Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Old National Station, Atlanta, GA

AUDIT REPORT

OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR
GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

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UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

November 1, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: KEITH A. PIERLE
MANAGER, GEORGIA DISTRICT

FROM: Sean Balduff
Director, Field Operations

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property
Conditions Review – Old National Station, Atlanta, GA
(Report Number 22-181-2-R23)

This report presents the results of our audit of Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property
Conditions Review – Old National Station, Atlanta, GA.

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 & Exec VP
    Vice President, Delivery Operations
    Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
    Vice President, Processing and Maintenance Operations
    Vice President, Southern Area Retail & Delivery Operations

MAIL DELIVERY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND PROPERTY CONDITIONS REVIEW – OLD NATIONAL STATION, ATLANTA, GA
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Results

Background

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Old National Station in Atlanta, GA (Project Number 22-181-2). The Old National Station is in the Georgia District of the Southern Area and services ZIP Codes 30337 and 30349. These ZIP Codes serve about 78,238 people in a predominantly urban area.[1] We judgmentally selected the Old National Station based on the number of Stop-the-Clock (STC)[2] scans occurring at the delivery unit, rather than at the customer's point of delivery, and indicators for undelivered mail.[3]

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Old National Station in Atlanta, GA.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on five audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, truck arrival scans, arrow keys,[4] 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.[5] 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 mailpieces at the carrier cases and in the "Notice Left" area[6] and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in Table 1 with

management on October 14, 2022 and included their comments where appropriate.

The Old National Station is one of three delivery units[7] the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed during the week of August 29, 2022, that are serviced by the Atlanta Processing and Distribution Center. We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding the conditions we identified at the Old National Station. We will issue a separate report[8] that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all three delivery units. See Appendix A for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting mail delivery, customer service, and property conditions at the Old National Station. Specifically, we found issues with all five of the 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 August 29, 2022.

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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 76,693 (98.03 percent) are considered living in urban communities and about 1,545 (1.97 percent) are considered living in rural communities.
2   A scan event indicating that 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."
3   Undelivered mail metrics include Customer 360 inquiries, Informed Delivery inquiries, and undelivered routes.
4   A distinctively shaped key that 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 subject to strict controls.
5   Time of day that clerks have completed distributing mail to the carrier routes.
6   The area of a delivery unit where letters or packages that the carriers were unable to deliver are stored for customer pickup.
7   The other two units were McDonough Main Post Office, McDonough, GA (Project Number 21-181-1) and Stockbridge Main Post Office, Stockbridge, GA (Project Number 22-181-3).
8   Project Number 22-181.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of August 30, 2022, we identified about 2,770 pieces of delayed mail at 33 carrier cases. Specifically, we identified about 1,741 letters and 1,029 flats. In addition, unit management did not accurately report delayed mail in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)[9] system. While they reported 1,414 delayed letters and flats the previous day, this represented only 51.05 percent of the delayed mail we identified at the unit. See Figure 1 for examples of delayed mail found at carrier cases.

Figure 1. Examples of Delayed Mail in the Carrier Cases

Source: OIG photos taken August 30, 2022.

Why Did It Occur

We interviewed carriers and management who stated that much of the mail we identified in the cases was due to blocked mail receptacles and broken cluster boxes at apartment buildings. However, the mail was not properly identified as such when we observed it. In addition, management stated that some carriers were not using the 3M case[10] for missequenced mail, but instead were putting it back in their cases upon returning from their routes. Furthermore, the acting PM supervisor was not aware of the mail at the carrier cases to accurately report it in DCV because she did not do a walkthrough of the unit the previous evening. She stated that she was busy with other tasks, including preparing outgoing mail for distribution to the plant

and taking a vehicle to a carrier whose vehicle was having mechanical issues.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have ensured that all mail was processed and delivered daily and that any mail returned from a route was properly identified. Postal Service policy[11] states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required to report in DCV all mail that remains in a unit after the carriers have left for their street duties.[12]

Furthermore, carriers should place missequenced mail into the 3M case when they return from their routes.[13] A supervisor should review and report this mail on a 3M Daily Log and notify the appropriate operations support office.[14]

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.

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9   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.
10   The area of the delivery unit where carriers place their missent, missorted, and missequenced mail.
11   *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.
12   *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, March 2022.
13   *3M (Missent, Missort and Missequence) Standard Work Instruction: Carrier*, May 8, 2019.
14   *3M (Missent, Missort, and Missequence) Standard Work Instruction: Supervisor*, May 8, 2019.

