



February 4, 2009

MITZI R. BETMAN
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

SUBJECT: Final Audit Report – Area Mail Processing Communications
(Report Number EN-AR-09-001)

This report presents the results of our audit of Area Mail Processing (AMP)¹ Communications (Project Number 08XG025EN000). Our objectives were to analyze AMP communications issues noted during prior audits and assess management's proposed changes to the *AMP Communications Plan*. Our audit focused on communication with stakeholders and the impact of stakeholder interest on the AMP process and consolidation efforts. This self-initiated audit addresses strategic and operational risks. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Conclusion

The Postal Service enhanced the AMP communications process regarding potential consolidations and closures. In addition, management's actions generally addressed prior audit findings and recommendations associated with stakeholder communications. However, our review of the *AMP Communications Plan* indicates that enhanced employee notification and input opportunities remain. Employee notification of the public meeting and an increase in avenues for stakeholder input using traditional and web-based methods could mitigate some stakeholder resistance and decrease possible delays or cancellation of AMP consolidations and associated cost savings.

Improved AMP Communications Process

Postal Service actions generally addressed prior audit findings and recommendations regarding AMP stakeholder communications. Management actions include a series of revisions of AMP communications guidelines made between April 1995 and March 2008 that increased message consistency, enhanced the public input process (PIP), and expanded the use of web pages to disseminate information. As a result, officials improved AMP transparency by providing frequent, consistent messaging to stakeholder groups. See [Appendix B](#) for our detailed analysis of this topic.

¹ The consolidation of all originating and/or destinating distribution operations from one or more postal facilities into other automated processing facilities for the purpose of improving operational efficiency and/or service.

Opportunities Remain to Enhance Area Mail Processing Communications

Employees, unions, and other stakeholders have resisted AMP consolidation efforts in the past. Our review of the *AMP Communications Plan* indicates enhanced employee notification and input opportunities exist. For example, after an initial service talk notifying employees of an AMP feasibility study, the *AMP Communications Plan* does not provide opportunity for employee input until the public meeting, although other mechanisms are often used at local discretion. Limited communication can result in employee anxiety about the unknown and resistance to the AMPs; delays or cancellation of network streamlining initiatives; and missed opportunities for savings. See [Appendix B](#) for our detailed analysis of this topic.

We recommend the Vice President, Corporate Communications:

1. Increase communication with employees during the Area Mail Processing (AMP) process by including a mechanism in the *AMP Communications Plan* to notify employees of the public meeting and include “employee-only” input opportunities following initial notification of the AMP feasibility study and preceding the public meeting.

Web-Based Stakeholder Communications

The Postal Service’s web-based AMP communications are limited to web pages for information dissemination and do not provide opportunity for stakeholder input. According to management, maintaining and updating even simple web pages can be costly and time-consuming, as would the incorporation of other web-based initiatives to facilitate stakeholder input. Forestalling the use of more advanced web-based communication options might result in missed opportunities for stakeholder input and continued resistance to AMPs. See [Appendix B](#) for our detailed analysis of this topic.

We recommend the Vice President, Corporate Communications:

2. Broaden the use of web-based methods for disseminating Area Mail Processing details to stakeholders — especially employees — and provide additional avenues for input.

Management’s Comments

Management generally agreed with recommendation 1, to increase communication with employees during the AMP process, and took action during our audit in response to the recommendation. Management updated the *AMP Communications Plan* to notify employees of the mechanism for submitting input at the initiation of the AMP feasibility study. In addition, management added an employee service talk and Newsbreak to the public meeting notifications to enhance communication with employees at the public meeting. Management stated they did not agree that employees’ first opportunity for

input would be at the public meeting and explained that employees have the same opportunities as the general public to submit comments to the district office. Management also stated that the audit provided no empirical data to support its assumption regarding employee anxiety levels at the time an AMP study is announced. They stated that the audit incorrectly concluded, based on opinions expressed at public meetings, that the same level of concern exists before and after AMP study results are released.

Management did not agree with recommendation 2, to broaden web-based communication alternatives, including employee input mechanisms. Management expressed reservations regarding whether blogs and social media would provide useful input and described actions currently under way to increase information on existing AMP websites, including a summary of public comments received. See [Appendix H](#) for management's comments, in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

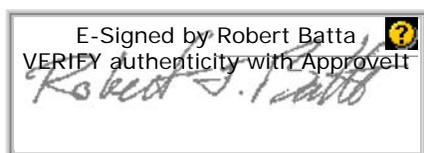
The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) considers management's actions responsive to recommendation 1 and will close this significant recommendation. Management's updates to the *AMP Communications Plan* will increase employee notifications of input opportunities for the AMP and may increase the perceived transparency of the process to employees.

