



# OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

## UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

### Delivery and Customer Service Operations - Austin-McNeil Station

### Audit Report

Report Number  
DR-AR-16-006

July 14, 2016





# OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

## UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

### Highlights

***We identified significant deficiencies in the unit's mail delivery and customer service operations.***

#### Background

In November 2015, the U.S. Postal Service's Office of Government Relations sent us a Congressional request regarding complaints with mail delivery and customer service operations at the Austin-McNeil Station, one of 14 Postal Service stations in Austin, TX. Customers complained about inaccurate and untimely mail delivery and unprofessional conduct at the facility.

The Austin-McNeil Station is in the Rio Grande District in the Southern area. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, this facility delivered over 20 million pieces of mail, including 780,394 packages, on 13 city and 14 rural delivery routes to 26,113 delivery points. The station also completed 136,805 retail customer service transactions. The Austin-McNeil Station has experienced a high level of management turnover, with eight different managers from June 2015 to January 2016.

During FY 2015, the Postal Service received 1,906 customer complaints about mail delivery and customer service at this facility. Of these complaints, 1,338 (70.2 percent) were about mail delivery – an increase of 23 percent over FY 2014.

Austin-McNeil Station management met with customers during a local homeowner's association meeting in September 2015 to hear their complaints.

Our objectives were to evaluate delivery and customer service operations at the Austin-McNeil Station.

#### What The OIG Found

We identified significant deficiencies in the unit's mail delivery and customer service operations. Specifically, we confirmed allegations of inaccurate and untimely mail delivery. Additionally, we identified 2,359 stop-the-clock scans performed after 7 p.m., 97 of which were falsely scanned at the station and an additional 2,262 of which were questionable. We referred these scans to our Office of Investigations for further review. Also, we observed four packages scanned as delivered although they remained at the station. Finally, 17 of the 1,338 customer complaints about mail delivery were not closed within 72 hours.

These deficiencies occurred due to supervisors scanning packages at the end of the day to avoid reporting delivery scan failures and a high level of management turnover. Also, management and station personnel misunderstood complaint resolution policies and failed to maintain customer complaint logs.

These deficiencies negatively impacted customer service and likely contributed to the 23 percent increase in customer complaints about mail delivery from FY 2014 to FY 2015.



# OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

## UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

### Highlights

In January 2016, while our audit was in process, the Postal Service filled the vacant station manager position. The new station manager implemented corrective actions to improve customer service, such as creating undelivered package and customer complaint logs, and emphasizing the importance of following up on packages held in the station.

### What The OIG Recommended

We recommended the manager, Rio Grande District, ensure management understands its responsibility for overseeing mail delivery, package scanning and reporting requirements; re-emphasize that the customer complaint log should be maintained and complaints should be addressed promptly; and clarify the district's policy for resolving and closing customer complaints.

### Austin-McNeil Station Mail Delivery



1,906 customer complaints were received in FY 2015.



1,338 or 70.2% of total complaints, were about mail delivery.



Mail Delivery complaints increased by 23% over FY 2014.



2,359 stop-the-clock scans were performed after 7 p.m., of which 97 were falsely scanned at the station.



17 of the 1,338 customer complaints about mail delivery were not closed within 72 hours.


# Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

July 14, 2016

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** MARY A. SULLIVAN  
DISTRICT MANAGER, RIO GRANDE DISTRICT

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen  
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Desktop  


**FROM:** Janet M. Sorensen  
Deputy Assistant Inspector General  
for Retail, Delivery and Marketing

**SUBJECT:** Audit Report – Delivery and Customer Service  
Operations - Austin-McNeil Station  
(Report Number DR-AR-16-006)

This report presents the results of our audit of Delivery and Customer Service Operations at the Austin-McNeil Station (Project Number 16XG010DR000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Rita F. Oliver, director, Delivery, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Vice President, Delivery Operations  
Vice President, Southern Area  
Corporate Audit and Response Management

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# Findings

## Introduction

This report presents the results of our audit of the Austin-McNeil Station (Project Number 16XG010DR000) in Austin, TX. This report responds to a Congressional request to review delivery and customer service operations at the Austin-McNeil Station, one of 14 Postal Service stations in Austin, TX. Customers complained about inaccurate and untimely mail delivery and unprofessional conduct. Our objectives were to evaluate delivery and customer service operations at the Austin-McNeil Station.

