

DHS Should Do More to Reduce Travel Reservation Costs





HIGHLIGHTS

DHS Should Do More to Reduce Travel Reservation Costs

April 24, 2015

Why We Did This

The Senate Appropriations Committee directed the Office of Inspector General to examine offline travel reservations because of concerns over excessive costs, and to identify areas of potential savings. We also determined whether the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reduced the costs of offline reservations in fiscal year 2014.

What We Recommend

We made five recommendations to DHS to update its travel policy, monitor offline travel reservations, maximize use of the online system, assess the cost-effectiveness of the current travel service, and submit requests for exceptions to using the current travel service.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

What We Found

DHS does not require components to track justifications for making travel reservations offline, that is, by contacting an agent by telephone. Therefore, it is difficult to identify whether offline travel fees are excessive. Making reservations by telephone costs \$23 to \$27 more per transaction than making a reservation online through the web-based system. The Department is also not effectively managing components' use of the online system. As a result, the Department may be missing opportunities to reduce offline travel reservation fees and identify cost savings. Finally, although the Senate Appropriations Committee expected DHS to reduce its offline reservation costs in fiscal year 2014, data from DHS showed that, overall, offline costs increased.

DHS Response

DHS reported it is committed to more efficient and effective cost controls over the use of its travel systems and accordingly concurred with the five recommendations. DHS has already begun implementing corrective actions.



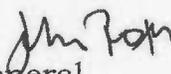
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Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

April 24, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Chip Fulghum
Acting Under Secretary for Management
Department of Homeland Security

FROM: John Roth 
Inspector General

SUBJECT: *DHS Should Do More to Reduce Travel Reservation
Costs*

Attached for your action is our final report, *DHS Should Do More to Reduce Travel Reservation Costs*. We incorporated the formal comments provided by your office.

The report contains five recommendations aimed at improving the Department's use of its web-based travel systems. Your office concurred with all of the recommendations. Recommendations 3 and 5 are unresolved and open. As prescribed by the *Department of Homeland Security Directive 077-01, Follow-Up and Resolutions for Office of Inspector General Report Recommendations*, within 90 days of the date of this memorandum, please provide our office with a written response that includes your (1) agreement or disagreement, (2) corrective action plan, and (3) target completion date for each recommendation. Also, please include responsible parties and any other supporting documentation necessary to inform us about the current status of the recommendation.

Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider recommendations 1, 2, and 4 resolved and open. Once your office has fully implemented the recommendations, please submit a formal closeout letter to us within 30 days so that we may close the recommendation. The letter should be accompanied by evidence of completion of agreed-upon corrective actions.

Consistent with our responsibility under the Inspector General Act, we will provide copies of our report to appropriate congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

You may call me with any questions at (202) 254-4100, or your staff may contact Mark Bell, Assistant Inspector General for Audits at (202) 254-4100. You can also send your response to OIGAuditsFollowup@oig.dhs.gov.



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Background

In 2003, the General Services Administration (GSA) launched the E-Gov Travel Service (ETS), a government-wide, web-based, travel management service managed by GSA to eliminate disparate, paper-driven systems; increase use of the web-based system; and reduce costs associated with planning travel.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Chief Financial Officer (CFO) managed the ETS implementation. The CFO provides overarching guidance and support across the Department and acts as a liaison among components, GSA, and the ETS vendor who operates the web-based travel system. DHS implemented ETS in 2008 and began migrating to the second generation, ETS2, in 2013.

The Department and its components contract with a Travel Management Center (TMC) to provide travel management services, including making transportation, hotel, and car rental reservations. According to the *DHS Financial Management Policy Manual* (travel policy), all travel reservations must go through the TMC. DHS travelers can book travel through the TMC online through the web-based travel system or offline by directly contacting a TMC travel agent by telephone. According to DHS' travel policy, "employees must use the official online travel systems for their travel reservations in all cases, when it is available, unless it is impractical to make advance reservations, or the travel is to an outside the contiguous United States location not adequately served by the online system."

