Defense Primer: United States Transportation Command

United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM or TRANSCOM) is a Department of Defense (DOD) functional combatant command responsible for providing air, land, and sea transportation to meet national security needs. TRANSCOM’s assigned mission is to “conduct globally integrated mobility operations, lead the broader joint deployment and distribution enterprise, and provide enabling capabilities to project and sustain the Joint Force.”

It is the centerpiece of the Defense Transportation System, which comprises U.S. military, U.S. commercial, and foreign transportation resources.

Established in 1987, TRANSCOM is located at Scott Air Force Base (AFB), IL. Historically, the command has provided strategic mobility in support of several major contingency operations from Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm to Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. It has supported peacekeeping initiatives such as Operations Restore Hope (Somalia), Uphold Democracy (Haiti), and Support Hope (Rwanda). It has also aided humanitarian relief operations in response to natural disasters such as Hurricanes Dorian, Florence, and Michael.

TRANSCOM has a workforce of over 116,000 personnel, of which about 45% are in the Reserve Component. The command reports that on any given day it conducts more than 240 air missions, has 20 ships underway, and sends 1,500 ground shipments. TRANSCOM also manages over 555,000 personal property shipments each year associated with Permanent Change of Station, or PCS, moves as part of its steady-state operations (Figure 1). Additionally, as DOD’s single manager for global patient movement, the command provides aeromedical evacuation and in-transit care to wounded servicemembers. As of December 9, TRANSCOM reports transporting over 6,000 patients this year, including 71 with battle injuries.

TRANSCOM operates in over 85% of the world’s countries. To accomplish its missions, the command uses military assets; it also relies heavily on its commercial-sector partners. TRANSCOM’s commercial partnerships are reflected in its large volume of contracting activities. See Table 1 for TRANSCOM’s contracting estimates for FY2020.

Table 1. Estimated FY2020 USTRANSCOM Expenditures on Contracted Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>FY2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airlift Division</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$2.3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sealift Services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$877M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized Transportation &amp; Support</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology &amp; Related Services</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>$251M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USTRANSCOM.

Component Commands

TRANSCOM’s Transportation Component Commands (TCCs) fulfill roles in training, equipping, and resourcing the forces necessary to carry out TRANSCOM’s global missions. TRANSCOM is composed of three TCCs, one each from the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. A description of each follows.

Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC)

Military SDDC, headquartered at Scott AFB, is TRANSCOM’s Army component that is responsible for all defense surface transportation. SDDC connects “surface warfighting requirements through distribution network nodes to the point of need, responsively projecting power and delivering desired effects in support of the Combatant Commands [COCOMs] and the Total Joint Force.” SDDC is also involved in planning and executing the surface delivery of equipment and supplies to all deployed servicemembers.

Military Sealift Command (MSC)

MSC is TRANSCOM’s Navy component headquartered at Naval Station Norfolk, VA. MSC operates 126 civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, provide logistics support and strategic sealift, and perform specialized missions around the world. MSC is responsible for the ocean transportation of military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners. During contingencies, MSC also exercises operational command over the Maritime Administration’s (MARAD’s) Ready Reserve Force (See CRS Report R45725, Shipping Under

Figure 1. USTRANSCOM Shipping Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Contingency Operations</th>
<th>Steady-State Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Passenger</td>
<td>Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>90% 10%</td>
<td>10% 70%</td>
<td>90% 10%</td>
<td>40% 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea</td>
<td>55% 45%</td>
<td></td>
<td>95% 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>90% 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td>90% 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CRS analysis of USTRANSCOM data, December 2020.
forces.
early commercial sealift and intermodal capacity to support the
Secretary of Defense William
Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA).
CRAF
airlines
Air Mobility Command (AMC)
AMC, TRANSCOM’s Air Force component headquartered
Scott AFB, provides airlift and aerial refueling services
for all U.S. armed forces. AMC also provides rapid
transportation services in response to humanitarian crises
and natural disasters.

Major Subordinate Units
In addition to the TCCs, TRANSCOM has one subordinate
command and one joint directorate. The Joint Enabling
Capabilities Command, or JECC, is TRANSCOM’s
subordinate command that “provides mission-tailored
capability packages on short notice to assist Combatant
Commanders to plan, prepare, establish, and operate Joint
Force Headquarters in globally integrated operations.” The
Joint Reserve Component Directorate is a joint directorate
under TRANSCOM that provides trained reserve
component forces to support TRANSCOM’s mission. This
directorate includes the Joint Transportation Reserve Unit,
or JTRU, which augments TRANSCOM in providing air,
land, and sea transportation for DOD.

