



Highlights of [GAO-13-402T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The nation's transportation system—including highways, airways, pipelines, and rail systems that move both people and freight—is critical to the economy and affects the daily lives of most Americans. However, this system is under growing strain, and estimates of the cost to repair and upgrade the system to meet current and future demands are in the hundreds of billions of dollars. At the same time, traditional funding sources—in particular motor fuel and truck-related taxes—are eroding and the federal government faces long-term fiscal challenges. Addressing these challenges will require looking across federal activities and reexamining all types of federal spending and tax expenditures.

DOT is the principal agency responsible for implementing national transportation policy and administering most federal transportation programs. This statement discusses four key management challenges facing DOT: (1) leveraging surface transportation investments to further national interests, (2) improving surface and aviation transportation safety, (3) effectively implementing the Next Generation Air Transportation System and (4) improving information security. This statement is based on GAO's previous reports and testimonies, which are listed at the end of the statement. GAO has made a number of recommendations to DOT to more effectively leverage the departments' investments and enhance the safety of the traveling public, among other areas. DOT actions underway to address these recommendations are described in this statement.

View [GAO-13-402T](#). For more information, contact Phil Herr at (202) 512-2834 or herrp@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Key Issues and Management Challenges, 2013

What GAO Found

Leveraging surface transportation investments to further national interests:

The Department of Transportation (DOT) faces several challenges leveraging investment in surface transportation networks to meet national goals and priorities. For example, DOT has to transition to a goal-oriented, performance-based approach for highway and transit programs, as required by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). Successfully implementing a performance-based approach entails new responsibilities for DOT since, as GAO has previously reported, its program oversight has generally been process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. DOT also faces challenges related to targeting funds to priorities like the nation's freight network, effectively managing discretionary grant and credit assistance programs, and effectively overseeing other programs, such as the federal-aid highway program.

Improving surface and aviation transportation safety: GAO's recent work on safety across all modes has highlighted the need for improved data reliability and oversight. For example, data are critical for identifying commercial motor vehicles that pose the highest safety concerns. In 2012, GAO recommended that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) develop a data-driven approach to target carriers operating illegally by attempting to disguise their former identities and expand this approach to examine all new motor carriers. FMCSA is currently working to develop such a data-driven approach. Aviation safety-data collection and oversight also can be improved. For example, limitations in flight activity (e.g., flight hours) and other data preclude a complete assessment of general aviation safety. GAO recommended, among other things, that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) require the collection of general aviation aircraft flight-hour data in ways that minimize the impact on the general aviation community and set safety improvement goals for individual general aviation-industry segments, which FAA is working to address.

Effectively implementing the Next Generation Air Transportation System

(NextGen): NextGen is intended to transform the current radar-based system to an aircraft-centered, satellite navigation-based system. FAA faces three key challenges going forward. One challenge is delivering procedures and capabilities that provide aircraft operators with a return on investment in NextGen avionics to incentivize further investments. FAA also faces challenges keeping key NextGen acquisitions within cost estimates and on schedule. NextGen implementation will be affected by how well FAA manages the program's interdependencies, as delays in one program can affect timeframes for other programs and overall acquisition and maintenance costs. Finally, FAA faces challenges managing the transition to NextGen. FAA will have to balance its priorities to ensure that NextGen implementation stays on course while continuing to maintain current equipment and facilities. FAA's modeling indicates that even if all NextGen technologies are implemented, 14 airports—including some of the 35 busiest—may not be able to meet projected increases in demand.

Improving information security: DOT faces challenges effectively protecting its computer systems and networks. GAO and others have found that DOT has not consistently implemented effective controls to ensure that financial and sensitive information is adequately protected from unauthorized access and other risks.