According to the travel policy, making travel reservations online offers substantial cost savings. As shown in table 1, booking domestic travel by contacting an agent at the TMC incurs an offline fee \$23 to \$27 more than booking online through the web-based system.

Table 1: Domestic Travel Reservation Fees for ETS and ETS2

Service Charge Type	FY 2013 (ETS)	FY 2014 (ETS and ETS2)*
Online Reservation Fee	\$9	\$7 – \$10
Offline Reservation Fee	\$34	\$30 – \$37
Difference (Percent Increase)	\$25 (278%)	\$23 – \$27 (270% – 329%)

* FY 2014 includes ETS and ETS2 fees due to components migrating from ETS to ETS2.

Source: GSA.

Travelers may also incur additional offline fees each time they contact the TMC to modify existing reservations. According to the DHS CFO, in fiscal year (FY) 2014, the Department spent \$5 million in travel reservation fees, of which \$4.3 million was spent making reservations offline. Five DHS components

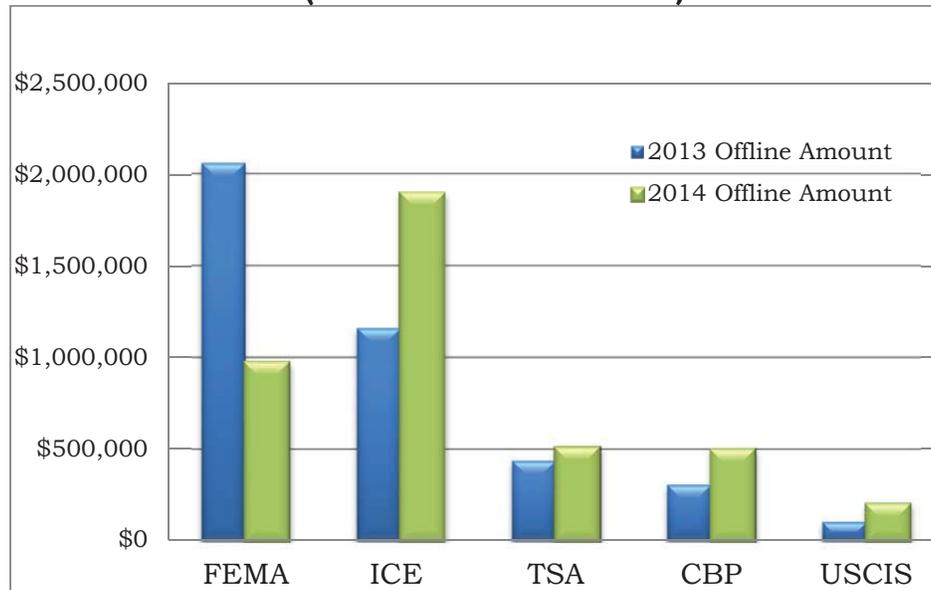


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comprise 95 percent of the Department's FY 2014 reservation fees. Figure 1 shows FY 2013 and FY 2014 offline reservation fees for these top five components. See appendix B for more detail on DHS' FY 2013 and FY 2014 offline travel reservation fees and transactions.

Figure 1: Top Five DHS Components Using Offline Reservation Fees (FY 2013 and FY 2014)



Source: Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of DHS data.

Results of Audit

The Department does not require components to track justifications for making travel reservations offline. Therefore, components could not provide such justifications to determine whether offline costs were excessive. DHS also does not effectively manage the components' use of ETS. As a result, the Department may be missing opportunities to reduce offline travel reservation fees and identify cost savings. Additionally, although the Senate Appropriations Committee expected the Department to reduce its offline travel costs, the Department's FY 2014 data showed that, overall, offline costs increased.

DHS Did Not Require Justification for Making Reservations Offline

Components could not provide justifications to determine whether offline reservation costs were excessive. The Department's travel policy requires employees to use the online system to book travel reservations except in limited circumstances that allow travelers to book offline by contacting the TMC. The Department's travel policy, however, does not require travelers to document why they did not book online nor does it require components to track other useful transactional data. Specifically, components could not provide (1) the number of reservations made offline, (2) total offline fees, or (3) number of



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offline fees charged per trip. Without this information, the Department cannot ensure offline fees are warranted and in compliance with its travel policy.

