

July 1995

**Transportation and
Telecommunications
Issue Area**

Active Assignments

Foreword

This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Transportation and Telecommunications issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of July 6, 1995, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact John Anderson, Director, on (202) 512-8021; or Gerald Dillingham, Associate Director, on (202) 512-4803.

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Transportation and Telecommunications

AVIATION SAFETY

TITLE: REVIEW OF FAA'S OVERSIGHT OF NEW ENTRANT AIRLINES (341437)

BACKGROUND : FAA has overall responsibility for ensuring the safety of aviation in the U.S. Over the last few years, several major airlines have gone out of business while many new entrants have come onto the scene, raising the issue of whether new airline entrants that do not have established track records are meeting safety standards.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Does DOT's certification process ensure that new airlines are financially fit before and after they begin operations? (2) Does the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have an effective program for certifying the initial operation of new airlines? (3) Once certified, is FAA ensuring that new entrant airlines continuously meet FAA's safety standards?

TITLE: FAA'S RESPONSE TO GAO, NTSB, AND DOT/IG AVIATION SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS (341441)

BACKGROUND : The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the Department of Transportation's Inspector General (DOT/IG), and GAO make numerous recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) aimed at improving aviation safety. FAA must respond to the three oversight agencies with its plans for acting or not acting on the recommendations.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are the major aviation safety areas where NTSB, GAO, and DOT/IG have made significant recommendations to FAA from 1990 through 1994? (2) To what extent has FAA been successful in implementing significant recommendations? (3) What are the major reasons for FAA not implementing or not fully implementing significant recommendations?

TITLE: STATUS OF FAA'S EFFORTS TO DEVELOP NEW EXPLOSIVES AND NARCOTICS DETECTION (341459)

BACKGROUND : The World Trade Center bombing and recent threats against aviation have raised serious concerns about the security of air travel. The Congress is concerned about the status of technology developed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and others to detect explosives and question whether or not the technology can also be used to detect narcotics.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is the status of FAA's efforts to develop new explosive detection technology? (2) Which FAA-sponsored technologies have potential for detecting narcotics?

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

TITLE: EVALUATION OF DOT'S USE OF STATE SAFETY BELT DATA AND IT'S GOALS AND STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING BELT USE (342890)

BACKGROUND : The Department of Transportation (DOT) encourages states to enact safety belt mandatory use laws and to increase belt use. States report belt use ranging from 25 to 84 percent. DOT has set a goal of 75 percent belt use by 1997. Our 1992 report showed that state belt use data were not reliable, and DOT's prior goal of 70 percent belt use provided little challenge for many states.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Is the Department of Transportation's estimate of 66 percent nationwide belt use methodologically sound? (2) What are the most successful strategies for increasing belt use? (3) How can U.S. strategies be improved to maximize safety belt use?

TITLE: GEOMETRIC DESIGN OF HIGHWAYS (342895)

BACKGROUND : The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) allows states more flexibility in applying design standards to roads in scenic and historic areas. However, FHWA reports that states continue to use strict federally approved standards on scenic highway projects. According to environmentalists, the strict standards destroy too many resources.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What geometric design standards do states use when improving or reconstructing scenic and historic roads? (2) What factors, including tort liability, influence states' choice of design standards? (3) Have any states or federal agencies developed design standards which could serve as a model for designing scenic highways?

TITLE: REVIEW OF DOT'S RAILROAD CROSSING PROGRAMS (343857)

BACKGROUND : The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration provide funds for rail crossing safety improvements through five different programs. States prioritize rail crossing projects, sometimes improving an entire rail corridor. The Department of Transportation has obligated over \$2.6 billion for rail crossings since 1974.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How does federal funding relate to state safety needs? (2) Can the Department of Transportation better implement the corridor concept of rail crossing improvement? (3) What innovative technologies are being developed for rail crossings and what will they cost? (4) Can interagency and intergovernmental coordination be improved regarding rail crossing safety?

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AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

TITLE: STATUS OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION'S AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL PROGRAM (341432)

BACKGROUND : For the past 5 years, GAO has prepared a report on the status of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) \$36.2 billion air traffic control modernization program. Our review will highlight the program's cost, schedule, and performance status. This report will supplement our testimony at FAA's budget hearings.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is the current cost, schedule, and performance status of air traffic control modernization? (2) What are the causes and effects of cost growth and schedule delays in key acquisition projects?

TITLE: NEW DENVER AIRPORT CONTRACTING ISSUES (341447)

BACKGROUND : The Denver International Airport (DIA) is currently scheduled to open on February 28, 1995, 16 months later than originally scheduled. The federal government has committed over \$600 million for this project. Considering the substantial federal funds committed, Congressional members have expressed concern about this delay and the management of the project.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What were the major causes of project cost growth and schedule slippages? (2) Were appropriate procedures followed for contracts funded in part or entirely from federal monies? (3) What were the major concerns expressed by various stakeholders since construction of the airport began in 1990 and how were these concerns addressed?