Customers complained about missing packages and alleged station management neglected to locate missing packages. According to the complaints, mail and packages were frequently delivered to the wrong addresses or not delivered at all, even though the Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) system<sup>1</sup> indicated the packages were delivered to the customers.<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

The Austin-McNeil Station experienced a high level of management turnover, with eight different managers from June 2015 to January 2016. Station management recognized operational concerns and met with customers during a local homeowner's association meeting in September 2015 to hear customer complaints. Additionally, in January 2016, the Postal Service assigned a permanent station manager to the Austin-McNeil Station.

## Summary

We identified significant deficiencies in the unit's mail delivery and customer service operations. Specifically, we confirmed allegations of inaccurate and untimely mail delivery. Additionally, we identified 2,359 stop-the-clock scans performed after 7 p.m., 97 of which were falsely scanned at the station and an additional 2,262 of which were questionable. We referred these scans to our Office of Investigations for further review. We also observed four packages scanned as delivered although they remained in the station. Finally, 17 of the 1,338 customer complaints about mail delivery were not closed within 72 hours after resolution.

These deficiencies occurred due to supervisors scanning packages at the end of the day to avoid reporting delivery scan failures and a high level of management turnover. Also, management and station personnel misunderstood complaint resolution policies and failed to maintain customer complaint logs.

These deficiencies negatively impacted customer service and likely contributed to the 23 percent increase in customer complaints about mail delivery from fiscal year (FY) 2014 to FY 2015.

In January 2016, while our audit was in process, the Postal Service filled the vacant station manager position. The new station manager implemented corrective actions to improve customer service, such as creating undelivered package and customer complaint logs and emphasizing the importance of follow-up on packages held at the station.

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<sup>1</sup> A system that receives and stores all tracking scan data, from acceptance to delivery, and is used by employees and customers for shipment tracking information.

<sup>2</sup> One complaint stated a parcel was not delivered as addressed but was scanned as delivered to a community parcel box; however, the customer alleges that a key to the parcel box was not provided to allow the customer to retrieve the parcel. Also, residents complained of unprofessional treatment by U.S. Postal Service employees when seeking assistance for the delivery issues and the Postal Service's denial of insurance claims on lost parcels.

**The Austin-McNeil Station had acting managers for 16 months from October 2014 through January 2016.**

## Delivery Operations

We validated that packages were misdelivered on numerous occasions. Our analysis found that complaints involving “misdelivered mail” and “no delivery/no attempt” increased from 1,091 to 1,338 (23 percent) between FYs 2014 and 2015. During our interviews with customers, we were informed that neighbors frequently contacted each other to exchange misdelivered packages,<sup>3</sup> while some customers never received their packages or received their packages as much as 1 month late. We also obtained documentation of tracking confirmation numbers showing late or lost packages and photos of misdelivered or late mail.

The Postal Service uses arrow locks to secure cluster box units (CBU) and neighborhood delivery and collection box units.<sup>4</sup> However, customers provided photographs of Postal Service CBUs left open or unlocked by carriers although Postal Service policy requires these units to be locked<sup>5</sup> (see Figures 1 and 2). In addition, Postal Service management stated that the CBUs were sometimes vandalized by unknown parties. These deficiencies negatively impacted customer service and likely contributed to the increase in customer complaints.

### Figures 1 and 2. Open Cluster Box Units



Source: Photos taken by Postal Service customers in August 2015 and provided to the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG).