In the response to recommendation 1, management also expressed concerns about statements and conclusions made in the audit finding on employee input opportunities and employee anxiety levels.

- Employee input – our statement in the report addressed “employee-only” input opportunities. However, management's comments address opportunities to provide input as a member of the general public. As stated in the report, we believe that increased “employee-only” input opportunities may help reduce employee resistance to the AMP process, without moving them into a public process.
- Anxiety level – our audit did not obtain empirical data such as psychological tests to determine employee anxiety levels during the AMP process. However, research indicates that common causes of stress and anxiety are physical and environmental changes related to job or work. Uncertainty also contributes to stress and anxiety. Based on the common causes of stress, available information about the AMP communication process, and our observations of employees at the public meetings, we believe additional communication opportunities for employees may help reduce their stress and anxiety levels, and thereby reduce their resistance to proposed AMPs.

The OIG considers management's comments on recommendation 2 nonresponsive. Postal Service officials have increased the use of the Internet for disseminating AMP information. The intent of the recommendation was to explore mechanisms for two-way dialogue between stakeholders and the Postal Service by increasing channels of input using web-based initiatives. Other agencies are currently using this technology, and as multidirectional web-based social media evolve, this strategy may prove useful to the Postal Service. We still consider the recommendation to be worthwhile, but since we did not designate it as significant, we will not pursue it through the resolution process.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Michael A. Magalski, Director, Network Optimization, or me at (703) 248-2100.



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APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

A decline in First-Class Mail® volume,² increased competition for traditional mail products from the private sector, increased automation and mail processing by mailers, and shifts in population demographics have resulted in excess capacity in the Postal Service's mail processing infrastructure. These factors, coupled with an aging processing infrastructure and network redundancies, make operating efficiently difficult. The Postal Service has recognized the need for a comprehensive redesign of its distribution and transportation network.

In 2003, the President's Commission on the Postal Service (the Commission) found the Postal Service had more facilities than it needed and did not use many of them efficiently. The Commission said these inefficient operations and an antiquated network cost the Postal Service billions of dollars in unnecessary expenses. The Commission also noted the Postal Service faced political resistance to closing or consolidating postal facilities and restrictive statutory requirements.

The Postal Service's *Strategic Transformation Plan, 2006-2010* articulated an initiative to improve its processing and transportation network.³ The charter of the initiative was to create a flexible logistics network that reduces both Postal Service and customer costs, increases operational effectiveness, and improves consistency of service.

On December 20, 2006, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (Postal Act of 2006)⁴ was signed into law, encouraging the Postal Service to continue to streamline its networks. In June 2008, the Postal Service submitted its Network Plan to Congress, as required by the Act,⁵ for rationalizing its mail processing and transportation networks.

Among the strategies described in the Network Plan is an updated method for communicating AMP initiatives to stakeholders. This process has been refined over 3 decades, as mail processing has evolved from a manual and mechanized process to a largely automated process.

AMP initiatives can result in a high level of local, and even national, interest among employees, customers, government officials, and the media. In response, the Postal Service developed the *AMP Communications Plan* (September 2005) to enhance the AMP stakeholder communications process, address community concerns, and provide more effective outreach. The *AMP Communications Plan* complements

² In 2007, First-Class Mail® volume decreased 1.8 percent compared with 2006. The volume decline continued a downward trend starting in 2002. Between 2002 and 2007, total First-Class Mail volume declined 6 percent, with a decrease of 19 percent in single-piece mail.

³ In recent years, the Postal Service has also referred to its network redesign by a series of names: Network Integration and Alignment, Evolutionary Network Development, Network Rationalization, and Network Optimization.

⁴ Public Law 109-435, dated December 2006.

⁵ Section 302, Network Plan, dated June 2008.