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Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees improperly scanned packages at the delivery unit. In total, employees scanned 621 packages at the delivery unit between May and July 2022 (see Table 2). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 65.06 percent of these packages were scanned "Delivered." This data excludes scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as "Delivered - PO Box" and "Customer (Vacation) Hold" but, rather, represents scans performed at the delivery unit that should routinely be made at the point of delivery. In addition, we only included "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location" scans performed Monday through Friday to avoid legitimate scans for businesses that are closed on weekends.

In addition, on the morning of August 30, 2022, we selected 60 packages[15] to review and analyze scanning and tracking history. Of the 60 sampled packages, 20 (33.33 percent) had missing or improper scans, including:

- Eight (one from the carrier cases and seven from the "Notice Left" area) were scanned either "Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location," "Receptacle Full," or "No Secure Locations Available" and were scanned away from the delivery point. Four of these packages were scanned at the delivery unit. All packages are required to be scanned at the delivery point.

- Seven (one from the carrier cases and six from the "Notice Left" area) had "Delivered" scans, which should only be performed when the package is successfully left at the delivery point.

- Three from the carrier cases were missing STC scans to let the customer know the reason for non-delivery.

- Two from the carrier cases were scanned "Held at Post Office at Customer Request," even though the carrier stated that she could not access the mail receptacle.

Further, 13 of the 30 packages in the "Notice Left" area were not returned to the sender, as required.[16] These packages ranged from three to 97 days past their return dates.

Table 2. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	May	June	July	Total	Percentage
Delivered	131	162	111	404	65.06%
Delivery Attempted – No Access to Delivery Location	41	24	18	83	13.37%
Receptacle Full / Item Oversized	32	21	19	72	11.59%
No Secure Location Available	19	15	9	43	6.92%
Delivery Exception – Animal Interference	1	3	4	8	1.29%
Delivery Exception – Local Weather Delay	0	8	0	8	1.29%
No Authorized Recipient	1	0	1	2	0.32%
Refused	0	0	1	1	0.16%
Total	**225**	**233**	**163**	**621**	**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.

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15   We judgmentally selected 30 packages from the carrier cases before carriers arrived for the day and 30 packages from the "Notice Left" area.
16   *Notice Left and Return Guidelines*, dated July 2007, states that domestic packages should be returned to sender on the 15th calendar day after a notice is left and international packages should be returned to sender on the 30th calendar day after a notice is left.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning and handling procedures, as they were more focused on mail delivery. The acting station manager stated that many of the errors identified should have been caught when management reviewed the daily scanning reports.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have adequately monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance, including ensuring that carriers scanned packages at the delivery point and not at the delivery unit. The Postal Service's goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,[17] which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.[18] Packages in the "Notice Left" area should have been reviewed for second notices and returned to sender if they remained after the prescribed number of days.

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 mailpieces 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 Postal Service brand.

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17 *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.
18 *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.

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Finding #3: Truck Arrival Scanning

What We Found

Employees at the Old National Station did not scan all incoming trailer/truck barcodes[19] as required. We reviewed data related to morning truck arrival scans from May 1 to July 31, 2022 and found that employees did not perform scans for 117 of 234 (50 percent) scheduled inbound trips (see Table 3). We noted that truck arrival scanning improved significantly in June and July 2022. In addition, during our observation on August 31, 2022, the clerk did properly scan the truck.

Table 3. Truck Arrival Scans from May 1 through July 31, 2022

Month	Count of Inbound Trips	Count of Missed Scans	Percentage Missing
May	84	71	84.52%
June	83	30	36.14%
July	67	16	23.88%
Total	**234**	**117**	**50.00%**

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.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not monitor scan performance data to ensure that all trucks received an arrival scan. Specifically, management was not aware of any reports available for monitoring truck scanning performance.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have reviewed truck arrival tracking reports to ensure that employees were performing all expected truck scans. 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.