These conditions occurred because of inadequate oversight due to a high level of management turnover at the station. Specifically, the Austin-McNeil Station had an acting manager(s) for 16 months from October 2014 through January 2016. This position was vacant and not filled by the district with a permanent manager until January 2016. During the 8 months prior to the beginning of our audit, June 2015 to January 2016, eight station managers were assigned to the station, an average of one new manager every month. Postal Service policy<sup>6</sup> states in part: “The delivery service manager must on a daily basis: Evaluate daily service rendered by the employees ... [and] observe carriers to assure their performance of duties.”

<sup>3</sup> The *Administrative Support Manual* instructs carriers to deliver mail according to the instructions or known desire of the addressee.

<sup>4</sup> Source: *Administrative Support Manual*, December 24, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Postal Service criteria require the use of locks to ensure the safety and security of mail in collection and delivery boxes, outdoor parcel lockers, and CBUs.

<sup>6</sup> Source: *Handbook M-39*.

## Package Scanning

We identified significant deficiencies in the unit's mail delivery package scanning operations. Specifically, we identified 2,359 stop-the-clock<sup>7</sup> scans performed after 7 p.m. on rural routes that were false or questionable.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, our analysis showed:

- Ninety-seven of the 2,359 packages scanned as delivered after 7 p.m. were false delivery scans. Our review of Global Positioning System (GPS) data indicated that, for 97 packages, station personnel performed the delivery scans at the Austin-McNeil Station and not at the delivery point<sup>9</sup> as required by policy.<sup>10</sup>
- 2,262 of the 2,359 packages scanned as delivered after 7 p.m. were questionable.
  - 858 of the 2,262 stop-the-clock scans had location data for the scan; however, the GPS coordinates led us to question whether the scan was performed at the point of delivery. For example, we identified 54 stop-the-clock scans performed in a vacant construction lot, 12 scans performed in the parking lot of the Austin-McNeil station, and three scans that appear to have been completed while the carrier was on the road. We also found scans that appeared questionable for other reasons such as multiple ZIP Code™ scans at the same delivery point, and scans at the same location over 30 minutes apart.
  - 1,404 of the 2,262 stop-the-clock scans that occurred after 7 p.m. had no GPS location data associated with them. In those cases, we could not determine if the scans were correctly performed at the point of delivery or at some other location. In May 2015, the station received the new handheld Mobile Delivery Device (MDD), which use a cellular network and GPS technology to obtain real-time delivery tracking information. If an MDD is not available, carriers can use an older Intelligent Mail® Device (IMD), the predecessor to the MDD to scan packages; however, the IMD does not provide GPS data or real-time delivery tracking information.

Station management informed the OIG, carriers sometimes stop a block or two outside the station parking lot to scan packages before returning to the station to avoid delivery scan failures<sup>11</sup> on the end-of-day (EOD) report for undelivered packages. The EOD report<sup>12</sup> is a tool for identifying all packages sent out for delivery each day without a stop-the-clock scan. This report is intended for information only and should not be used to enter new or missed scans or rescan tracking information.<sup>13</sup> It is located on the PTR website.

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7 A "stop-the-clock scan" indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the package.

8 We also conducted in depth analysis to identify scans prior to 8 a.m., scans within 10 minutes of out-for-delivery, and scans before out-for-delivery.

9 We were unable to definitively determine how many packages were falsely scanned for one of the routes because some of the scans contained Caller Service (a fee-based optional delivery service), which requires packages to be picked up by the customer at the Post Office rather than delivered to the customer's location. Scans were not specific enough to determine delivery type.

10 *Delivery and Retail Standardization* Tab 3, Section 5.

11 The barcode data is downloaded at the end of the day, transmitted to the PTR system, and used by customers to track packages. Sometimes the delivery scan performed by the carrier on the route does not download due to GPS obstructions such as trees or high-rise buildings, and managers enter the delivered scans manually.

12 *Product Tracking and Reporting System Instructions* for using EOD report.

