in the nation’s transportation system, and projections suggest that this trend is likely to continue. Increased congestion can have a number of negative economic and social effects, including wasting travelers’ time and money, impeding efficient movement of freight, and degrading air quality. U.S. transportation policy has generally addressed these negative economic and social effects from the standpoint of individual transportation modes and local government involvement. However, there has been an increased focus on the development of intermodal transportation. Intermodal transportation refers to a system that connects the separate transportation modes—such as mass transit systems, roads, aviation, maritime, and railroads—and allows a passenger to complete a journey using more than one mode. My testimony today is based on GAO’s prior work on intermodal transportation, especially intermodal ground connections to airports, and addresses (1) the challenges associated with developing and using intermodal capabilities and (2) potential strategies that could help public decision makers improve intermodal capabilities.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-855T.

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

INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION

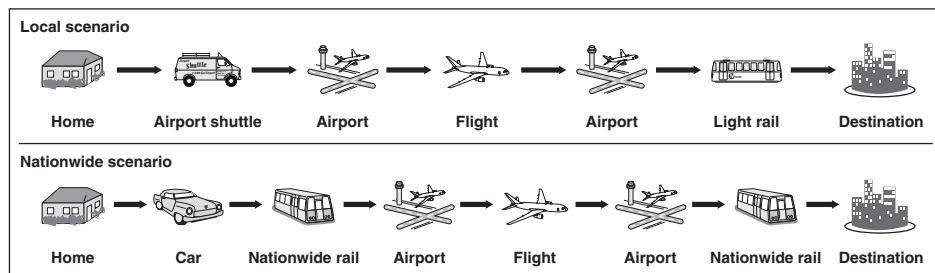
Challenges to and Potential Strategies for Developing Improved Intermodal Capabilities

What GAO Found

A number of financing, planning, and other challenges play significant roles in shaping transportation investment decisions and the development of intermodal capabilities. Significant challenges to the development of intermodal capabilities are the lack of specific national goals and funding programs. Federal funding is often tied to a single transportation mode; as a result it may be difficult to finance projects, such as intermodal projects, that do not have a source of dedicated funding. In addition, federally funded transportation projects, including intermodal projects, face a number of planning challenges. These challenges include limits on the uses of federal funds, ensuring that widespread public participation is reflected in decisions, physical and geographic land constraints, and the difficulty coordinating among multiple jurisdictions in transportation corridors. Finally, intermodal capabilities, while offering benefits to mobility, may need to develop a demand over time.

Two general strategies developed from GAO’s prior work would help public decision makers improve intermodal capabilities. Both strategies are based on a systematic framework that includes identifying national goals, defining the federal role, determining funding approaches, and evaluating performance. The first strategy would increase the flexibility of current federal transportation programs to encourage a more systemwide approach to transportation planning and development, but would leave project selection with state and local decision makers. The second strategy is a fundamental shift in federal transportation policy’s focus on local decision making by increasing the role of the federal government in order to develop more integrated transportation networks. While the first strategy would most likely lead to a continued focus on locally determined and developed transportation projects, the second strategy could develop more integrated transportation networks, either nationwide or along particularly congested corridors. The second strategy could be costly, and high benefits, which may be difficult to achieve, would be needed to justify this investment.

Two Examples of Intermodal Connections for an Airline Passenger



Source: GAO.