Handbook PO-408, *Area Mail Processing (AMP) Guidelines*, and has been updated several times. The Postal Service most recently revised and reissued both documents in early 2008. See [Appendix C](#) for details on updates and revisions to the *AMP Communications Plan*.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2008⁶ reiterates findings from two Government Accountability Office (GAO) products.⁷ In the act, Congress directs the GAO to evaluate the revised *AMP Communications Plan* to determine whether the Postal Service has implemented recommendations “to strengthen planning and accountability in realignment efforts” and improve communications with stakeholders. Congress also halted progress on six AMP initiatives, pending the GAO’s evaluation of its earlier findings and congressional review of the report.⁸

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to analyze AMP communications issues noted during prior audits and assess management’s proposed changes to the *AMP Communications Plan*. Our audit focused on communication with stakeholders and the impact of stakeholder interest on the AMP process and consolidation efforts. In order to execute this review, we:

- Conducted interviews with management to gain an understanding of the *AMP Communications Plan*.
- Compared the updated plan with recommendations from past reviews.
- Reviewed other Postal Service mandates and guidance regarding communicating with stakeholders about AMP consolidations.
- Surveyed stakeholder input and its impact on past AMP initiatives and performed other analyses and analytical procedures as necessary.
- Reviewed public meeting minutes to assess input from stakeholders.
- Benchmarked against communication methods for other, similar Postal Service initiatives, as well as similar initiatives at other agencies/organizations.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2008 through February 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such

⁶ Public Law 110–161, dated December 2007.

⁷ *U.S. Postal Service: Mail Processing Realignment Efforts Under Way Need Better Integration and Explanation* (Report Number GAO-07-717, dated June 2007); *U.S. Postal Service: Progress Made in Implementing Mail Processing Realignment Efforts, but Better Integration and Performance Measures Still Needed* (Report Number GAO-07-1083T, dated July 2007).

⁸ The halted consolidations underway were in Sioux City, IA; Detroit/Flint, MI; Bronx, NY; Aberdeen, SD; and Canton, OH. The Postal Service subsequently cancelled the Sioux City, Aberdeen, and Bronx consolidations.

tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. 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 on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management officials on November 19, 2008, and included their comments where appropriate.

PRIOR AUDIT COVERAGE

The OIG issued six reports between December 2005 and July 2008 addressing AMP communication concerns and the GAO issued six products that included AMP communication discussions or recommendations. See [Appendix D](#) for more details on prior audits related to AMP communications.

APPENDIX B: DETAILED ANALYSIS

Improved Area Mail Processing Communications Process

Postal Service actions generally addressed prior audit findings and recommendations regarding communication with AMP stakeholders. Managers revised AMP communications guidelines multiple times between April 1995 and March 2008 to increase message consistency, enhance the PIP, and expand the use of web pages. Specifically, management:

- Redesigned notification templates for message frequency, clarity, and consistency at four AMP actions or events, including: Notice of Intent to Conduct Feasibility Study, Public Meeting, AMP Proposal Decision, and Other Events, such as suspending or cancelling feasibility study.
- Added details to the communication timetable.
- Added AMP updates to the Postal Service's website.
- Enhanced PIP guidelines and moved the public meeting to earlier in the AMP process.

The Postal Service's actions enhanced the AMP communication process. For example, comments at one public meeting revealed that some business mailers might not have received sufficient notice of the meeting. To help ensure business mailers are aware of public meetings, management plans to post a notification at each Business Mail Entry Unit to inform customers. As a result of their actions and continued efforts, Postal Service officials have improved AMP communications and increased the transparency of the AMP process through frequent, clear, and consistent messaging to stakeholder groups. See [Appendix D](#) for a summary of prior audit findings and recommendations.

Opportunities Remain to Enhance Area Mail Processing Communications

Employees, unions, and other stakeholders have resisted AMP consolidation efforts. Our review of the *AMP Communications Plan* indicates enhanced employee notification and input opportunities remain. Employees are first notified in face-to-face "service talks" at the initiation of an AMP feasibility study. Communication efforts between the initiation of the study and the public meeting are at the discretion of local management and have included Newsbreaks, postings to local bulletin boards, additional service talks, and local newsletter articles. However, the *AMP Communications Plan* does not include a mechanism to notify employees directly of public meetings or movement of the AMP through the approval process, unlike other stakeholder groups. Employees, who are perhaps the stakeholder group most directly affected by consolidations and/or

closures, usually learn about these events from their union representatives, mailers, or the media.