13 Starting in April 2016 the EOD report was temporarily disabled. The report was suspended to allow the Postal Service to investigate improper use of the data that negatively impacts visibility and customers' tracking experience.



***Complaints made directly to the facility, either in person or by phone, were not correctly recorded or promptly addressed.***

Further, we found packages maintained in the station scanned as delivered or not scanned at all. For example, during our visit on February 11, 2016, we found four packages in the station that had been scanned as delivered. Further, on that same date, we observed a package that had been in the unit for approximately 6 weeks without being delivered. The package did not have a request to hold by the customer and had never received an out-for-delivery scan or an attempted delivery scan (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Figures 3 and 4. Undelivered Package Dated December 30, 2015**



Source: Photos taken by the OIG on February 11, 2016.

According to delivery unit management, this occurred because of the daily 7:00 a.m. package status reporting time. Specifically, supervisors scanned or rescanned packages at the end of the previous day to avoid reporting delivery scan failures on the EOD report the next morning. As stated earlier, this report is a tool for identifying all packages sent out for delivery each day without a stop-the-clock scan. This report should not be used to enter scans or rescan tracking information.

On April 14, 2016, the Postal Service suspended the EOD report nationwide to allow for investigation into improper use of the data that negatively impacts visibility and postal customer's tracking experience; therefore we are not making a recommendation on this issue.

### **Complaint Handling**

Customer complaints at the station were not always appropriately managed by customer service operation personnel. Complaints made directly to the facility, either in person or by phone, were not correctly recorded or promptly addressed. Our analysis and discussions with management revealed that the facility did not have a customer complaint log to record complaints made directly to personnel at the station.

Complaints made online or to the 1-800-ASK-USPS® customer service number were generally acknowledged by station management. Specifically, our analysis of online complaints showed that complaints involving “misdelayed mail” and “no delivery/ no attempt” increased from 1,091 to 1,338 (23 percent) between FYs 2014 and 2015. Further analysis showed that all but 17 were recorded as resolved within 72 hours in the Enterprise Customer Care (eCC) system in FY 2015. However, sometimes there was

little or no follow-up with customers to resolve the complaints. Specifically, we were informed by customers that they contacted the Austin-McNeil Station, but repeatedly received no response regarding their complaint. One customer subsequently learned, from insurance claim personnel, that her complaint had been closed by the station even though, in the customer's opinion, the complaint had not been resolved. Other customers also informed the OIG that they complained about the Austin-McNeil Station's unresponsiveness and considered this unprofessional conduct. Postal Service policy<sup>14</sup> directs personnel to investigate complaints and take corrective action to resolve them.

These customer service issues occurred because facility management did not follow established Postal Service procedure requiring facilities to maintain one or more customer complaint logs to track complaints and document actions. Additionally, station managers misunderstood Rio Grande District management's policy for resolving customer complaints. Station management advised the OIG that all complaints must be closed in 24 hours. But, district personnel informed us that the policy is to make contact in 24 hours and document complaint resolution in 72 hours. Otherwise the complaint resolution is considered failed (see [Chart 1](#)). Postal Service Complaint Resolution and Proper Use policy confirms the district position that customer complaints should be resolved in three business days.

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<sup>14</sup> Source: Management Instruction [PO-160-2014-1](#).

# Recommendations

***We recommend the district manager ensure delivery unit and station management understand their responsibility for oversight of mail delivery, package scanning processes and reporting requirements.***

We recommend the manager, Rio Grande District:

1. Ensure delivery unit and station management understand their responsibility for oversight of mail delivery, package scanning processes and reporting requirements.
2. Re-emphasize Postal Service policy to maintain a customer complaint log and address customer complaints promptly.
3. Clarify the Rio Grande District's policy for resolving and closing customer complaints.

## Management's Comments

Management agreed with the findings and recommendations and acknowledged that the instability of station management contributed to the mail delivery and customer service operations issues identified in this report.

