

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The nation's economic growth and security are heavily dependent on its physical infrastructure systems that include, among other things, transportation, postal and delivery, and communications networks; public housing; and thousands of federal buildings and facilities. Historically, the federal government has supported the construction of much of this infrastructure and helped ensure the safety and efficiency of the services it provides. Federal agencies estimate that hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed over 20 years to construct, repair, and maintain such systems. Physical Infrastructure has the lead responsibility in GAO for helping the Congress and agencies maintain a safe and efficient physical infrastructure.

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DESCRIPTION OF

Our oversight responsibilities are governmentwide and include reviews of (1) the full range of infrastructure investment needs and spending trends, (2) housing and urban development projects, (3) financing methods and environmental/economic impact of infrastructure projects, (4) federal efforts to reduce accidents, injuries, and fatalities in all transportation modes, (5) the viability and quality of postal services, (6) telecommunications infrastructure, (7) disaster assistance, and (8) the acquisition, construction, maintenance, and security of the nation's federal buildings and facilities.

Our work helps the Congress and federal agencies to ensure the continued functionality of the nation's infrastructure. For example, our work on infrastructure project oversight and financing provides the Congress with information on the resources needed and financing alternatives available to maintain and modernize the nation's transportation systems, public buildings, and public housing. We also evaluate the impact of infrastructure on the surrounding environment to help federal and local officials consider options as they debate the economic, transportation, and environmental issues associated with economic development. Through our work on transportation safety and security, we (1) promote a better understanding of the root causes of accidents, injuries, and fatalities and the related costs to society and (2) identify potential solutions. Finally, our work on the impact of transportation, telecommunications, and postal policies on competition and consumers helps the Congress assess both the existing level of competition and options to reshape legislation, as necessary.

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IMPACT OF

our work

Citing concerns raised in our report on the status of high-speed rail projects in the United States, Florida's governor cancelled an \$8 billion high-speed rail project planned for the state. Our report questioned the project's cost estimates, financing requirements, ridership estimates, and extremely ambitious construction schedule. As a result, the federal government did not have to provide nearly \$300 million to cover the cost of the federal loan that the project would have required. Our reviews of the Agency for Housing and Urban Development's recent funding request led the Congress to reduce the agency's funding by \$1.6 billion. In the safety arena, the Federal Aviation Administration promptly addressed a safety inspector staffing shortfall when we pointed out that impending turnover and industry actions could jeopardize aviation safety. We have testified that the Postal Service faces an uncertain future as its financial difficulties increase due to slower growth in mail volumes and difficulties in restraining costs. Our testimony highlighted the need for legislation to modernize and reform the nation's outdated postal laws.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT and *future projects*

Infrastructure Needs and Financing Alternatives

- Identify and evaluate trends in federal infrastructure investment
- Assess needs estimates for federal infrastructure
- Identify best practices for federal infrastructure management
- Identify and evaluate alternatives to financing infrastructure projects
- Review state and local planning for public infrastructure projects

Transportation Safety

- Assess the quality and usefulness of transportation safety data
- Monitor and evaluate FAA's efforts to identify and address key security vulnerabilities for U.S. commercial aviation

Public Buildings Management

- Evaluate the performance of federal real property management
- Assess federal practices for acquiring and operating real property
- Review judiciary's multibillion dollar courthouse construction program

Public Housing Management

- Assess the costs, benefits, and quality of federally assisted housing programs
- Determine the adequacy of current housing programs to meet the growing demand and the needs of special populations

Competition and Consumer Protection

- Evaluate the status of competition in aviation, rail, and telecommunications
- Assess the need for regulatory oversight of the Internet
- Determine the cost effectiveness and affordability of the postal delivery infrastructure
- Monitor and evaluate regulatory oversight of postal and delivery sectors