The original intent of AMP public meetings was to answer questions from the public and mailers, but Postal Service officials have noted that public meetings are attended predominantly by employees. Since the Communications Plan does not specify an “employees-only” input meeting scheduled between initial employee notification and the public meeting (a period of up to 3 months), the public meeting is the employees’ first opportunity to provide input or express their concerns in an open forum. Although no career Postal Service employee has involuntarily suffered a job loss due to an AMP, limited communication can result in anxiety about the unknown and resistance to the AMPs; delays or possibly even cancellation of network streamlining initiatives; and ultimately, in missed opportunities for savings. See [Appendix E](#) for a summary of stakeholder notifications during the AMP process.

Web-Based Stakeholder Communications

The Postal Service’s web-based AMP communications are limited to unidirectional web pages, which are best suited for information dissemination and do not provide opportunity for stakeholder input. Using more advanced web-based communication options for AMP stakeholders could broaden stakeholder input avenues and help reduce resistance to AMPs.

The most recent *AMP Communications Plan* provides guidelines for posting consolidation information for each AMP event on the Postal Service’s Internet site. In their continued effort to enhance communications, Postal Service personnel have stated that postings to the AMP website include updated web pages (rather than replacements) for each AMP event, which will increase transparency and provide a sense of history of the process for stakeholders. According to management, maintaining and updating even simple web pages can be costly and time-consuming, as would incorporating blogs to facilitate stakeholder input.

The Postal Service has recognized the utility and importance of its web presence. Vision 2013, the Postal Service’s Strategic Plan 2009-2013, states the organization will use blogs and podcasts, social networking sites, and mobile devices to improve two-way communications with stakeholders. Two Postal Service blogs are currently available on the Internet for sharing information and receiving comments from interested parties and more are under development. We determined that other government agencies and non-governmental organizations currently use blogs, message boards, wikis, and other web-based communication devices for open communication with stakeholders. See [Appendix F](#) for more information on benchmarking web-based communication methods and [Appendix G](#) for a glossary of terms.

APPENDIX C: IMPROVEMENTS TO AMP COMMUNICATIONS

("√" = enhancements included in AMP communications guidelines)

		Initiation of AMP Study	Completion of AMP Study	Public Input Process	Approval of AMP	No Action Taken	Post to Postal Service Internet	Enhancements
Criteria	<i>AMP Guidelines</i> (March 1995)		√		√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single worksheetpage. • Developed standardized instructions.
	<i>AMP Communications Plan</i> (September 2005)	√	√		√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions and frequency for notifications increased. • Examples of notifications included. • Communications checklist (matrix) added.
	<i>AMP Communications Support Kit</i> (February 2006)	√	√		√	√		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive background. • Letter to the editor/opposite editorial template provided. • Approval announcement day time specific. • Templates added for "no action taken."
	<i>AMP Notifications Tool Kit</i> (May 2006)	√	√	√	√	√		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIP added (after headquarters [HQ] functional review process). • PIP mentioned in AMP study notification letters and stand-up talks. • Stand-up talks provided at both losing and gaining facilities.
	<i>AMP Communications Plan</i> (March 2008)	√	√	√	√	√	√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added AMP process flow diagram. • PIP moved to earlier in process (simultaneous with area and HQ review). • Shortened timeline. • Web postings specific and match phases of AMP.

APPENDIX D: PRIOR AUDITS WITH AMP COMMUNICATIONS RELATED ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Name	Communications Discussions/Findings	Communications Recommendations	Postal Service Actions
OIG Audits			
<p>Area Mail Processing Guidelines (NO-AR-06-001, 12/21/2005)</p>	<p>Limited Use of AMP Process – Resistance to consolidations affected the approval and implementation of AMP proposals. Policy Could Be Improved – <i>AMP Guidelines</i> were incomplete and some detailed procedures for addressing AMP issues were not contained or referenced in AMP policy. For example, the guidance did not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how to address resistance that may be encountered when completing an AMP study or implementing an AMP proposal. This resistance includes unions, affected communities, and other stakeholders. • Adequately address what should be communicated with stakeholders, by whom, when, or how. 	<p>Develop a process for addressing resistance to mail processing consolidations and facility closures.</p> <p>Update <i>AMP Guidelines</i> or supporting policies to address what should be communicated with stakeholders, by whom, when, and how.</p>	<p>Established HQ multi-functional communication team and <i>AMP Communications Plan</i>.</p> <p><i>AMP Communications Plan</i> provided details for required communications to stakeholders, including timing and Postal Service officials responsible.</p>
<p>Sioux City, IA Processing and Distribution Facility Consolidation (EN-AR-07-001, 11/9/2006)</p>	<p>Compliance with AMP Guidelines – To add credibility to the consolidation process, the Postal Service must provide support for AMP data and follow the AMP process. Handbook PO-408 states that a vital aspect of implementing an AMP is timely, clear communication with all parties.</p>	<p>Communicate updated information on the Sioux City AMP proposal with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Summary brief on www.usps.com.</p>
<p>Bronx, NY Processing and Distribution Center Consolidation (EN-AR-07-003, 7/18/2007)</p>	<p>Potential Risks: Transitioning Employee Integration – Although no formal recommendation was made, issue was discussed with management and the report notes management could mitigate some risks of the consolidation by providing an effective communication mechanism for transitioning employees that allows them to address questions and concerns timely.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>AMP communication guidelines under revision during audit. Management to consider incorporating additional employee communication guidelines.</p>

