

Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 23-076-3-R23 | May 10, 2023



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

May 10, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: REGINA M. BUGBEE
MANAGER, MAINE-NEW HAMPSHIRE-VERMONT DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sean Balduff", is centered below the memorandum header.

FROM: Sean Balduff
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review – Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME
(Report Number 23-076-3-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Valeta Bradford, Operational Manager, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit and Response Management
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Executive Vice President
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, Atlantic Area Retail & Delivery Operations

Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Main Office Carrier Section in Portland, ME (Project Number 23-076-3), and responds to Representative Chellie Pingree's interest in mail operations in the Portland, ME, area. The Main Office Carrier Section is in the Maine-New Hampshire-Vermont District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 04092, 04101, 04102, 04103, 04105, 04107, 04108, and 04110. These ZIP Codes serve about 105,135 people in a predominantly urban area.¹ This delivery unit has 113 city routes and 11 rural routes. We judgmentally selected the Main Office Carrier Section based on the number of Customer 360² and Informed Delivery³ contacts associated with the unit, undelivered route information, and Stop-The-Clock (STC)⁴ scans performed at the unit.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Main Office Carrier Section in Portland, ME.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,⁵ and property conditions. Specifically, we reviewed delivery metrics, including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, amount of reported delayed mail, package scanning, and distribution up-time.⁶ During our site visit we reviewed mail conditions; package and truck arrival scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; and unit safety, security, and maintenance conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mail pieces at the carrier cases and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized

in Table 1 with management on April 27, 2023, and included their comments, where appropriate.

The Main Office Carrier Section is one of five delivery units⁷ the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of March 13, 2023, that are serviced by the Southern Maine Processing and Distribution Center. We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Main Office Carrier Section. We will issue a separate report⁸ that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all five delivery units. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting mail delivery and customer service at the Main Office Carrier Section. Specifically, we found issues with four of the five areas we reviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Results

Audit Area	Issues Identified	
	Yes	No
Delayed Mail	X	
Package Scanning	X	
Truck Arrival Scanning	X	
Arrow Keys	X	
Property Conditions		X

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of March 13, 2023.

Regarding property conditions, we conducted a review of safety, security, and maintenance conditions at the unit and found no issues.

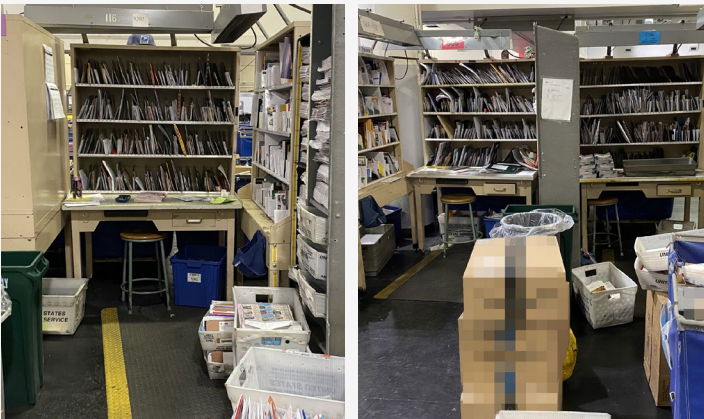
- 1 We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from Esri, which is based on 2010 Census Bureau information. Of the people living in these ZIP Codes, about 96,718 (92 percent) are considered living in urban communities and about 8,417 (8 percent) are considered living in rural communities.
- 2 A cloud-based application that enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.
- 3 Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mail pieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.
- 4 A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mail piece. Examples of STC scans include "Delivered," "Available for Pick-up," and "No Access."
- 5 A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.
- 6 Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.
- 7 The other four units were Industrial Park Annex, Saco, ME (Project Number 23-076-1), Lewiston Main Post Office, Lewiston, ME (Project Number 23-076-2), Sanford Main Post Office, Sanford, ME (Project Number 23-076-4), and Southern Maine Carrier Unit, Scarborough, ME (Project Number 23-076-5).
- 8 Project Number 23-076.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of March 14, 2023, we identified about 80,113⁹ delayed mail pieces at 91 carrier cases, the six hot cases,¹⁰ and on the workroom floor. We found undelivered mail dating back to March 10, 2023. In addition, management did not accurately report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹¹ system. While they reported 24,502 delayed mail pieces, this represented only 30.58 percent of the delayed volume we identified at the unit. See Table 2 for the number of delayed pieces for each mail type by location; Figure 1 for examples of delayed mail found at carrier cases; Figure 2 for an example of mail at a hot case; and Figure 3 for an example of packages on the workroom floor.