In response to recommendation 1, management agreed that station management should understand their responsibility for oversight of mail delivery and package scanning. Management re-issued existing procedures governing "Stop-the-Clock" scanning and developed guidelines to ensure service commitments will be met. Management stated they have implemented this recommendation.

In response to recommendation 2, management agreed that all delivery units should keep a complaint log and respond timely to customer complaints. Management issued a message to unit managers re-emphasizing the requirement to maintain a Customer Complaint Control Log as required by existing policies and procedures. They further stated that these actions have already reduced customer complaints. Management stated they have implemented this recommendation.

In response to recommendation 3, management agreed that Austin-McNeil Station managers were not properly following policies for resolving and closing customer complaints. Management re-emphasized station managers' responsibilities and procedures for handling customer complaints, including making contact with the customer within 24 hours of receiving the complaint and resolving the issue within 72 hours, whenever possible. Management also established weekly telecons with customer service offices to provide guidance on conducting thorough investigations for handling and successfully resolving customer complaints. Management stated they have implemented this recommendation.

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

## Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations in the report.

All recommendations require OIG concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 should not be closed in the Postal Services' follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed.

# Appendices

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## Appendix A: Additional Information

### Background

The Austin-McNeil Station, one of 14 branches in Austin, TX, is in the Rio Grande District in the Southern Area. In FY 2015, the station delivered 20 million pieces of letter mail and flats, with an additional 780,394 packages, on 27 city and rural delivery routes to 26,113 delivery points. The station also completed 136,805 customer service retail transactions in FY 2015.

During FY 2015, the station received 1,906 customer complaints about mail delivery and customer service. Of these customer complaints, 1,338 (70.2 percent) were about mail delivery. This was an increase of 23 percent over the 1,091 complaints about mail delivery received in FY 2014. Customer complaints involved missing packages, station management's inability to locate packages, mail and packages delivered to the wrong address, and packages not delivered, but scanned as delivered by station personnel.

In November 2015, the U.S. Postal Service's Office of Government Relations sent us a Congressional request regarding complaints with mail delivery and customer service operations at the Austin-McNeil Station, one of 14 Postal Service stations in Austin, TX. Customers complained about missing packages, packages delivered to the wrong address, and packages not delivered, but scanned as delivered. They also alleged that management had neglected to locate missing packages.

### Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to evaluate delivery and customer service issues at the Austin-McNeil Station.<sup>15</sup> Specifically,

- We observed rural carriers and assigned rural carrier associates during street delivery.
- We judgmentally selected rural routes servicing Avery Ranch to observe street performance and package delivery scanning.
- We reviewed documentation and applicable policies and procedures related to delivery operations, package scanning and customer service. Specifically, we reviewed *Management of Delivery Services* (Handbook M-39),<sup>16</sup> *City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities* (Handbook M-41),<sup>17</sup> and *Rural Carrier Duties and Responsibilities* (Handbook PO-603)<sup>18</sup> as well as policies regarding scanning and insurance claims.
- We interviewed Postal Service personnel and reviewed procedures to establish customer complaint procedures (see [Chart 2](#)).
- We analyzed data such as city delivery efficiency indicators for FY 2015, PTR system and complaint data from the eCC system, and delivery unit data from the Enterprise Data Warehouse.
- We also interviewed Rio Grande District and Austin-McNeil Station officials to discuss and obtain complaint history, scanning practices, and parcel delivery procedures.
- We conducted interviews and reviewed surveys of complainants to obtain information on packages not received and the circumstances that led to formal complaints.

<sup>15</sup> Our scope was limited to one delivery unit, the Austin-McNeil Station. Even though the complaint comes from one route, we expanded the scope to look at the entire unit's rural performance.

<sup>16</sup> Source: [Handbook M-39](#).

<sup>17</sup> Source: [Handbook M-41](#).

<sup>18</sup> Source: [Handbook PO-603](#).

