



# Summer Is the Season, Sanity the Reason to Privatize the TSA

*Government's Security Theater Is Wasting More Than Just Our Time*

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Summer is known for family vacations, weekend getaways, and work outings. Last year, a survey found that 77 percent of Americans plan to take some sort of summer vacation. For the millions of Americans that fly to their destinations, summer also means dealing with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

Created by the Bush Administration in the wake of 9/11, the TSA is responsible for overseeing nearly all US airports and conducts both passenger and baggage screening. Despite enjoying over 60,000 employees and a budget of more than US\$8 billion, the TSA has failed to measurably improve airport security. Instead, it has wasted travelers' time, encouraged would-be flyers to instead drive on dangerous highways, and gained a lingering reputation as the government agency that harasses grandma at the airport. For these reasons, it is time to privatize the TSA.

If the TSA's purpose is to provide security and detect terrorist activity, it has massively failed, as Chris Edwards of the Cato Institute demonstrates. In recent report, Edwards finds that a 2007 *USA Today* investigation discovered that private screeners at San Francisco International Airport had better detection ability than federal screeners at LAX.

Likewise, a 2012 study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) comparing 16 private-screening airports with federal-screening airports on four performance measures found that federal screeners performed better on some measures and private screeners performed better on others. Essentially, the result was a wash. This result mirrors the TSA's own 2008 study comparing screening at private and federal airports and found performance to be similar. If investigators can't determine significant differences between private and government screening, then should airport security really be a responsibility of the state?

The 2001 law that created the TSA also allowed some airports to opt out of its services and contract with private firms for security. Originally, five airports embraced the private option; now there are 17, with San Francisco being the largest. Also, federal rules require private screeners be trained to the same standards as federal screeners. However, it is not enough to analyze 17 US airports and conclude full privatization is a remedy. Looking outside the United

States offers more clues to find the best way to conduct airport security. More than 80 percent of airports in Europe and Canada use private companies for both passenger and baggage screening.

Privatization enables the government to use precious resources for intelligence gathering, analysis, and investigation instead of airport security. It is a much better use of taxpayer funds, as airport security is one of the last lines of defense in the case of a terrorist attack.

Despite TSA's costs to government budgets, privacy, and traveling time, there is no empirical evidence that suggests the agency accomplishes its intended goals. In fact, there have been over 25,000 security breaches in the TSA's first decade alone.

It's time to be honest about the state of US airline security. The TSA's security theater undoubtedly dissuades some travelers from flying on airplanes and instead drive on more dangerous roads. Researchers at Cornell University have found that travelers switching from the skies to the roads has led to an increase of 242 driving deaths per month. The fact is that the TSA's over-the-top security policies are killing travelers by pushing them away from airports.

The TSA can not demonstrate any considerable difference between their security and that of private companies. One former TSA administrator reported, "There's no question the private sector can handle security." This summer, it's time to to reflect on the real costs of the TSA and the false benefits they claim to provide. More lawmakers and think tanks are pushing the need for TSA reform. Passengers should fasten their seat belts, because privatization is about to take off.