

# PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

*The nation's economic growth is heavily dependent on a safe, secure, and effective national physical infrastructure, which includes transportation, postal and communications networks, as well as federal buildings and facilities. The transportation and telecommunications infrastructure provides the framework for the nation's economy, facilitating the movement of people, goods, and ideas. The nation relies heavily on the postal system for efficient and safe mail delivery service. And thousands of federal facilities house and support the government workforce and other assets needed to provide services to the American people. Protecting the nation's physical infrastructure from acts of terrorism has become a national priority. Maintaining our physical infrastructure in a state of good repair is also important. Federal agency officials estimate that hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed over the next 20 years to construct, repair, and maintain our physical infrastructure systems. The Physical Infrastructure team helps Congress, federal agencies, and the public address these important challenges.*

## Our Work

Our reports and testimonies help Congress oversee a variety of federal agencies, including the Department of Transportation (DOT), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as well as other entities such as Amtrak and the Postal Service. Our work helps Congress and the entities we review ensure the continued effectiveness and security of the nation's infrastructure by

- identifying best practices and financing alternatives available to maintain and modernize the nation's transportation systems and public buildings;
- assessing federal efforts to improve the safety, security, and capacity of our infrastructure;
- assessing the Postal Service's efforts to ensure its viability and accomplish its mission as it faces financial and competitive challenges in the 21st century; and
- assessing the existing level of competition and availability of transportation and telecommunications services and the options available to reshape legislation.

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## *Accomplishments and Key Projects*

Our recent reports and testimonies have helped Congress prepare for reauthorization of transportation programs in 2003 and have assessed competition in the transportation and telecommunications sectors. We helped frame the debate over how and whether intercity passenger rail should measure up against other funding priorities. We assisted Congress in its continuing oversight of the Postal Service's transformation in response to the challenges it faces in the 21st century. We also provided critical information on the weaknesses of the nation's aviation security and emergency response systems in the wake of September 11. Subsequently, Congress passed, and the President signed, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which created the Transportation Security Administration.

In response to our reports and recommendations:

- Congress enacted legislation that will save the Postal Service and postal customers nearly \$3 billion annually in pension costs.
- Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which created the Transportation Security Administration and mandated improvements in security throughout the nation's transportation system, with a special emphasis on the aviation system.
- DOT identified the major causes of accidents involving large trucks to facilitate more effective safety enforcement.
- FCC is making more efficient use of its funds to provide advanced telecommunication and information services to schools and libraries at discounted rates, thereby allowing wider access to these services.
- GSA developed and implemented an initiative to address its large inventory of buildings that are unneeded or excessively costly to maintain.

Currently, we are also

- providing information and analyses concerning aviation and surface transportation programs for reauthorization legislation scheduled for 2003;
- evaluating the impact of global developments on the U.S aviation industry, with a special emphasis on international environmental and safety standards;
- identifying the challenges and opportunities associated with the development of an integrated intermodal passenger transportation system;
- assessing efforts to reduce accidents and fatalities in passenger vehicles, trucks, aircraft, and other vehicles;
- evaluating lessons learned from the government's response to anthrax attacks in the fall of 2001;
- identifying steps taken by industry and government to secure the nation's transportation system and actions needed to further enhance the security of the nation's ports, mass transit, and other transportation modes;
- identifying problems and suggesting solutions aimed at improving the government's acquisition, management, and disposal of its half-million properties;
- assessing the Postal Service's transformation efforts aimed at ensuring its viability and continuing its mission; and
- providing Congress with objective information on emerging telecommunications technologies and their impact on the nation's economy.