

March 19, 2003

MICHAEL S. FLORES
MANAGER, FORT WORTH DISTRICT

SUBJECT: Management Advisory – Delayed Mail – Bridgecreek Station, Wichita Falls, Texas (Report Number TD-MA-03-002)

This management advisory reports our observations of delayed mail at Bridgecreek Station, Wichita Falls, Texas (Project Number 01PA001DE001). We performed work for this report in response to anonymous information obtained from a Postal Service employee during the course of a related audit.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The purpose of this management advisory is to notify Postal Service officials of improper mail handling and resulting delays we observed at Bridgecreek Station, Wichita Falls, Texas. During our work, we noted delayed mail at Bridgecreek Station, reviewed applicable Postal Service policies and procedures, interviewed Postal Service managers at Postal Service Headquarters and in the field, and photographed conditions. We did not audit, review, or comprehensively investigate the observations we made. We are providing this advisory so management can take whatever corrective action they consider necessary under the circumstances. Work associated with this report was conducted from October 2002 through March 2003. We discussed our observations and recommendations with appropriate management officials and included their comments, where appropriate.

Prior Audit Coverage

Our report, Address Change Service (Report Number TD-AR-03-004, dated March 12, 2003), revealed that mishandled Address Change Service mail processed during the period September 2000 to July 2002, resulted in unnecessary cost to the Postal Service exceeding \$20 million, and that the Postal Service could save \$14 million over the next 2 years, by properly handling Address Change Service mail. We recommended management develop necessary training materials, analyze address change service performance, and provide feedback to local post offices.

Results

Delayed Mail

On October 15, 2002, we observed approximately 20,000 pieces of mail delayed at Bridgecreek Station, Wichita Falls, Texas. The mail was 5 to 6 weeks old, with some pieces postmarked as early as September 4, 2002. The mail could not be delivered as addressed and consisted of First-Class return to sender mail and Address Change Service mail. When mail cannot be delivered as addressed, Postal Service procedures



Delayed mail photographed at the Bridgecreek Station, Wichita Falls, Texas
October 15, 2002.

require that it be returned to sender if possible, or in the case of Address Change Service mail, that mailers be notified. Postal Service Management Instruction PO-441, Rehandling of Mail Best Practices, dated April 2002, requires a Postal Service clerk to properly identify and expedite mail that cannot be delivered as addressed. However, local officials at the Bridgecreek Station stated they had insufficient staff to process such mail on a daily basis. Because mail that could not be delivered as addressed was not processed on a daily basis, it accumulated to unacceptable levels. Our analysis of conditions 2 months later, on December 16, 2002, revealed the situation had improved, but was still unacceptable. On that date, more than 9,000 pieces of mail were still backlogged.

Recommendations

We recommend the district manager, Fort Worth, Texas:

1. Take necessary action to reduce the mail backlog at Bridgecreek Station, prevent recurrence, and report results of the inquiry to the vice president, Southwest Area

Operations; vice president, Delivery and Retail; and the Office of Inspector General.

Management Comments

Management agreed with our recommendation, and stated they performed a follow-up in the Bridgecreek Station on February 28, 2003. They found that corrective measures are in place and the unit is current on Address Change Service mail. Management stated that the unit manager performs a daily review to ensure that mail is not delayed and that the postmaster has made this a matter for a weekly follow-up. Management's comments, in their entirety, are included in the appendix of this report.

Evaluation of Management Comments

Management's comments are responsive to our recommendation and the actions taken and planned should correct the issues identified in the report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Joe Oliva, director, Transportation and Delivery, at (703) 248-2100, or me at (703) 248-2300.

B. Wayne Goleski
Assistant Inspector General
for Core Operations

Attachment

cc: John A. Rapp
Henry A. Pankey
George L. Lopez
Susan M. Duchek

APPENDIX. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

DISTRICT MANAGER
FORT WORTH DISTRICT



March 4, 2003

B. WAYNE GOLESKI
ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR CORE OPERATIONS
1735 N. LYNN ST.
ARLINGTON, VA 22209-2020

Subject: Transmittal of Draft Management Advisory – Delayed Mail – Bridgecreek Station,
Wichita Falls, Texas (Report Number TD-MA-02-DRAFT)

This is the Fort Worth District response to Report Number TD-MA-02-DRAFT, which outlined your observations of delayed return to sender mail at Bridgecreek Station in Wichita Falls TX (Project Number 01PA001DE001).

The Postmaster and Manager of Post Office Operations performed a follow-up review in the unit on February 28th. They found that corrective measures are in place and the unit is current on ACS mail. We agree that the recommended procedures and operational changes, described below, were effective.

Cause of the delay

Bridgecreek Station has four rural routes. All four routes were impacted by 911 readdressing. The rural routes delivered to 1,636 addresses, of which 67% were changed to meet 911 criteria. 911 readdressing began in Clay County 6/7/00 and in Archer County 8/8/01. The customers were informed at the time their addresses changed that they must notify their correspondents of their new street addresses. Bridgecreek rural carriers continued to deliver mail to the rural addresses until the grace period was over. During the grace period, rural carriers would process 30-40 pieces of Return to Sender mail per day. After 6/17/02, rural carriers were returning from 2,000 to 2,500 pieces per day combined. When the date came to discontinue delivery of the mis-addressed mail, the unit was inundated with return mail.

Our temporary fix to process mis-addressed mail

The unit began sending UBBM mail to the Main Post Office to free up workhours that might be applied to the mis-addressed mail at Bridgecreek Station. During the same time, however, Bridgecreek lost one distribution clerk so there was no effective gain in available manpower. Overtime was used to offset the remaining volume. The mail was moved to a more visible location as well. Management and clerks were instructed to get current and establish a plan that would maintain the mail on a daily basis. We ordered cancellation dies that would eventually be used to automate part of the process.

4600 MARK IV PARKWAY
FORT WORTH TX 76161-9100
(817) 317-3301
FAX: (817) 317-3320

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Operational changes that have been used to stay current

By mid-December, Wichita Falls was working Return to Sender mail by automating machinable mail. Letter-size Return to Sender mail is pulled out of the station workload and sent to mail processing. The Mark II canceling equipment is used to apply the Return to Sender icon to the letter. The letters are then sent to the Plant in Fort Worth where an adhesive label is applied over the barcode. This practice moves letters from a few hand stamps per minute to 12,000 per hour. Using the automated equipment in the Fort Worth Plant to apply an adhesive label over the original barcode prevents the mail from staying in an automation loop that would repetitively send the mail back to the original address. This automated process replaces manually stamping the Return to Sender icon on letters and also replaces manually blotting out the barcode.

The remaining volume of non-machinable mail is processed by clerks in the unit. The unit manager changed the reporting time for one clerk position to afford more time to work the Return to Sender mail.

Rural address hygiene has improved so the volume of Return to Sender mail has dropped to a more normal rate.

The unit manager performs a daily review to ensure that mail is not delayed. By January 10th, the unit was current and remains within a two-day window for processing this mail.

The Bridgecreek Unit was a high performing unit last year. The unit was unfortunately overwhelmed by the unusual volume of Return to Sender mail created by 911 readdressing. The unit has adopted creative solutions to stay current with the workload by matching automation, workhours, and employee commitment.

The Postmaster and Station Manager are aware of expectations to stay current daily on ACS mail and that it is processed for dispatch. The Postmaster has made this a matter for a weekly follow-up.



Michael S. Flores

cc: George L. Lopez, Vice President, Southwest Area