GAO Highlights

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

TSA Has Taken Steps to Improve Security Areas Identified in the TSA Modernization Act, but Additional Actions Are Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

Threats to the nation's transportation systems persist and continue to evolve. Within DHS, TSA is the federal agency with primary responsibility for the prevention of and defense against terrorist and other threats to the United States' civil aviation, and rail, public transit, pipeline, and other surface transportation systems. The TSA Modernization Act includes provisions intended to enhance security across this broad range of systems and further calls on GAO to review TSA's progress in these areas.

This statement summarizes past and ongoing work related to TSA's actions to address selected aviation and surface transportation security areas covered by the TSA Modernization Act. This statement is based on products GAO issued from December 2017 through October 2019 and draft reports currently with TSA for comment.

To perform this work GAO reviewed TSA program documents, visited domestic and foreign airports, and interviewed TSA officials, DHS officials, and transportation industry stakeholders, including associations and air carriers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations designed to address the challenges discussed in this statement. TSA concurred with recommendations from prior work and is currently reviewing recommendations from our draft reports, including those regarding passenger screening rules and aviation screening technologies.

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has made initial progress in certain security areas mandated by the TSA Modernization Act, but additional actions are needed.

- **International aviation security.** In December 2017, GAO reported that TSA has taken steps to enhance its foreign airport assessments. Since that time, TSA has developed a tool to better track and address foreign airport vulnerabilites. In addition, TSA reviews security directives and emergency amendments it issues to address security concerns. However, TSA's review process does not fully define how to coordinate with industry representatives and it has not determined if it is appropriate to incorporate the security measures of many longstanding directives into air carrier security programs in accordance with TSA policy. In October 2019, GAO recommended, and TSA officals agreed, that TSA better define how to coordinate with air carriers when reviewing directives and when to incorporate directives into security programs.

- **Passenger screening rules.** TSA develops screening rules by considering current intelligence and other factors to identify passengers who fall within the scope of the rules for enhanced screening. GAO found that TSA coordinates rules reviews through quarterly meetings and notifies an expanded set of DHS and TSA stakeholders of rule changes as called for by the Act. TSA tracks some data on rule implementation but does not comprehensively measure rule effectiveness. In its draft report, GAO recommended that TSA explore additional data sources for measuring the effectiveness of its rules. TSA is currently reviewing this recommendation.

- **Aviation screening technologies.** GAO found that TSA does not ensure that screening technologies continue to meet detection requirements after they have been deployed to airports. According to officials, the agency uses certification—a step in the test and evaluation process—to confirm that technologies meet detection requirements before they are deployed to airports, and calibration of the technologies to confirm that technologies are at least minimally operational while in use at airports. While these processes serve important purposes, performance can degrade over time. In its draft report, GAO recommended that TSA implement a process to ensure technologies continue to meet detection requirements after deployment. TSA is currently reviewing this recommendation.

- **Surface transportation pipeline security**. In December 2018, GAO identified some weaknesses and made recommendations to strengthen TSA's management of key aspects of its pipeline security program. For example, TSA does not have a strategic workforce plan to help ensure it identifies the skills and competencies—such as the required level of cybersecurity expertise—necessary to carry out its pipeline security responsibilities. GAO recommended, and TSA concurred, that TSA develop a strategic workforce plan. As of October 2019, TSA has not yet fully addressed this recommendation. We will continue to monitor progress.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**