

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106382](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. surface transportation system comprises multiple modes of transportation and moves billions of passengers and millions of tons of goods each year. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes provisions for DHS to take steps to enhance surface transportation security through information sharing. Steps include allocating intelligence staff to locations with higher-risk assets and making security clearance applications available to surface transportation stakeholders. The act includes a provision for GAO to review implementation of these steps.

This report describes (1) how and where TSA and DHS I&A allocated field-based intelligence staff and (2) the extent to which DHS made the security clearance application process available to surface transportation stakeholders, among other topics. GAO analyzed TSA and DHS I&A documents and data, including staff allocations for fiscal year 2023, conducted site visits to areas with higher-risk surface transportation assets, and interviewed agency officials and surface transportation stakeholders.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends TSA, DHS I&A, and CISA implement communications approaches that convey consistent and accurate information about accessing the security clearance application process. DHS agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106382](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or [McNeilT@gao.gov](mailto:McNeilT@gao.gov).

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# SURFACE TRANSPORTATION THREATS

## Better Communication with Stakeholders Needed about the Security Clearance Process

### What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (DHS I&A) allocated field-based intelligence staff to locations with higher-risk surface transportation assets. TSA and DHS I&A considered surface transportation security risks differently when doing so because each took into account their other mission priorities. Though their approaches differed, in fiscal year 2023, TSA and DHS I&A each allocated field-based intelligence staff to approximately half of the 62 geographic areas with higher-risk surface transportation assets. According to TSA and DHS I&A officials, the remaining locations with higher-risk surface transportation assets that did not have field-based intelligence staff located within the geographic area were supported by field-based intelligence staff in other locations.

### Surface Transportation Modes



Sources: GAO analysis of Transportation Security Administration documents; photos (l to r) serjio74/Stock Adobe.com, vacant/Stock Adobe.com, Svetlaya/Stock Adobe.com, Tomasz Wozniak/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106382

DHS made the security clearance application process available to surface transportation stakeholders, but some misunderstood aspects of the process. DHS and its entities—TSA, DHS I&A, and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)—have applicable policies and other guidance. However, agency officials, field-based intelligence staff, and surface transportation stakeholders GAO interviewed misunderstood how some aspects were applied, specifically as they related to accessing the security clearance application process. For example, some misunderstood which DHS entity was responsible for initiating applications for surface transportation owners and operators, whether there was a maximum number each would sponsor, and the type of employee eligible. Implementing a coordinated communications approach could help ensure relevant agency staff, as well as surface transportation stakeholders, have consistent and accurate information about the security clearance application process and ultimately facilitate classified information sharing when the need arises. Each DHS entity is responsible for ensuring its own staff have accurate information about the security clearance process. Further, as the lead agency for sharing transportation security-related information, TSA would be best positioned to coordinate the communications approach for sharing information with surface transportation owners and operators and external stakeholders about accessing the security clearance application process.