DHS Did Not Effectively Manage Components' Use of the Online System

DHS did not set future online reservation goals that would achieve cost savings. According to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), components are able to realize “significant benefits” once they achieve a 70 percent or greater online booking rate.¹ However, for FY 2015, DHS set each component’s online reservation goal below 70 percent, with one component’s goal at 11 percent. Table 2 shows the components’ FY 2015 goals.

Table 2: DHS’ FY 2015 Online Reservation Goals

DHS Component	FY 2015
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	68%
Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A)/Office of Operations Coordination and Planning (OPS)	59%
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)	59%
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)	57%
Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO)	54%
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC)	53%
Headquarters (HQ)	52%
Office of Health Affairs (OHA)	49%
Transportation Security Administration (TSA)	49%
Science and Technology Directorate (S&T)	42%
National Programs and Protection Directorate (NPPD)	36%
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	11%

Source: DHS CFO.

In addition to setting goals below the recommended 70 percent, DHS did not validate the components’ estimates for the percentage of reservations made offline. Instead, to establish the goals for percentage of reservations that should be made online in FY 2015, a program official explained the Department accepted the component-provided offline estimates and then added an allowance to each one. DHS did not validate the information provided by the components or explain the rationale for applying the allowance. As a result, DHS may not achieve cost savings intended with the implementation of ETS.

DHS did not ensure that ETS is the best value and the most cost-effective system for all components. GSA may grant an exception to using ETS when:

¹ 41 C.F.R. § 301-73.101 Note 2
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- a business case analysis proves an alternative travel management service is in the best interest of the government;
- the agency has security, secrecy, or protection of information issues that ETS contractors cannot mitigate;
- the agency lacks the technology to access ETS; or
- the agency has critical and unique technology or business requirements that ETS contractors cannot accommodate or cannot accommodate at an acceptable and reasonable price.²

As a condition of receiving an exception, the agency must agree to conduct annual business case reviews of its travel management system.

FEMA implemented ETS even though, in FY 2014, its travelers made 76 percent of their reservations offline. In August 2014, the FEMA CFO acknowledged that ETS does not meet its mission requirements. However, the Department did not recommend FEMA conduct a business case analysis to ensure that use of ETS is in the best interest of the government.

Although the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Secret Service use a system other than ETS, DHS did not require either component to submit a formal request to GSA for an exception. The Secret Service prepared a one-time business case analysis in 2008, but the Department did not submit the required information to GSA. DHS also did not require the Coast Guard to complete the exception process.

The Department may be missing opportunities to reduce offline travel fees and identify cost savings. In FY 2014, the Department's offline fees made up 86 percent of total reservation costs. The purpose of implementing a government-wide online reservation system is to minimize the total cost per transaction and realize cost savings. However, the lack of useful data and adequate oversight hinders the Department's ability to monitor components' performance and make cost-effective management decisions.

Finally, the Department did not meet the Senate Appropriations Committee expectations to significantly reduce offline travel reservations in FY 2014. Although two components significantly reduced the number of offline transactions, the Department's overall costs increased from the previous fiscal year. The remaining components made 15,000 more offline transactions totaling approximately \$1.1 million. See appendix B for a breakdown of each component's total number of offline reservations.

² 41 CFR § 301-73.104
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Recommendations

We recommend that the Chief Financial Officer, Department of Homeland Security:

Recommendation #1: Update the Department's travel policy to require that travelers provide justifications for contacting the Travel Management Center directly instead of making an online reservation.

Recommendation #2: Require components to monitor travelers' use of offline travel reservations to ensure travelers comply with DHS' travel policy.

Recommendation #3: Develop and implement an oversight plan and procedures to monitor compliance with travel policies and initiatives and to maximize the use of ETS.

Recommendation #4: Require FEMA to assess whether ETS is the most practical, cost-effective way for its employees to make travel reservations.

