

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107104](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why GAO Did This Study

WMATA serves a critical function in the national capital region. Its rail and bus system connects residents and visitors to jobs, housing, and essential services. In recent years, WMATA's operations have come under scrutiny, raising the importance of WMATA's oversight.

The IIJA includes a provision for GAO to report on the implementation of reforms to WMATA's OIG and capital planning process. This report examines (1) how WMATA OIG's independence compares to key attributes of an independent OIG, and (2) the extent to which WMATA implemented the IIJA's requirement to develop performance outcome measures for WMATA's capital investments, among other objectives.

GAO reviewed WMATA documents and compared WMATA's OIG to attributes of an independent OIG identified by GAO based on the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and other information. GAO assessed WMATA's pilot program to measure capital investment outcomes against GAO's leading practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to WMATA, that (1) the Board develop procedures for IG removal, (2) the Board develop a policy to ensure the IG's direct communication with Congress, and (3) the WMATA General Manager adopt leading practices to assess its measurement of capital investment outcomes. WMATA neither agreed nor disagreed with GAO's recommendations, but identified actions it plans to take. GAO stands by its recommendations.

View [GAO-25-107104](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or vonaha@gao.gov.

November 2024

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Actions Needed to Safeguard Inspector General Independence and Evaluate Capital Investment Outcomes

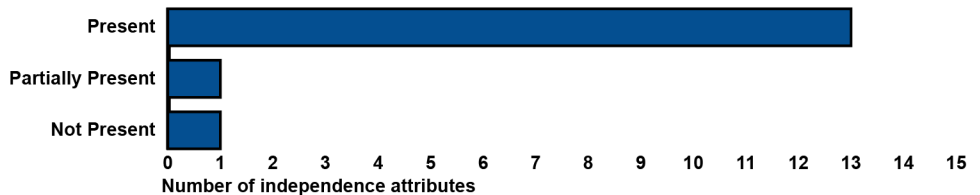
What GAO Found

GAO identified 15 key attributes that help ensure the independence of Offices of Inspectors General (OIG). Most (13) of these attributes were present at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) OIG, including the authority to audit and investigate, issue subpoenas, and develop the OIG's budget. In addition, WMATA has taken actions to carry out the reforms to WMATA's OIG contained in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), including delegating human resources and procurement authorities to the OIG.

Of the remaining two key attributes of OIG independence, one was not present at WMATA's OIG and one was partially present.

- Not present: WMATA's Board of Directors (Board) does not have procedures in place for the removal of an Inspector General (IG), such as advance notice to Congress of a planned removal. Without established removal procedures, an IG may fear termination in response to issuing critical reporting.
- Partially present: The OIG has limited ability to communicate with Congress because the Board has not established a policy that the IG may communicate with Congress at the IG's discretion. Former WMATA IGs and OIG officials told GAO the Board and management discouraged the IG from communicating with Congress both privately and in public settings, such as hearings. Board officials told GAO the Board has never prevented the IG from communicating with Congress. Without a policy specifying that the IG may communicate with Congress at the IG's discretion, the OIG will not have assurance that it can inform Congress and respond to Congress's needs.

Presence of GAO-Identified Attributes of Independence at WMATA's Office of the Inspector General



Source: GAO analysis of Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) information and interviews with current and former WMATA officials. | GAO-25-107104

The IIJA also contained provisions for WMATA to implement performance measures to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of major capital projects. In 2022, WMATA created a pilot program to measure capital investment outcomes. This program fully met two of five leading practices for the design of pilot programs. This program partially met or did not meet the three remaining leading practices related to 1) a data gathering strategy, 2) criteria to identify lessons learned and inform decisions about scalability, and 3) a data analysis plan to track program performance and evaluate final results. While WMATA is not required to follow these leading practices, adopting them could help WMATA assess whether the pilot program is achieving its objective of measuring the outcomes of capital investments.