We conducted this performance audit from January through July 2016 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 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 on June 14, 2016, and included their comments where appropriate.

We assessed the reliability of PTR system data by performing electronic testing of the package tracking ID and interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about this data. We also assessed the reliability of the eCC system by reviewing existing information about the system and the system that produced the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

### **Prior Audit Coverage**

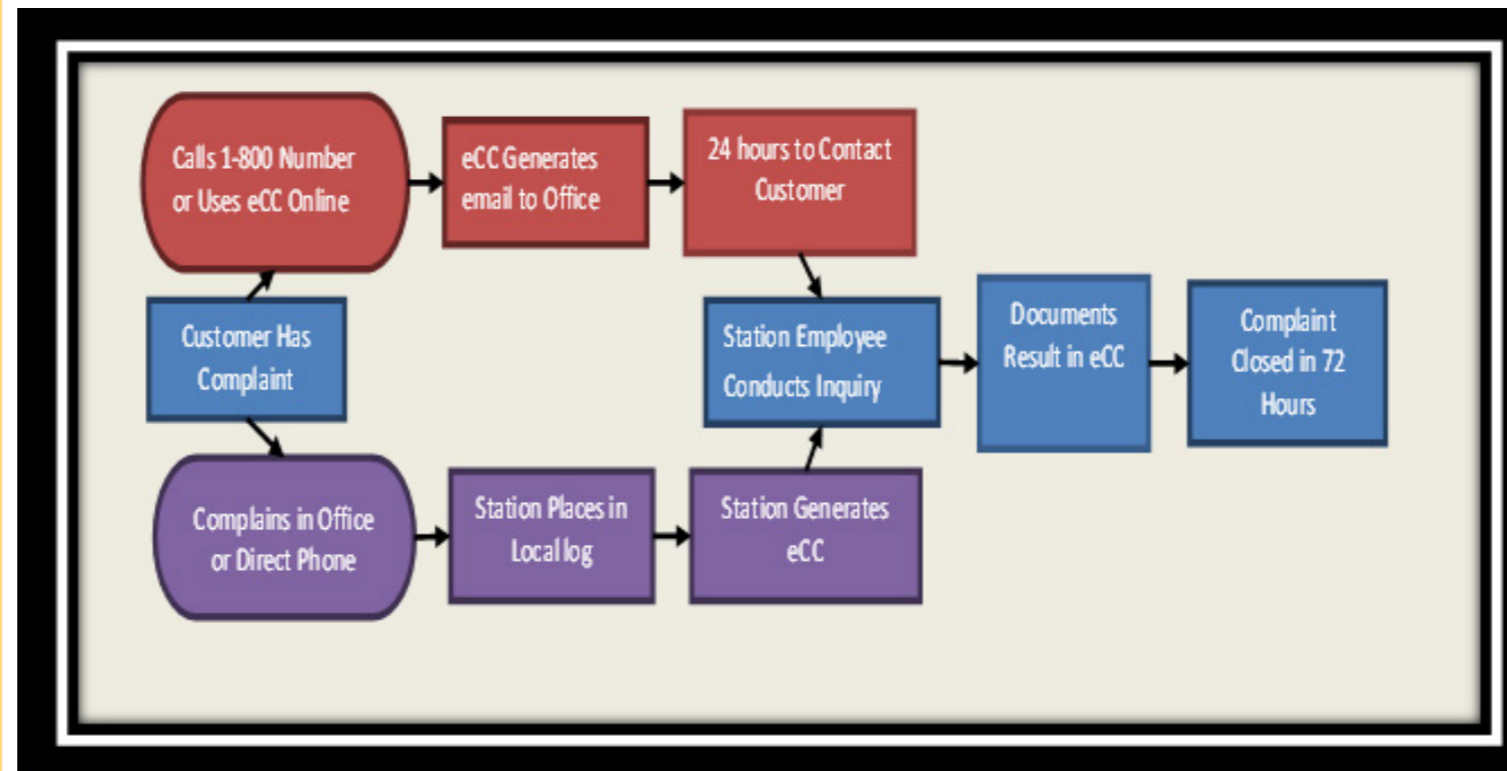
The OIG did not identify any prior audits or reviews related to the objective of this audit.

