

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Postal Service makes play to stay in game

Alan Morrell
Staff writer

Post Comment

January 22, 2008 3:13 am — There was a time when, if you needed to send something somewhere, you used the post office.

Nowadays, e-mails have taken the place of letters, bill paying is done electronically, companies such as UPS and FedEx have cut into the package-delivery business and more income tax returns are filed electronically than by mail.

All of those challenges have greatly affected the post office. And the agency, which has not been an arm of the government since the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 nor received federal subsidies since 1983, has had to reinvent itself.

That's why in Rochester, postal officials have proposed closing five city branches, opening four new offices — only two of which would offer retail services, because the other two would be for carriers only — and upgrading a retail branch in Greece within the next two years.

"We're not the only game in town anymore," said Karen Mazurkiewicz, the western New York spokeswoman for the Postal Service. "We have a real need to grow revenue. If not, eventually we'll just price ourselves out of business."

'Most viable' sites

The realignment of postal branches is designed to place offices in areas where they are "most viable," Mazurkiewicz said. Postal officials said the changes would mean bigger, more modern buildings with better parking. Opponents are worried that the Postal Service is abandoning low-income people who would not be able to get to the new locations.

"From what I've seen in my career, the Postal Service has deserted, especially in the Northeast, the city centers," said Jim Bertolone, president of the American Postal Workers Union Local 215. "If we're not there, our competitors will be there. You can bet that UPS will be there."

The proposed consolidation of two branches in northwest Rochester could cause problems for residents of the Maplewood and Edgerton neighborhoods, said Cindy Kaleh, president of the Maplewood Neighborhood Association and a recent appointee to the Monroe County Legislature. Many postal customers there walk to their local post offices, and some would not be able to get to new sites easily, she said.

Putney Nix of Greece, a former city resident, said the Postal Service already hurt the city when it moved its local headquarters from downtown to Henrietta in 1977. Nix said he vastly prefers paying his bills by mail instead of online.

"I'm an old-school guy, not good with the computer," he said. "I don't trust computers with my bills. Everything I do is by mail."

Modern approach

In 2006, President Bush signed into law the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. The law was drafted to respond to what the Postal Service called its outdated business model and to provide a more modern approach to competition.

That meant a slew of changes throughout the Postal Service, said Rochester Postmaster Karl Anderson, including newer, upgraded facilities; improved parking for customers and employees; the use of new technology for post office operations and retail operations; and adding more retail counters.

Net loss of \$5.1 billion

Last year, the Postal Service posted a net loss of \$5.1 billion, according to its annual report. In the two previous years, the Postal Service posted net income of \$900 million in 2006 and \$1.4 billion in 2005. Most of the loss reported for 2007 was due to the 2006 law, which assigned escrow funding that the Postal Service had set aside, along with an additional \$5.4 billion payment, to a new retiree health benefits fund.

With cost-costing measures at the forefront, consolidating some offices was a natural progression, Anderson said during a meeting in Greece last week where the following proposals were discussed.

Some specifics

The Postal Service has no choice but to close the Midtown office, he said, because Midtown Plaza will be demolished to make way for PAETEC's new world headquarters.

Retail operations from Midtown would be combined with those from the Cumberland Street office near downtown, which would close, and move to a new location.

The branch in the federal building would close, he said, because security screenings mandated after the 2001 terrorist attacks make it difficult for customers to enter the building.

Postal officials also called the branch at the intersection of Dewey Avenue and West Ridge Road "substantially inadequate" because of its small, cramped size and lack of parking, and plans are on the table to find a new location and combine it with the office at Dewey and Lexington avenues.

The plan being studied for the Rochester area would create two new "carrier annexes," where postal workers sort mail before delivery but there are no retail operations. The plan also would open three new retail sites and would renovate the Ridgemont Plaza office, which then would offer only retail service.

Offices down nationwide

Changes are being undertaken throughout the country, Mazurkiewicz said. According to the national report, the Postal Service had 27,276 post offices throughout the United States in 2007, down from 27,318 the year before. Decreases also were reported in classified branches, classified stations, carrier annexes and "community post offices."

"We're constantly repositioning ourselves," she said.

\$21M local investment

The Postal Service would invest about \$21 million in the Rochester area, Mazurkiewicz said. A consultant who presented the plan, Keith LaShier of Colorado-based LaShier & Associates, said no funding has yet been approved to buy land.

Bertolone, the union president, said the Postal Service should use space in the old Sibley's building downtown to serve the Midtown Plaza customers.

He also praised city efforts in the 1990s which prompted the Postal Service to open a Priority Mail Center — now called a Logistics and Distribution Center — on Lyell Avenue.

"That's what the city needs," Bertolone said.

"They don't need (the Postal Service) to abandon the northwest part of the city."

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2. Largest Postal Unions Sue to Block IG's Access to Medical Records

January 22, 2008

The two largest unions of United States Postal Service workers have filed a lawsuit in federal court in New York to stop the USPS inspector general's office from obtaining postal workers' medical records. The IG's office is investigating employees' use of leave, and it is giving health care providers a letter that states a worker's health information can and should be turned over without notifying the individual because the IG's office is a health oversight agency entitled to the information, adding that notice to the worker "would likely jeopardize our oversight activities." The two plaintiff unions in *National Association of Letter Carriers, et al. v. United States Postal Service and United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General*, No. 08-CV 00458, together represent 482,000 USPS workers. Their lawsuit was filed Jan. 17.

