



Updated December 23, 2020

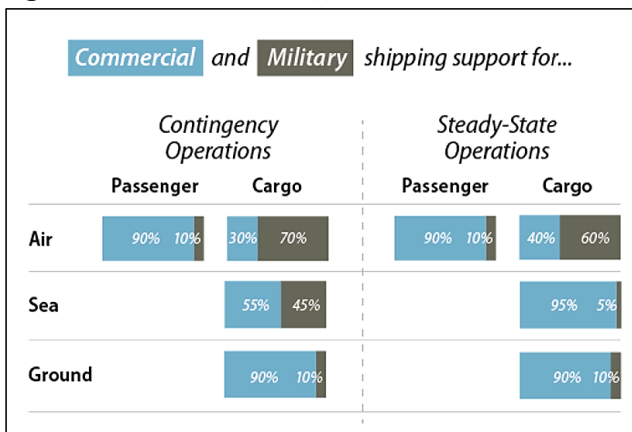
# Defense Primer: United States Transportation Command

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.

Figure 1. USTRANSCOM Shipping Providers



Source: CRS analysis of USTRANSCOM data, December 2020.

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

Division	Programs	FY2020
Airlift Division	10	\$2.3B
Sealift Services	6	\$877M
Specialized Transportation & Support	15	\$2.5B
Information Technology & Related Services	60	\$251M

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*

*the Jones Act: Legislative and Regulatory Background*, by John Frittelli).

### Air Mobility Command (AMC)

AMC, TRANSCOM's Air Force component headquartered at 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 examples.

**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, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the Defense Contract 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 I–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

## 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.