Report Name	Communications Discussions/Findings	Communications Recommendations	Postal Service Actions
OIG Audits			
<p>Management Advisory - Automated Area Mail Processing Worksheets (EN-MA-08-001, 10/19/2007)</p>	<p>Prior Audit Recommendations Addressed documenting the specific AMP event in the communications worksheets.</p> <p>Additional Enhancements – Communications</p> <p>1. Stakeholders – Concerns were expressed about inadequate transparency and a perception that management does not consider public input when making decisions to consolidate operations. A summary of public comments is to be submitted to the Area Vice President; however, the draft AMP policy does not require their inclusion in the AMP proposal. Recognizing public input in the proposal would enhance the guidelines by documenting stakeholder concerns and improving transparency.</p> <p>2. Employees – The new Chapter 4 on communications did not discuss the importance of addressing employee concerns regarding employment retention and available opportunities. Postal Service employees’ efforts have a direct and visible impact on the organization’s results. Managing organizational change is essential to continued success, and helping employees adjust to changing roles requires open communication at all levels.</p>	<p>Document major concerns and input provided by stakeholders, along with the responses and actions taken to address concerns as part of the AMP proposal.</p> <p>Include a reference to Article 12 of the appropriate collective bargaining agreements to help ensure that employees understand the potential impacts and available protections.</p>	<p>Written inquiries and comments from the employee organizations and employees addressed by local management. Local Consumer Affairs or Public Affairs and Communications office handles other inquiries and comments. Summary of written comments and verbal comments from public input meeting submitted as part of AMP proposal and become part of the record. Summary posted at www.usps.com.</p> <p>Revised PO-408 indicates reassignments and/or excessing will be accomplished in accordance with applicable provisions of <i>Employee and Labor Relations Manual</i> and applicable collective bargaining agreements.</p>

Report Name	Communications Discussions/Findings	Communications Recommendations	Postal Service Actions
OIG Audits			
<p><i>Kansas City, KS Processing and Distribution Center Consolidation</i> (EN-AR-08-001, 1/14/2008)</p>	<p>Stakeholder Communications – Stakeholders expressed concerns with the communication process for the Kansas City AMP. Concerns included which stakeholders were notified, when stakeholders were notified, and the information shared with stakeholders.</p> <p>Risk Factors – Transitioning Employee Integration – Employee attrition and the process for moving employees to the Kansas City, MO, Processing and Distribution Center may have resulted in the loss of skilled plant employees. The transition could have required increased time for employee training and orientation, and an effective communication mechanism to allow transitioning employees’ questions and concerns to be addressed in a timely manner.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No action required.</p>
<p><i>Detroit, MI Processing and Distribution Center Consolidation</i> (EN-AR-08-005, 7/17/2008)</p>	<p>Other Issues – Stakeholders expressed concerns with the communication process for the Detroit AMP. Concerns included which stakeholders were notified, when stakeholders were notified, and the information shared with stakeholders.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No action required.</p>

