

BEFORE THE
POSTAL RATE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20268-0001

Complaint on First-Class Mail
Service Standards

Docket No. C2001-3

OBJECTION OF THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
TO INTERROGATORIES DBP/USPS-118-123
(December 14, 2001)

In accordance with Rule 26 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, the United States Postal Service hereby files these objections to the following interrogatories filed by Mr. Popkin on November 28, 2001: DBP/USPS-118-123.

The Postal Service has filed Declarations and answered numerous interrogatories in an effort to help develop a record upon which the issues raised by the complaint in this proceeding can be resolved. The Postal Service understands the need to develop a record in this proceeding which will contain sufficient detail to provide a foundation for the parties to file testimony and make legal arguments and for the Commission to reach factual and legal conclusions pertinent to the issues raised by the complaint. Accordingly, the Postal Service has accommodated the parties by responding to question that ask for some fairly detailed and nuanced aspects of mail processing and transportation. Some parties have been judicious and focused in discovery, with rare exception, asking questions fairly closely tied to the core issues in this proceeding. When questions go far beyond what is material or necessary to resolve the issues in this proceeding, the Postal Service has tried to exercise some restraint in filing objections. Unfortunately, that restraint often can often encourage questions that stray farther and farther away from developing the sort of record necessary to resolve the issues raised by the complaint. And at some point, the Postal

Service must object. We have reached that point in relation to a number of questions filed on November 28, 2001.

The responses to a number of interrogatories filed on November 28th, if provided, would unquestionably increase the breadth of everyone's understanding of specifically how mail is transported and processed in various nooks and crannies in the postal system. However, the burden of tracking down some of the requested information far outweighs its probative value to this proceeding.

A number of interrogatories relate to the 17 Outlier facilities for which outgoing service standard changes conforming to those at issue in this proceeding have been held in abeyance. Thus, there were no outgoing mail service standard changes for these Outlier facilities implemented as part of the finalization of Phase 2 in 2000 and 2001. The reasons for the postponement in implementing the changes have been explained. It has been made clear that some deviations in what is now standard procedure result from this delay (e.g., split service standards within some ADC areas). And it has been made clear that, pending the resolution of this proceeding, the Postal Service has decided to delay any outgoing mail service standard changes for these Outlier facilities indefinitely. The Postal Service has not objected to questions asking generally about differences between standard operations and those which may result from the delayed implementation in the Outlier service areas. And the Postal Service does not object to questions asking for descriptions of examples that might help clarify such differences and provide a basis for parties to prepare testimony or file briefs that raise issues or legal arguments on the basis of the existence of such differences. See, for example, the November 26, 2001, response to DBP/USPS-89. However, there is a limit beyond which the Postal Service should not be

required to go.

DBP/USPS-118(c)

This interrogatory asks for detailed mailflows in and out of the 16 Outlier facilities that were not described *ad nauseum* in response to DBP/USPS-89. The Postal Service objects. These, again, are the facilities whose 2-day and 3-day outgoing service standard changes are on hold. The current service standards for mail originating from these facilities has been provided. There is no material issue that will be resolved on the basis of the level of detail provided in response to DBP/USPS-89 or that is being requested here. The Postal Service should not be burdened with having to respond. If there is some general question that Mr. Popkin wants an answer to, if he wants confirmation that this or that phenomenon occurs with some level of frequency, the Postal Service can try to be responsive. It is not probative to a resolution of the issues in this proceeding whether or not Phenomenon A occurs between Midland and North Houston and Phenomenon B occurs between Minot and Fargo. That they occur somewhere and why they might occur would seem to be sufficient information. And that information has been provided.

DBP/USPS-119

Fore the same reason, the Postal Service objects to requests that it “describe in detail” how mail is dispatched between the various facilities identified in this interrogatory or why the arrangement were originally set up. Within the vastly complex surface transportation network, there are all sorts of combinations employed to get mail between various points. Some of these arrangements have been in place for as long as the applicable service standards have historical antecedents that may go back a decade, if not longer. The interrogatory focuses not on the changes in transportation at issue in this proceeding but on the

discrete areas where changes have been postponed. The responses to these questions would not bring the parties or the Commission any closer to an understanding of the rationale for or the appropriateness of the service standard changes that are actually at issue in this proceeding.

