

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS STAFF REPORT**



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**TSA Ignores More Cost-Effective Screening Model**

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**Prepared for Chairman John L. Mica**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**112<sup>th</sup> Congress**

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## Key Findings

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1. *Taxpayers would save \$1 billion over five years if the Nation's top 35 airports operated as efficiently as SFO does under the SPP model.* 35 airports account for 75 percent of commercial passengers in the United States.<sup>1</sup> 34 of these airports operate under the federal model, while SFO operates under the SPP model. If federal screeners at each of these airports were able to process the same number of passengers that private screeners screen at SFO, then 7,601 screeners could be cut from the Federal workforce, resulting in at least \$1 billion in savings from salaries alone.
2. *SPP screeners are 65 percent more efficient than their federal counterparts.* Private screeners at SFO process 65 percent more passengers per screener than their Federal counterparts at LAX. If federal screeners at LAX operated as efficiently as private screeners at SFO, the LAX screener workforce could be reduced by 867 full time equivalent (FTEs) positions (see Appendix 2).<sup>2</sup>
3. *Taxpayers would save more than \$38.6 million a year if LAX joined the SPP (see Table 1).* A reduction of 867 FTEs at LAX would result in approximately \$33.3 million in savings from salary alone.<sup>3</sup> \$635,800 would be saved because the National Deployment Force would not need to be deployed to fill staffing gaps.<sup>4</sup> \$4.6 million would be saved in reduced training and recruitment costs due to lower attrition rates. Total savings would exceed \$38.6 million a year. This assessment did not take into account higher overtime and injury rates that are unique to the federal model because TSA officials refused to provide that information to Committee staff. Savings will increase once these factors are also considered.
4. *TSA concealed significant cost factors unique to the federal screening model.* Committee staff found that TSA dismissed significant cost factors unique to the all-federal model when conducting past cost comparisons of the SPP and federal models.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, TSA did not consider cost savings that would result from increased screener efficiencies or removing the need to deploy the NDF. In addition to these metrics, the Committee recommends that future cost comparisons also include an analysis of the rate of screener overtime charged due to poor scheduling, and costs paid out due to injury rates.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *FAA Aerospace Forecast: Fiscal Years 2011-2031*, at 26.

<sup>2</sup> This number is calculated by dividing the annual number of passengers screened at LAX by the annual number of passengers-per-screener at SFO, and subtracting that number from the 2010 total number of FTE screeners at LAX.

<sup>3</sup> Committee staff used the average base screener salary for private screeners at SFO, or \$38,480, as the base annual salary for screeners at both SFO and LAX.

<sup>4</sup> The National Deployment Force (NDF) is a team of mobile TSA screeners whose mission is to respond to emergencies at the Nation's airports due to heightened security or increased traffic. Increasingly, TSA has deployed the NDF to backfill staffing shortages at airports due to high attrition and poor screener allocation models. The NDF has never been deployed to a SPP airport.

<sup>5</sup> GAO: TSA Cost and Performance Study; GAO: TSA Revised Cost Comparison.

<sup>6</sup> Committee staff requested this information from TSA in order to include it in the report, however TSA officials refused the request.



5. ***TSA has hired 137,100 staff<sup>7</sup> since the agency's creation and spent more than \$2 billion on recruiting and training costs (see Appendix 3).***<sup>8</sup> Due to high attrition, TSA has spent so much time managing itself that it has been unable to focus necessary resources on oversight and regulation of U.S. transportation security, in general. The SPP allows TSA to function as its creators in Congress originally intended—as a government regulator.
6. ***Clear and substantial advantage existed to approve five airport applications denied by TSA.*** Interviews with each of the five denied airport authorities found that significant advantages would have resulted from SPP participation including cost-savings, greater flexibility and responsiveness of screening staff, and improved customer service.
7. ***TSA's SPP application and evaluation process is flawed.*** The SPP application requires only a simple, one-sentence response from the airport operator to provide rationale for applying to the program. TSA officials did not communicate with or seek additional information from any of the airport authorities that were denied participation (see Appendix 5).
8. ***TSA does not have clear criteria to determine if a "clear or substantial advantage" exists to approve SPP applications.*** TSA officials could not have had sufficient information to determine if advantage existed to allow airport participation in the SPP. TSA refused to release the metrics used to evaluate SPP applications and TSA officials claim that applications were denied based on the "discretion of the Administrator."<sup>9</sup>
9. ***There is evidence that TSA officials erroneously claimed no communication with union representatives about the SPP.*** On February 1, 2011, Chairman Mica requested that Administrator Pistole provide all communications between DHS and TSA with labor union organizations and their representatives related to the SPP (see Appendix 6). Administrator Pistole responded on February 28, 2011, that "there are no such communications" (see Appendix 7).<sup>10</sup> However, there is a public history of union meetings and communications with DHS and TSA officials regarding the program, including an in-person meeting between American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) representatives and DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, where AFGE urged "the SPP program and policies be reviewed by senior leaders."<sup>11</sup> TSA officials also noted in an internal presentation that impact on the TSO workforce is a "justifiable reason" to end or limit the SPP program, stating that "TSOs at potential SPP airports face uncertainty about their job status."<sup>12</sup>

**10. *TSA officials recommended abolishing the SPP.*** Although the SPP is mandated statutorily through ATSA, documents obtained by the Committee confirm that TSA officials

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<sup>7</sup> E-mail from Tomeika Blackwell, Legislative Affairs, TSA, to Rachel Weaver, T&I Comm. (March 23, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> TSA officials did not comply with requests from Committee staff to provide the cost of recruiting and training screeners. Information obtained by the Committee related to these costs is all publicly available, and does not provide a complete representation, therefore this estimate is conservative.

<sup>9</sup> Briefing with TSA SPP Program Office (March 22, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Letter from John S. Pistole, Administrator, TSA, to John L. Mica, Chairman, T&I Comm. (Feb. 28, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> AFL-CIO, *AFGE's Efforts Put SPP on Ice: TSA Ends Expansion of Airport Privatization Program*, The TSO Voice, Jan. 29, 2011 [hereinafter AFGE's Efforts Put SPP on Ice].

<sup>12</sup> TSA SPP Power Point.

recommended awarding new contracts at existing SPP airports for one year while the agency “resume(d) federalization efforts.”<sup>13</sup>

11. *Most of the rest of the world utilizes a SPP-like screening model at airports.* The United States is one of the only countries in the world, along with governments in the Middle East and Africa that operates as security operator, administrator, regulator, and auditor at airports (see Appendix 1). Most international governments contract the role of airport security “operator” to qualified private screening companies, allowing the government to focus on setting standards, performing oversight, and enforcing regulations. International stakeholders report that this private-federal model drives innovation, increases performance, and lowers costs.

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<sup>13</sup> *Id.*