Recommendation #5: Require components that have not implemented ETS to submit an exception request and annual business case reviews to GSA in compliance with the CFR.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

DHS concurred with all of the recommendations. In its comments, DHS, noted that FY 2013–14 period saw a significant change in the DHS online travel environment due to ending of the one generation of ETS and stand-up of the next generation ETS2. The change in travel management services was marked by substantially increased 2014 offline reservation fees as the older contract drew to a close and DHS had to agree to a more expensive bridge during the transition to ETS2. DHS reported as of April 1, 2015, all Components have transitioned to ETS2. DHS asserts the department is committed to working toward more efficient and effective cost controls over this aspect of its travel function.

We have included a copy of the management comments in their entirety in appendix A. DHS also provided technical comments to our report. We made minor changes to incorporate these comments, as appropriate.

Recommendation #1: Concur. The DHS CFO updated the DHS Travel Policy by issuing an April 1, 2015, memorandum that requires travelers provide justification for contacting the Travel Management Center directly. The updated policy requires that all direct booking justifications to be documented for review.



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OIG Analysis: DHS' memorandum provides an interim and immediate solution to the recommendation. It requires components to update their internal policies and procedures to document justifications for offline reservations. It does not note whether DHS will incorporate this into its *Financial Management Policy Manual*. This recommendation is resolved but will remain open until DHS fully incorporates this into the Department's *Financial Management Policy Manual* and provides evidence that components developed procedures for documenting offline reservation justifications.

Response to Recommendation #2: Concur. The April 1, 2015, DHS CFO Memorandum referenced in recommendation 1 requires that DHS Components develop and implement internal policies and procedures for monitoring their travelers' use of offline travel reservations in accordance with the updated DHS-wide travel policy. It also requires the components to provide a notice of completion to DHS CFO within 60 days of the memo.

OIG Analysis: The DHS CFO memo requires components to develop internal policies and procedures documenting the justification of making offline reservations and a system of monitoring the use of offline reservations. This recommendation is resolved but will remain open until DHS provides evidence that all DHS components have implemented procedures to monitor the use of offline travel reservations.

Response to Recommendation #3: Concur. The DHS CFO's Office of Risk Management and Assurance will work with each component to develop appropriate oversight and monitoring activities designed to determine compliance with the updated DHS-wide travel reservation policy. The estimated completion date is September 30, 2015.

OIG Analysis: Although DHS' comments are responsive to this recommendation, they do not provide sufficient details the Department will take to address the recommendation. This recommendation will remain open and unresolved until DHS CFO provides a more detailed corrective action plan for addressing this recommendation.

Response to Recommendation #4: Concur. FEMA CFO staff have already completed a gap analysis of the system, identified gaps, and funded software enhancements to support their mission travel needs. By mid-April 2015, FEMA expects to confirm the delivery date of their surge blanket travel enhancement. Upon delivery of these enhancements, ETS2 will meet the majority of FEMA's mission travel requirements. DHS CFO will continue to monitor FEMA's progress in implementing these enhancements. The estimated completion date is June 30, 2015.



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OIG Analysis: DHS' planned corrective actions are responsive to the recommendation. This recommendation will remain resolved and open until DHS provides evidence that FEMA has fully implemented ETS2.

Response to Recommendation #5: Concur. The DHS CFO's eGov travel team is scheduling meetings for FY 2015 Quarter 3 with the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Coast Guard to identify how best to implement this recommendation. If components are unable to begin their planning activities to transition to ETS2 in the current fiscal year, OCFO will work with them to obtain their business case for review and submission to the General Services Administration. The estimated completion date is September 30, 2015.

OIG Analysis: Although DHS comments are responsive, the Department did not provide sufficient detail on how it plans to address the recommendation. This recommendation will remain unresolved and open until DHS provides a more detailed corrective action plan for addressing this recommendation.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit between June 2014 and January 2015 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives.