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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 (DU).*

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Finding #4 Arrow Keys

What We Found

Unit management did not properly manage and safeguard arrow keys. On the morning of August 31, 2022, we reviewed the unit's inventory log for arrow keys and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. We found that eight of the 87 keys at the unit were not listed on the inventory log and 11 keys listed on the inventory log could not be located. Unit management had not reported any of the missing keys to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. In addition, employees did not always keep arrow keys secure. Specifically, we observed instances where the █████ ██████████ was left open and unsupervised. In addition, when the ██████ was locked, the ███ was often kept in an ██████████████ next to the ███████

Why Did It Occur

Unit management did not prioritize the proper management of the arrow keys. Specifically, the acting station manager had only been at the unit for about one month and was more focused on mail delivery. In addition, the acting PM supervisor did not always keep the ████████████████ locked because she was busy with other tasks, such as sorting mail. Therefore, she sometimes left the ████████ open for carriers to return their arrow keys.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have ensured that arrow key security procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,[21] management must keep an accurate inventory of all keys and missing keys must be immediately reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. In addition, policy[22] states that arrow keys must remain secured until they are individually assigned to personnel. Upon return, arrow keys should be deposited in a secure location and a supervisor or clerk must verify all keys have been returned and accounted for daily.

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.

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21 *Administrative Support Manual* Issue 13, Sections 273.461, 273.464, and 273.471, July 1999 - updated through March 31, 2022.
22 *Standard Work: Arrow Key Accountability*, January 2022 and *USPS Arrow Key Standard Work*, January 2022.

Finding # 5: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found safety, security, and maintenance issues at the Old National Station, including:

- Exposed wiring in the customer lobby and work area (see Figure 2).

- Missing monthly inspections for all six fire extinguishers. Four were last inspected on June 21, 2021, and two did not have a monthly tag to identify their last inspection date. In addition, two fire extinguishers were not mounted on a wall.

- A refrigerator in the employee breakroom plugged into a surge protector, rather than into the wall.

- One blocked Inspection Service door (see Figure 3).

- No sign posted in the delivery unit employee parking lot stating that vehicles may be subject to search.

- An inoperable urinal in the men's restroom and toilet in the women's restroom.

- Three dirty air vents - one in the customer lobby and two in the workroom area (see Figure 4).

- A damaged ceiling in the workroom area near the P.O. Box section (see Figure 5).

- Damaged Postal Service signage and overgrown vegetation in front of the building (see Figure 6).

During our audit, management took corrective actions by covering the exposed wiring in the customer lobby, repairing the urinal in the men's restroom, and mowing the grass.

Figure 2. Examples of Exposed Wiring

Exposed Wires in the Customer Lobby
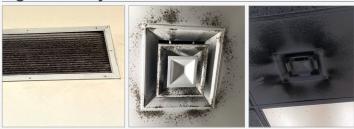
Exposed Wires Behind the Window Clerk Area

Source: OIG photos taken August 30, 2022.

Figure 3. Blocked Inspection Service Door

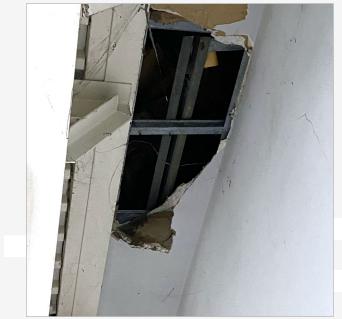Source: OIG photo taken August 30, 2022.

Figure 4. Dirty Air Vents

Source: OIG photos taken August 30, 2022.

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Figure 5. Damaged Ceiling

Source: OIG photo taken August 30, 2022.

Figure 6. Damaged Signage and Overgrown Vegetation

Source: OIG photos taken August 30, 2022.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not take the necessary actions to ensure that facility condition issues were corrected. Specifically, the acting station manager had only been at the unit for about one month and was not aware of several of the issues we identified, including the exposed electrical wires in the customer lobby and the issues with the fire extinguishers.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight of facility maintenance; reported safety, security, and maintenance issues as they arose; and followed up to ensure resolution. The Postal Service is required to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration

(OSHA) requires employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace free of recognized hazards.[23]

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to maintenance, safety, and security deficiencies can reduce the risk of injuries to employees and customers; reduce related costs, such as workers' compensation claims, lawsuits, and OSHA penalties; and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with all findings in the report. See Appendix B for management's comments in their entirety.

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23   OSHA Act of 1970 and Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook.*

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Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from August through November 2022 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 relied on computer-generated data from PTR, DCV, and the SVWeb database. Although we did not test the validity of the controls over these systems, we assessed the accuracy of the data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Appendix B: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 20, 2022

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response: Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property
Conditions Review – Old National Station, Atlanta, GA (Project Number 22-181-2-DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, *Mail Delivery, Customer Service, and Property Conditions Review – Old National Station, Atlanta, GA.*

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

Management has begun taking steps to address these five findings.

Keith Pierle
Manager, Georgia District

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

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