Figure 1. Examples of Delayed Mail in Carrier Cases



Source: OIG photos taken on March 14, 2023.

Figure 2. Example of Delayed Mail in Hot Case



Source: OIG photo taken on March 14, 2023.

Table 2. Type of Delayed Mail

Type of Mail	Carrier Cases	Hot Cases	Workroom Floor	Total OIG Estimated Count of Delayed Mail
Letters	34,642	7,333	0	41,975
Flats	33,463	2,088	0	35,551
Packages	1,144	303	1,140	2,587
Totals	69,249	9,724	1,140	80,113

Source: OIG count of delayed mail pieces identified during our visit on March 14, 2023.

⁹ Count of mail included individual piece counts and OIG estimates based on Postal Service conversion factors in Management Instruction PO-610-2007-1, *Piece Count Recording System*, and Handbook M-32, *Management Operating Data Systems*, Appendix D.
¹⁰ A case designated for final withdrawal of mail as carriers leave the office.
¹¹ A tool for unit management to manually self-report delayed mail, which provides a snapshot of daily mail conditions at the point in time when carriers have departed for the street.

Figure 3. Example of Delayed Packages on the Workroom Floor



Source: OIG photo taken on March 14, 2023.

Why Did It Occur

Management stated they did not have enough resources to deliver all the mail each day. The Postmaster and station manager both stated they had significant staffing issues, including a shortage of carriers, carriers on extended leave, and carriers with work restrictions limiting the number of hours they can work or duties they can perform. According to management, the unit shares part-time carriers with the Southern Maine Carrier Unit. We analyzed vacancy data provided by the District Manager of Field Human Resources and determined the two units were understaffed by 31 part-time carriers as of March 24, 2023. In addition, the Main Office Carrier Section was understaffed by seven full-time carriers.

Management did not accurately report delayed mail in DCV because they were more focused on delivering the mail, which limited their ability to properly perform their managerial duties. In addition, the PM supervisor did not update delayed mail totals in DCV with mail that carriers brought back in the evening because he prioritized other duties. Specifically, he prepared collection mail for the last truck departing to the plant and transported any additional collection mail to the plant from late arriving carriers.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided the station with enough resources to deliver all the mail each day. Postal Service policy¹² states that managers must review all communications that may affect the day's workload and be sure that replacements are available for unscheduled absences. In addition, Postal Service policy¹³ states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. Further, managers are required¹⁴ to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in DCV and must update DCV if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When mail is delayed, there is an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction, which may adversely affect the Postal Service brand. In addition, inaccurate reporting of delayed mail in DCV provides management at the local, district, area, and headquarters levels with an inaccurate status of mail delays and can result in improper actions taken to address issues.

¹² Handbook M-39, *Management of Delivery Services*, TL-14, Section 111.2, June 2019.

¹³ *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.

¹⁴ *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, September 2022.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 231 packages at the delivery unit between November 2022 and January 2023 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 64.50 percent of the packages were scanned delivered. We also found that 69 (29.87 percent) of these scans were made by one employee who no longer works at the unit. This data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered – PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold” but, rather, represent scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery.

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	November	December	January	Total	Percentage
Delivered	41	77	31	149	64.50%
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location	32	13	34	79	34.20%
No Authorized Recipient Available	0	1	0	1	0.43%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized	0	0	1	1	0.43%
Refused	0	0	1	1	0.43%
Total	73	91	67	231	100%*

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

* Total percentage does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

In addition, on the morning of March 14, 2023, before carriers arrived for the day, we selected 30 packages¹⁵ to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 30 sampled packages, one (3.33 percent) was scanned “Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location” at the delivery unit, rather than the delivery address.¹⁶

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor package scanning, as they were more focused on mail delivery. In addition, unit management receives a daily report from the district showing STC scans made at the unit; however, this report is limited to STC scans made after 3 p.m.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance, including verifying all packages were scanned at the delivery point and not at the delivery unit. The Postal Service’s goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mail pieces to the correct address with proper service,¹⁷ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.¹⁸

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Customers rely on accurate scan data to track their packages in real time. When employees do not scan mail pieces correctly, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations, management can potentially improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance the customer experience and the Postal Service brand.

¹⁵ We judgmentally selected 30 packages from the carrier cases. The Main Office Carrier Section sends their notice left packages to the Portland Main Post Office; therefore, we did not sample any notice left packages.