The Senate Appropriations Committee directed the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to examine offline travel reservations because of concerns over excessive costs. The committee also expected DHS to significantly reduce the number of offline travel reservations in FY 2014. Therefore, we conducted the audit to determine whether the Department's offline travel reservation costs were excessive and, if so, identify areas of potential savings. We also determined whether the Department reduced costs associated with offline reservations in FY 2014.

To achieve our audit objectives, we interviewed personnel from the DHS Office of the Chief Financial Officer, GSA, Coast Guard, Secret Service, FEMA, ICE, TSA, CBP, USCIS, and NPPD. We reviewed Federal, departmental, and component travel policies and procedures. We obtained and reviewed DHS' *Financial Management Strategic Plan for FYs 2014–2016*, and the CFO's *Financial Management Health Assessment* that reports component targets for online travel reservations.



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We judgmentally selected eight components for field work and testing: FEMA, ICE, TSA, CBP, USCIS, NPPD, Secret Service, and Coast Guard. We selected these components based on total fees incurred, the highest total dollar amounts in offline ticketing fees, and unique requirements due to component mission. We obtained and reviewed travel reservation data for FYs 2011 through 2014 from the selected components. We could not verify the reliability of DHS or component travel reservation data because we could not reconcile component provided information to CFO data. Additionally, some components could not provide transactional level data due to transition to ETS2, which occurred during our audit. Given these limitations, we determined that the CFO's reported offline travel fees are of undetermined reliability.

Office of Audits major contributors to this report are: Donald Bumgardner, Audit Director; Christine Haynes, Audit Manager; Inez Jordan, Audit Manager; Apostolos Exarchos, Program Analyst; David Lu, Program Analyst; Lindsey Koch, Auditor; Marisa Coccaro, Program Analyst; Corneliu Buzesan, Program Analyst; Andre Marseille, Program Analyst; Kelly Herberger, Communications Analyst; and LaTrina McCowin and Brad Mosher, Independent Referencers.



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Appendix A Management Comments to the Draft Report

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

April 6, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: John Roth
Inspector General

FROM: Jim H. Crumpacker, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office 

SUBJECT: OIG Draft Report: "DHS Should Do More to Reduce Travel
Reservation Costs" (Project No. 14-123-AUD-DHS)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

As the OIG acknowledges, FY 2013-2014 period saw a significant change in the DHS online travel environment due to ending of the E-Gov Travel Service (ETS)/Hewlett-Packard (HP) FedTraveler travel management service (TMS) and stand-up of the next generation ETS2/Concur TMS. The change in TMS was marked by substantially increased 2014 offline reservation fees under HP FedTraveler, as that contract was drawing to a close and DHS had to agree to a more expensive bridge contract so that its travel function could continue during implementation and transition to ETS2/Concur.

For example, self-service (online) domestic or international air or rail ticket fees of about \$9 in 2013 rose to approximately \$12 in FY 2014. The same tickets reserved offline for about \$34 in FY 2013, increased to \$49 in FY 2014. Conversely, the same ticket fees for those Components that were able to switch to ETS2/Concur in 2014 were \$7.30 and \$30.49 for online and offline services, respectively.

As of April 1, 2015, all DHS Components have completed transitioning off of FedTraveler and are achieving savings with the new, lower cost ETS/Concur system. In addition, the number of offline transactions dropped 25 percent from 2013 to 2014. Ticket reservation fee increases notwithstanding, the increase in actual offline fee expenditures in FY 2013 was only \$63,173, just one percent. Clearly these facts demonstrate DHS's commitment to working toward more efficient and effective cost controls over this aspect of its travel function.



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The draft report contained five recommendations with which the Department concurs. The DHS Chief Financial Officer (CFO) has already fully implemented Recommendations 1 and 2, and requests that OIG consider these resolved and closed. Specifically, OIG recommended that the DHS CFO:

Recommendation 1: Update the Department's travel policy to require that travelers provide justifications for contacting the Travel Management Center directly instead of making an online reservation.

Response: Concur. The DHS CFO has updated the DHS Travel Policy, found in the CFO's Financial Management Policy Manual (FMPM) by memorandum (dated April 1, 2015), which requires that travelers provide justification for contacting the Travel Management Center (TMC) directly (i.e., offline) instead of making an online reservation.