Commercial Assets
The Commander of TRANSCOM, with the approval of the
Secretary of Defense, has the authority to develop and
maintain contractual relationships between DOD and the
commercial transportation industry to cultivate concepts,
requirements, and procedures that provide responsive
strategic mobility capabilities. DOD airlift, sealift, and
surface transportation programs involving the commercial
transportation industry include the following selected
eamples.

Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF). The CRAF “is a
cooperative, voluntary program involving the [Department
of Transportation] DOT, DOD and the U.S. civil air carrier
industry in a partnership to augment DOD aircraft
capability during a national defense related crisis.” The
program derives its authority from the Defense Production
Act of 1950, but was instituted by Presidential Executive
Order 10219 in February 1951. DOD and DOT work
 collaboratively to manage the CRAF program to meet DOD
airlift requirements in emergencies when the need for airlift
exceeds the capability of the military’s aircraft fleet. All
CRAF aircraft must be U.S.-registered carriers that are fully
certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. To
provide incentives for civil carriers, the participating
airlines are given preference in carrying commercial
peacetime cargo and passenger traffic for DOD. As of
October 2020, 26 carriers and 451 aircraft are enrolled in
CRAF (figures updated by DOD on a quarterly basis).

Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA).
Secretary of Defense William Cohen approved creation of
the VISA program on January 30, 1997. Similar to CRAF,
VISA is a partnership between MARAD and the U.S.
maritime industry to provide DOD with assured access to
commercial sealift and intermodal capacity to support the
emergency deployment and sustainment of U.S. military
forces. Established under DOT in 1981, MARAD has
responsibility in areas involving ships and shipping,
shipbuilding, port operations, vessel operations, national
security, environment, and safety. Through the VISA
program, DOD develops transportation solutions in
anticipation of its wartime requirements.

Defense Freight Transportation Service (DFTS). DFTS,
designed for high-volume, repetitive shipments between
fixed locations, is a collaboration between TRANSCOM,
Management Agency. Under DFTS, “commercial third
party firm[s] … manage and coordinate transportation” of
DOD freight shipments using all forms of surface
transportation. TRANSCOM is responsible for program
execution.

Considerations for Congress

Fuel price volatility. TRANSCOM’s operations and
annual budget are affected by even small changes in fuel
prices, which are subject to multiple factors such as
supply and demand, value of the dollar, and geopolitical
risks and events (see CRS In Focus IF11202, Oil Price
Volatility and the Department of Defense, by Heather L.
Greenley). TRANSCOM uses a Defense Working Capital
Fund to mitigate price volatility, however the fund serves multiple purposes (see CRS In Focus
IF11233, Defense Primer: Defense Working Capital
Funds, by G. James Herrera).

Sealift Fleet Readiness. In September 2019,
TRANSCOM conducted the largest no-notice sealift
readiness exercise in the command’s history. The
exercise activated 61 MSC and MARAD sealift vessels
and “required substantial contributions from maritime
labor and the sealift industry.” TRANSCOM reported
that 39 of the 61 ships activated (~64%) were ready for
tasking—a rate which they determined could delay the
buildup of combat power in a theater of operations.
TRANSCOM concluded the exercise “reinforced the
need for recapitalization, [and] appropriate levels of
resourcing to correct material deficiencies.” Congress
may wish to further explore the state of sealift fleet
readiness in terms of capabilities and resourcing.

Relevant Statutes
Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 157 – Transportation
Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 961 – Civil Reserve Air Fleet
Title 10, U.S. Code, §2218 – National Defense Sealift Fund

Other Resources
DOD Instruction 5158.06, JDDE Planning and Operations
Defense Transportation Regulations 4500.9-R (Parts 1–VII)
Joint Publication 4-01, The Defense Transportation System

Tyler F. Hacker, Analyst in Defense Logistics
G. James Herrera, Analyst in U.S. Defense Readiness and
Infrastructure

https://crsreports.congress.gov

IF11479
Disclaimer
This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS’s institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.