DBP/USPS-120

This interrogatory requests (a) a listing of all instances where the service standard from an Outlier facility are divided between 2-days and 3-days within the same ADC and (b) an explanation for each such instance.

The “split ADC” phenomenon has been confirmed and explained. The Postal Service objects to providing the requested list and a case-by-case explanation for why each specific origin-destination pair service standard may have been established 10 or more years ago. The resolution of the issues in this proceeding will not be advanced by being able to list every such pair or by the knowledge of whether each such pair has a unique historical background.

DBP/USPS-121

Having responded in great detail to DBP/USPS-89, the Postal Service is now asked in subparts (a) through (d) of DBP/USPS-121 to provide an even greater level of operational minutiae for mail traveling in and out of Midland, Texas. There is not a single material issue in this proceeding that hinges on the provision of the requested data. Subpart (e) is another example of a burdensome request. It should be sufficient for the Postal Service to acknowledge a particular operational nuance and to explain why it might occur. However, the Postal Service objects to being required to review its entire network to identify all instances where 2-day and 3-day mail is transported as described in the question and to provide the reasons for each such instance.

DBP/USPS-122

The Postal has provided a listing of all drive times utilized in conjunction with making the service standard changes at issue in this proceeding. In DBP/USPS-89(i), the Postal Service was asked to provide drive times from one Outlier (Midland) to a list Area Distribution centers. The Postal Service explained (1) that drive times from Midland were not part of the model, (2) that mail from Midland went through either the Fort Worth or El Paso P&DC, and then (3) provided drive times from El Paso to the listed ADCs.

This interrogatory now asks for drive times to those ADCs from any other P&DC through which Midland dispatches 2-day and 3-day mail. To the extent that this questions seeks drive times from Fort Worth to the ADCs listed in the response to DBP/USPS-89(i) that already have been provided a part of the list of model drive times, it is objectionable for being cumulative. To the extent that it requests other drive times, the Postal Service still objects. The resolution of the issues in this proceeding is not going to be affected by knowing the drive time from Fort Worth to Phoenix or Tulsa, for example.

DBP/USPS-123

The Postal Service reserves the right to object later to subpart (a) of this question after its content of the question is clarified. Until such time, the Postal Service can neither respond nor object.

Otherwise, the Postal Service objects to subparts (d) through (t). The Postal Service has explained generally about how the current 2-day and 3-day service standards were developed and what the bases for those standards are. The Postal Service has explained that there Outlier facilities, why they are Outliers, and why their outgoing service standards may not presently be in synch with some of the service standards changes that are at issue in this proceeding.

To the extent that these interrogatories now ask the Postal Service to confirm that anomalous differences exist or to confirm that the basis for those differences conforms to explanations provided earlier, it is cumulative. Both the general nature of and the basis for Outlier anomalies have been explained. Insofar as the questions seek to require that the Postal Service provide specific, detailed descriptions of how the mail is dispatched between the numerous origin-destination pairs listed in subparts (d) through (t), the Postal Service also objects. We can either bring Docket No. C2001-3 to a halt for the purpose of knowing all there is to possibly know about the processing and transportation of mail originating from the Outlier facility service areas or we can seek to resolve the questions raised by the complaint in this proceeding.

The Postal Service is willing to assume that these questions seek to determine whether any reasons not already provided in earlier general descriptions of Outliers would explain the circumstances listed. Accordingly, the Postal Service is willing to review its earlier responses and, in answer to subparts (d) through (t), explain whether there are any other reasons that might explain the different service standards listed. Beyond that, the Postal Service finds the questions objectionable as unnecessarily burdensome.

Respectfully submitted,

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

By its attorneys:

Daniel J. Foucheaux, Jr.
Chief Counsel
Ratemaking

Michael T. Tidwell
Attorney

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that, in accordance with section 12 of the Rules of Practice, I have this day served the foregoing document upon all parties of record in this proceeding.

475 L'Enfant Plaza West, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20260-1137
(202) 268-2998/ FAX: -5402
December 14, 2001

Michael T. Tidwell