DHS policy already establishes certain conditions that might automatically justify direct booking through the TMC. However, the updated policy requires that all direct booking justifications to be documented for review. A copy of the CFO's memorandum has been provided to OIG under separate cover. The DHS CFO requests that OIG consider this recommendation resolved and closed.

Recommendation 2: Require components to monitor travelers' use of offline travel reservations to ensure travelers comply with DHS' travel policy.

Response: Concur. The CFO Memorandum referenced above requires that DHS Components develop and implement internal policies and procedures for monitoring their travelers' use of offline travel reservations in accordance with the updated DHS-wide travel policy. The DHS CFO requests that OIG consider this recommendation resolved and closed.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement an oversight plan and procedures to monitor compliance with travel policies and initiatives and to maximize the use of ETS.

Response: Concur. The DHS CFO's Office of Risk Management and Assurance will work with each Component to develop appropriate oversight and monitoring activities designed to determine compliance with the updated DHS-wide travel reservation policy. Estimated Completion Date (ECD): September 30, 2015.

Recommendation 4: Require FEMA to assess whether ETS is the most practical, cost-effective way for its employees to make travel reservations.

Response: Concur. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) CFO staff have already completed a gap analysis of the system, identified gaps, and funded software

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enhancements that will support their mission travel needs. By mid-April 2015, FEMA expects to confirm the delivery date of their surge blanket travel enhancement. Upon delivery of these enhancements, ETS-2 will meet the majority of FEMA's mission travel requirements. DHS CFO will continue to monitor FEMA's progress in implementing these enhancements. ECD: June 30, 2015.

Recommendation 5: Require components that have not implemented ETS to submit an exception request and annual business case reviews to GSA in compliance with the CFR.

Response: Concur. The DHS CFO's eGov travel team is scheduling meetings for FY 2015 Quarter 3 with the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Coast Guard to identify how best to implement this recommendation. If components are unable to begin their planning activities to transition to ETS2 in the current fiscal year, OCFO will work with them to obtain their business case for review and submission to the General Services Administration. ECD: September 30, 2015.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.



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Appendix B

DHS FY 2013 and FY 2014 Offline Travel Reservation Fees and Transactions

DHS FY 2013 and FY 2014 Offline Reservation Fees

Component	2013 Offline Amount	2014 Offline Amount	Percentage Difference
FEMA	\$2,063,362	\$977,311	-53%
ICE	\$1,163,960	\$1,898,942	63%
TSA	\$440,893	\$511,785	16%
CBP	\$309,899	\$502,290	62%
USCIS	\$108,099	\$204,572	89%
NPPD/USVISIT	\$61,410	\$95,269	55%
FLETC / I&A / OPS	\$40,551	\$19,462	-52%
S&T	\$26,863	\$45,319	69%
HQ	\$19,983	\$35,376	77%
DNDO	\$10,163	\$11,749	16%
OHA	\$3,392	\$9,673	185%
Total	\$4,248,575	\$4,311,748	1%

Note: According to FEMA officials, the majority of its travel is for disaster deployments, which are episodic and can change dramatically from year to year.

Source: DHS CFO.

Number of DHS FY 2013 and FY 2014 Offline Reservation Transactions

Component	2013 Offline Transactions	2014 Offline Transactions	Percentage Difference
FEMA	61,338	16,246	-74%
ICE	33,666	42,747	27%
TSA	12,837	12,709	-1%
CBP	9,023	12,299	36%
USCIS	3,150	4,866	54%
NPPD/USVISIT	1,788	2,224	24%
FLETC / I&A / OPS	1,185	315	-73%
S&T	780	1,075	38%
HQ	578	834	44%
DNDO	296	337	14%
OHA	99	224	126%
Total	124,740	93,876	-25%

Note: According to FEMA officials, the majority of its travel is for disaster deployments, which are episodic and can change dramatically from year to year.

Source: DHS CFO.



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