Chart 1. Timeline for Complaint Response



Source: The OIG analysis based on information from Postal Service district management and Postal Service policy.<sup>19</sup>

Chart 2. Customer Complaint and Resolution Process



Source: OIG analysis based on information from Postal Service district management and Postal Service complaint processing policy.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Management Instruction [PO-160-2014-1](#).

## Appendix C: Management's Comments

DISTRICT MANAGER  
RIO GRANDE DISTRICT



June 30, 2016

SHERRY FULLWOOD  
(A) DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Delivery and Customer Service Operations – Austin-McNeil Station  
(DR-AR-16-DRAFT)

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the OIG audit of Delivery and Customer Service Operations at the Austin McNeil Station. The Rio Grande District does generally agree with the recommendations made during this audit as they pertain to inaccurate and untimely mail delivery at the Austin McNeil Station. We do agree that there were significant deficiencies in the unit's mail delivery and customer service operations.

The instability of the station manager position contributed greatly to the lack of oversight and failure of approved processes for efficient and effective delivery and customer services.

Recommendation (1):

Ensure delivery unit and station management understand their responsibility for oversight of mail delivery and package scanning processes.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Rio Grande District agrees that every delivery unit and station manager should understand their responsibilities. McNeil Station supervisors no longer scan packages at the end of the day to avoid failures. The stabilization of unit management has contributed greatly to the accuracy of package scanning processes.

Rio Grande District re-issued the "Stop the Clock", Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) from the Southern Area with guidelines that have been developed to ensure service commitments are met. A copy of the SOP is attached.

Target Implementation Date:

June 30, 2016

Responsible Official:

Postmaster, Austin Post Office.

1 POST OFFICE DRIVE  
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78284-0001  
210-368-5548  
FAX: 210-368-1789



Recommendation (2):

Re-emphasize Postal Service policy to maintain a customer complaint log and address customer complaints promptly.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Rio Grande District agrees that every unit should maintain a customer complaint log and address customer complaints promptly. The deficiencies in delivery operations contributed greatly to the increase of customer complaints and dissatisfaction. Customer complaints have been reduced because these operational deficiencies have been addressed.

A reminder message was sent to the field to re-emphasize the requirement to complete a Customer Complaint Control Log as per the POM Exhibit 165.3 and adherence to postal policy outlined in Management Instruction PO-160-2015-1, Complaint Resolution.

Target Implementation Date:

June 15, 2016

Responsible Official:

Postmaster, Austin Post Office.

Recommendation (3):

Clarify the Rio Grande District's policy for resolving and closing customer complaints.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Rio Grande District agrees that the policy for resolving and closing customer complaints was not being properly followed at the Austin McNeil Station.

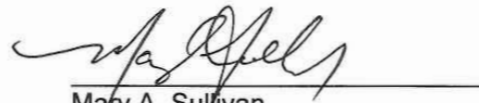
The current district instruction re-emphasizes the eCustomer Care Process via myPO outlining the responsibility, procedures, and techniques when handling customer's complaints. The process involves contacting the customer within 24 hours, acknowledging receipt of their inquiry and providing a quality resolution within a 72 hour period. However, some cases may require additional research to allow for a better customer experience thus eliminating potentially reopened cases. Weekly eCC telecons are held with various opportunity offices to provide guidance on how conduct a thorough investigation of the customer's concerns in order to provide a successful resolution.

Target Implementation Date:

June 15, 2016

Responsible Official:

District Manager, Marketing  
Postmaster, Austin Post Office



Mary A. Sullivan  
District Manager

Attachment

cc: Vice President, Delivery Operations  
Vice President, Southern Area  
Manager, Corporate Audit and Response Management



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