Report Name	Communications Discussions/Findings	Communications Recommendations	Postal Service Actions
GAO REPORTS			
<p><i>U.S. Postal Service: Bold Action Needed to Continue Progress on Postal Transformation</i> (GAO-04-108T, 11/5/2003)</p>	<p>Review of President's Commission report – cautioned that streamlining strategies would likely lead to suspicion and lack of trust, and lack of input from stakeholders could prevent the Postal Service from achieving the goal of a more efficient network. Encouraged stakeholders' engagement in the process to address legitimate concerns and minimize disruption to alleviate some of the resistance to facility closures.</p>	<p>Develop an integrated plan to optimize the Postal Service's infrastructure and workforce, in collaboration with its key stakeholders and make it available to Congress and the public, with periodic progress reports.</p>	<p>Agreed to take action.</p>
<p><i>U.S. Postal Service: The Service's Strategy for Realigning Its Mail Processing Infrastructure Lacks Clarity, Criteria, and Accountability</i> (GAO-05-261, 4/8/2005)</p>	<p>Discussed impact of resistance to AMPs and found the Postal Service "strategy excludes stakeholder input and is not sufficiently transparent or accountable..."</p>	<p>Develop a mechanism for informing stakeholders as decisions are made.</p>	<p>Postal Service stated it will make decisions with stakeholder input without specifying how it will incorporate input into realignment decisions and agreed to the need for transparency.</p>
<p><i>U.S. Postal Service: Realignment Efforts Underway Need Better Integration and Explanation</i> (GAO-07-717, 6/21/2007)</p>	<p>Reviewed draft of the AMP Communications Plan – Found the plan was still unclear, the public input meeting was held too late in the process and there was a lack of transparency regarding how the Postal Service uses public input in reaching decisions.</p>	<p>Improve public notice (clarify notification letters). Improve public engagement (hold public meeting during data gathering phase and make info available in advance). Increase transparency (update <i>AMP Guidelines</i> and explain how public input is used in decision-making process).</p>	<p>Negotiated timing of public input meeting to after feasibility study and simultaneous with Area Vice President approval period. Also, began posting slides and agenda for public input meetings on www.usps.com.</p>

Report Name	Communications Discussions/Findings	Communications Recommendations	Postal Service Actions
GAO REPORTS			
<p><i>Postal Reform Law: Early Transition Is Promising, but Challenges to Successful Implementation Remain</i> (GAO-08-503T, 2/28/2008)</p>	<p>Reviewed progress on Postal Act of 2006 – Addressed constraints affecting network optimization, employee impact and communication, and monitoring the workplace environment.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>No action required.</p>
<p><i>USPS Has Taken Steps to Strengthen Network Realignment Planning and Improve Communication</i> (GAO-08-1022T, 7/24/2008)</p>	<p>Reviewed Postal Service Network Plan – Noted improved public notice and engagement, increased clarity of notification letters, and increased transparency into the process.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>No action required.</p>
<p><i>U.S. Postal Service: Progress Made Toward Implementing GAO’s Recommendations to Strengthen Network Realignment Planning and Accountability and Improve Communication</i> (GAO-08-1134R, 9/25/ 2008)</p>	<p>Reviewed Postal Service Network Plan – Reported the Postal Service took steps to address GAO recommendations to improve communication with its stakeholders as it consolidates its AMP operations and noted as AMP consolidations are implemented, the Postal Service will have the opportunity to gather stakeholder feedback on the updated <i>Communications Plan</i> and assess the effectiveness of modifications.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>No action required.</p>

**APPENDIX E: AREA MAIL PROCESSING COMMUNICATIONS
STAKEHOLDER NOTIFICATION BY AMP EVENT**

	Initiation of Feasibility Study	Notification of Public Meeting and AMP Proposal moved to Area Vice President (AVP) and Headquarters for approval	Decision by AVP/Headquarters (AMP approved or no action taken)	Other (AMP suspended or resumed)
Congress (national and local offices)	yes	yes	yes	yes
Employees	yes	no	yes	yes
Local/state officials	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mailers	yes	yes	yes	yes
Media	yes	yes	yes	yes
Public	yes	yes	yes	yes
Unions	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>Source: Postal Service Area Mail Processing Communications Plan (March 2008)</i>				

APPENDIX F: BENCHMARKING WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION METHODS

Question	Response	Benchmarked Organizations	Function	Website
What web-based communication mechanisms are available?	Blogs	Transportation Security Agency – Evolution of Security	Disseminate information and stakeholder input (with comments “on”).	http://www.tsa.gov/blog/
	Live help/chat	State of Utah	Disseminate information and stakeholder input.	http://www.utah.gov/
	Message boards	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – National Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions	Stakeholder input.	http://www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip/welcome.shtml
	Podcasts	Commonwealth of Virginia	Disseminate information.	http://www.virginia.gov/
	User surveys	Commonwealth of Virginia	Stakeholder input.	http://www.virginia.gov/
	Web pages	UK Post Office®	Disseminate information.	http://www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po
	Webcasts	Postal Regulatory Commission	Stakeholder input and disseminate information.	http://www.prc.gov
	Wikis	Office of the Director of National Intelligence, National Intelligence Council	Communication among experts.	http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_home.html
What benchmarking or guidance is available to organizations expanding their web-presence?	Non-governmental organizations	Center for Digital Government – Digital Government Achievement Awards	National research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government.	http://www.centerdigitalgov.com/
	Professional publications	Journal of E-Government	Journal focusing on application and practice of e-government.	http://www.egovjournal.com/index.htm
	Government agencies	Office of Management and Budget, Electronic Government Initiatives	2002 Presidential E-Government Strategy to integrate agency operations and information technology investments.	http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/egov/index.html