TITLE: REVIEW OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION'S (FAA) FISCAL YEAR 1996 FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT (F&E) BUDGET REQUEST (341450)

BACKGROUND : FAA is undertaking an extensive program to modernize the nation's air traffic control system. FAA funds this program through its annual Facilities and Equipment (F&E) appropriation. For the past several years, the Transportation Subcommittees have requested GAO's assistance in analyzing the annual F&E budget request from FAA.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What fiscal year 1996 Facilities and Equipment (F&E) budget line items have potential for reduction or deferral until future years?

Transportation and Telecommunications

AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

TITLE: ALLOCATION OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR AIRPORTS (341454)

BACKGROUND : The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) oversees Airport Improvement Program funds (AIP) and Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) fees used for airport development. The AIP, created in 1982, is funded with aviation taxes and has provided \$16 billion to airports. PFCs, collected since 1992, are imposed on airline passengers by some airports and total \$1.4 billion.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are the AIP and PFC funding processes and trends? (2) How were these funding trends, at selected airport types, affected by the implementation of PFCs?

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

TITLE: FORMULA FOR APPORTIONING FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY FUNDS TO THE STATES (342883)

BACKGROUND : The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) mandated that GAO study the federal-aid highway apportionment formula (\$108 billion over 6 years). The House and Senate agreed that GAO should do this work in two phases: Phase I (this job) focusing on the apportionment formula and how it works; Phase II developing alternative formulas.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How does the current Federal-Aid Highway (FAH) formula apportion funds to the states? (2) How do formula distributions compare to program-related variables? (3) How does the FAH funding formula relate to attainment of program goals (both highway and broader)?

TITLE: HIGHWAY SIGNS: CONVERSION TO METRIC UNITS COULD BE COSTLY (342903)

BACKGROUND : The Metric Conversion Act requires every federal agency to use the metric system in its procurement, grants, and other business-related activities to the extent feasible. Responding to this mandate, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) developed a metric conversion plan, which included the conversion of highway signs to metric units by September 30, 1996.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is the status of states' efforts in converting highway signs into metric units? (2) What are the costs of converting our nation's highway signs to metric units?

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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

TITLE: CHICAGO CENTRAL AREA CIRCULATOR (342905)

TITLE: INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS PROGRAM (342907)

COMPETITION AND FINANCIAL HEALTH

TITLE: INTERNATIONAL AVIATION ISSUES (341460)

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COMPETITION AND FINANCIAL HEALTH

TITLE: STATUS OF AMTRAK'S STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS PLAN AS OF JUNE 1995 (343872)

SEA

TITLE: REVIEW OF THE COAST GUARD'S INSPECTION FEES FOR SMALL PASSENGER VESSELS (344497)

TELECOM/COMPETITION & REGULATION

TITLE: TELECOMMUNICATIONS: REVIEW OF IMPEDIMENTS TO DOING BUSINESS ABROAD (348015)

BACKGROUND : Congress plans hearings to identify regulations and policies which impede the provision of telecommunications services abroad. Companies face many kinds of problems such as licensing requirements and procedures, a lack of standards and intellectual property protection, and foreign investment limits.

Telecommunications is a key growth sector for the U.S.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What kinds of problems, if any, have some U.S. businesses encountered when trying to provide telecommunications services abroad? (2) What are some solutions which can be undertaken by federal agencies, by the Congress, and/or through international agreements and institutions?

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TELECOM/COMPETITION & REGULATION

TITLE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM STATE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP THE NATIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE (NII) (348016)

BACKGROUND : Congressional action on a national information infrastructure has been delayed, partly due to questions about private investment and universal service. Several states have begun projects to improve their own information infrastructures and have developed strategies for encouraging private investment and defining universal service for advanced telecommunications.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How have selected states applied the concept of universal service to their telecommunications modernization projects? (2) How have states encouraged private investment in information infrastructure modernization? (3) What factors facilitated or hindered state efforts to address these two issues?

OTHER ISSUE AREA WORK - TRANSPORTATION

TITLE: JOINT GAO-NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE REVIEW OF OPERATIONS OF THE NIAGARA FALLS BRIDGE COMMISSION (340632)

BACKGROUND : The Niagara Falls Bridge Commission is a U.S./Canadian entity operating three bridges in the Niagara Falls area. It issued \$121 million of tax-exempt bonds in 1992 and refinanced them with \$133 million of similar bonds in 1993 to fund expansion and improvements. Little progress has been made to date.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Has the Commission implemented its capital plan in an effective and efficient manner? (2) Has the Commission been prudent in financing its capital plan? (3) What organization should provide oversight to the Commission in the future?