¹⁶ Twenty-five of the sampled packages were missing an STC scan to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery because an attempt had not been made to deliver these packages. We included these 25 packages in the delayed mail finding above.

¹⁷ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.

¹⁸ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Main Office Carrier Section did not scan all incoming trailer/truck barcodes,¹⁹ as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from November 1, 2022, to January 31, 2023, and found that employees did not perform a scan for any of the 689 scheduled incoming trucks (see Table 4). In addition, during observations on the morning of March 14, 2023, we noted that employees were not scanning the incoming mail trucks.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management was not aware of the policy requiring employees to scan the trailer barcode on mail trucks arriving at the delivery unit and had not instructed employees to perform the scans.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have instructed the appropriate employees to perform scans on all incoming trucks and enforced the requirement. According to Postal Service policy,²⁰ employees must scan the trailer barcode on Postal Service trailer/trucks and Highway Contract Route trucks arriving at the delivery unit during local operating hours.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When employees do not scan the truck barcode, the Postal Service does not receive timely transportation information and is unable to address issues that may be causing mail delays, which could affect customer service.

Table 4. Truck Arrival Scans from November 2022 through January 2023

Month	Count of Inbound Trips	Count of Missed Scans	Percentage Missing
November	181	181	100%
December	264	264	100%
January	244	244	100%
Total	689	689	100%

Source: OIG analysis of data extracted from the Postal Service’s Surface Visibility Web (SVWeb) System. SVWeb collects end-to-end data by linking multiple scans of a single asset to create visibility data to support planning, management, and optimization of the surface network.

¹⁹ The trailer barcode on the back door and inside right and left walls of the trailer.
²⁰ United States Postal Service Standard Operating Procedure – Subject: Trailer Scans at the Delivery Units (DUs).

Finding #4 Arrow Keys

What We Found

Unit management did not properly manage arrow keys. On the morning of March 16, 2023, we reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. We determined three of the 143 keys located at the unit were not listed on the inventory log, and 12 keys listed on the inventory log could not be located. Unit management could not provide any documentation that the missing keys had been reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not prioritize the proper management of arrow keys. Specifically, the station manager stated that a clerk at the unit had previously managed the arrow keys and kept the inventory log current. However, the clerk retired about three years ago, and management has not updated the inventory log regularly since then. The station manager was aware of the requirement to report missing keys to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service but stated, to her knowledge, there had been no missing keys at the unit for about five years.

What Should Have Happened

Unit management should have verified that arrow key procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,²¹ management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and conduct a semiannual physical survey of all building keys. Missing keys must be immediately reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When there is insufficient oversight and supervision of accountable items such as arrow keys, there is increased risk of mail theft. These thefts damage the Postal Service's reputation and diminish public trust in the nation's mail system. Additionally, because arrow keys open mail receptacles, lost or damaged keys can result in undelivered mail.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report.

See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

²¹ *Administrative Support Manual* Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 - updated through February 28, 2023.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from March through April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such 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 objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

We assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, and SVWeb data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



May 4, 2023

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions
Review – Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME (Report Number 23-076-3-
DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Main Office Carrier Section, Portland, ME*.

Management agrees with the four findings in the report on delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scanning, and arrow keys.

Management has begun taking steps to address the four findings.

Delayed Mail: Management will retrain local EAS on the Standard Work for properly reporting delayed mail in DCV. Management continues to pursue recruitment activities in the Southern Maine area and post career opportunities weekly until all vacancies are filled.

Package Scanning: Personnel will be retrained on the proper way to scan parcels for non-delivery due to No Access, Weather Delays, and Integrity Scans. The Standard Work for proper scanning due to Weather Delays or No Access is communicated on a regular basis and always in advance of an expected weather event.

Truck Arrival Scanning: Management will retrain personnel on the proper way to scan Truck Arrivals. The Standard Work instructions has also been sent out to all offices and reminders will be sent weekly.

Arrow Keys: The office will be retrained on Standard Work and operating procedures for Arrow Key Management including updating key logs, reporting missing arrow keys to the USPS Inspection Service, returning any broken arrow keys to Topeka, and ensuring arrow keys are verified and secured daily. Recent Gemba's were completed and office in full compliance.

E-SIGNED by Regina M Bugbee
on 2023-05-04 11:01:09 CDT

Regina M. Bugbee
Manager, Northern New England District

cc: Vice President, Area Retail & Delivery Operations (Atlantic)
Manager, Corporate Audit Response Management

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