APPENDIX G: GLOSSARY

<p>Blog (a contraction of the term "Web log") – a Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning <i>to maintain or add content to a blog</i>. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability of readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.</p>
<p>Live Help/Chat – applications designed specifically to provide online assistance to users of a web site. The software enables the administrator or call-center staff of a web site to receive and respond to text communication from multiple users of the site.</p>
<p>Message Board – a web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content. Internet forums are also commonly referred to as Web forums, newsgroups, message boards, discussion boards, (electronic) discussion groups, discussion forums, bulletin boards, <i>fora</i> (the Latin plural) or simply forums. The terms "forum" and "board" may refer to the entire community or to a specific sub-forum dealing with a distinct topic. Messages within these sub-forums are displayed either in chronological order or as threaded discussions. A sense of virtual community often develops around forums that have regular users. Message boards allow anonymous posts or posts only by registered users and typically have both an administrator and moderator to provide guidance and monitor posts.</p>
<p>Podcast – series of audio or video digital-media files distributed over the Internet by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers. Though the same content may also be made available by direct download or streaming, a podcast is distinguished from other digital-media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added.</p>
<p>Web Page – a resource of information suitable for the World Wide Web and accessed through a web browser. Information is usually in HTML or XHTML format and may provide navigation to other web pages via hypertext links. Web pages may be retrieved from a local computer or from a remote web server. The web server may restrict access only to a private network, e.g., a corporate intranet, or it may publish pages on the World Wide Web. Web pages are requested and served from web servers using Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP).</p>
<p>Webcast – media file distributed over the Internet, either live or recorded.</p>

APPENDIX H: MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

MITZI R. BETMAN
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS



January 13, 2009

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SUBJECT: Draft Audit Report - Area Mail Processing Communications (Report Number EN-AR-09-DRAFT)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the subject draft audit report.

We will incorporate some of the recommendations as outlined below. It is also important to note that the Area Mail Processing (AMP) Communications Plan's purpose is to outline the stakeholder notification process. The plan is not intended to provide all of the employee communications that are made throughout the AMP process.

Recommendation 1:

Increase communication with employees during the AMP process by including a mechanism in the AMP Communications Plan to notify employees of the public meeting and include "employee-only" input opportunities following initial notification of the AMP feasibility study and preceding the public meeting.

Response

To address this recommendation, when an AMP study is announced, we will add to the employee notifications (service talk, Newsbreak) information on how they can submit their comments. Also, we will add to the Communications Plan a service talk and Newsbreak advising employees of the public meeting, while noting that, to date, employees seem to have been well apprised of the public meetings without special notification as they comprise the overwhelming percentage of attendees.

We do not agree that the employees' first opportunity for input would be at the public meeting. With the initial notification of the AMP study, the public is afforded the opportunity to submit comments to the district office. Employees are not excluded from this and have the same opportunity to offer input as the general public. The report also provides no empirical data to support its assumption regarding employee anxiety levels from the time an AMP study is announced. The report incorrectly concludes, based on opinions expressed at the public meetings that the same level of concern exists before study results are released as after. Until the study is completed, there is no conclusive information that can be given about possible impacts and it would be unfair to speculate.

Target Implementation Date: February 1, 2009

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Recommendation 2:

Broaden the use of web-based methods for disseminating Area Mail Processing details to stakeholders—especially employees—and provide additional avenues for input.

Response

We do not agree with this recommendation. While practical uses of so-called Web 2.0 media are currently being investigated, it is uncertain whether a blog or other social media would be used adequately or be effective in providing useful input. We have, however, expanded the information available on the AMP Web page on usps.com by posting the study summaries and summaries of public comments received, which includes employee input.

The report contains no information that should be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).



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