William H. Young, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, wrote Sept. 27 to James C. Miller III, chairman of the USPS Board of Governors, saying he was "shocked" to learn that IG inspectors are obtaining workers' entire medical files with the letter. Privacy safeguards in the HIPAA law (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) forbid obtaining this data without notification of the employee, Young wrote. Wendy A. Hocking, secretary of the Board of Governors, responded with a letter dated Nov. 2 that said the IG office's actions are within its statutory authority, so the board will take no action.

The lawsuit says the IG's office started this practice in 2006. Previously, it acquired any personal medical information it needed from the workers, not their health care providers, the suit states. The current practice violates both HIPAA and the Privacy Act of 1974 and should be enjoined from continuing it, the lawsuit states.

3. Postal 'delays' due to seasonal rush: Ali

Published: Tuesday, 22 January, 2008, 01:29 AM Doha Time

Staff Reporter

Q-Post has said it was delivering and dispatching mails and other articles as early as possible in the prevailing circumstances.

Responding to complaints from several customers, especially expatriates, that a number of their mails, meant to be delivered during the Christmas and New Year celebration period, were delayed by about two to three weeks, Q-Post chairman Ali Mohamed al-Ali said no one had brought such complaints to his notice until yesterday.

It is true that there was some delay in the delivery of some packets during the Christmas and New Year period, he said.

"Delays are usual as we have to cope with a torrent of mails and parcels during such occasions," he said. Sometimes, the staff finds it difficult to cope with the seasonal rush, added the chairman.

The Q-Post chairman said most of the parcels had to be handled manually to ensure that no contraband or prohibited materials entered the country through its postal system. "We have a computerised sorting machine for letters," he said. When pointed out that there were also complaints from customers about inordinate delays in the dispatch of letters to some countries, the chairman said the Q-Post had accorded maximum priority to international mails and had taken all steps to ensure their speedy dispatch. "The delay could be perhaps because of some problems at the receiving end," he said. Gulf Times Newspaper, 2008

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4. Nigeria: Nipost Intercepts 2,500 Fake Passports

21 January 2008
Posted to the web 21 January 2008

Betrand Nwankwo

The security measures put in place by the Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST) to check the activities of fraudsters have started yielding results, as it has intercepted 2,500 fake passports meant for shipment overseas. Similarly, NIPOST also intercepted 4,000 scam letters and parcels meant for shipment abroad between October and December last year.

Postmaster-general of federation (PMG), Mallam Ibrahim Mori Baba, disclosed this at the weekend while speaking on the occasion to mark this year's Pan African Postal Union (PAPU).

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5. Study finds Postal Service gets no edge

1/18/2008, 4:33 p.m. EST
By RANDOLPH E. SCHMID
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After listening to complaints that being part of government gives the Postal Service a competitive advantage, Congress directed the Federal Trade Commission to investigate.

Turns out, just the opposite is true.

Yes, there are advantages to being part of the government, but they are outweighed by limitations and restrictions on government agencies, the FTC found.

Indeed, federally imposed restraints on the post office's operations increase its costs to provide competitive products by an estimated \$330 million to \$782 million a year, the FTC said.

At the same time, the post office's benefits from being part of government help it by an estimated \$39 million to \$117 million a year, according to the study.

Congress called for the study in the new law governing postal operations signed by President Bush in December 2006. The agency's competitors have long claimed they are at a disadvantage because the post office doesn't have to pay state and local taxes, for example.

That's true, and there are other advantages, the FTC said, but they are more than balanced by the disadvantages.

Advantages for the post office include:

- _Immunity from state and local taxes.

- _Limits on lawsuits against government agencies.

Exemptions from many state and local zoning and land use rules.

- _Ability to borrow from federal funds.

Drawbacks for the post office include:

- _Labor law restrictions, including inability to reduce fringe benefits.

- _Higher retirement benefit costs than private firms.

- _The obligation to serve everyone in the country six days a week.

- _Restrictions on closing post offices and other facilities.

- _Pricing subject to review by an independent commission.

- _Requirements to fly mail to rural locations in Alaska.

- _Restraints on investing.

6. Royal Mail Could Be Split Further

20 January 2008 by Mark White - © Hellmail.co.uk
rmvan.jpg

Every now and then, someone somewhere tries to draw a comparison between the Miners strike and the seeming endless bitterness between some workers at Royal Mail and Chief Executive Adam Crozier although increasingly it seems to be directed at CWU leader Billy Hayes and the Postal Executive for what some regard as a complete 'sell out'. Sell out or not, the motion to modernise and move Royal Mail towards a more efficient commercial basis was carried and realistically with the whole of Europe now adopting the liberalisation of postal services, Royal Mail was not in a position to stand still.

Whilst it might make for sensationalist writing and encourage a sense of solidarity against the 'capitalist oppressors', any comparison to the Miners strike is way off the mark. I was born in the Black Country and the 2007 postal dispute bore little if any comparison to the fight to keep pits open. There are still families that don't talk to each other and for what? The pits closed and that was that. The fight may have been a fierce one but Mothers didn't want their young sons going down mines. It was a dirty, dangerous job to say the least and it was costing more to dig it out than it was to import it. Collecting and delivering post may be physical work, but it doesn't compare with the infiltration of coal dust into peoples homes and their lungs.

That said, tradition can be a powerful thing, evident at the rally on Saturday with a long line of trade union banners as other areas joined forces to show support for postal workers at Burslem. The minimal coverage of the event in the press may have much to do with so much of our manufacturing gone and traditional forms of employment replaced by tele-sales centres and large retail outlets. These days, people see marches and demonstrations as trouble and more trouble and have seen their own trades carved up or else dispensed with altogether long ago. Little wonder that most just shrug their shoulders and journalists go in search of other stories. We live in a country where ministerial leaders can be incompetent and yet keep their jobs. That whole ethos filters down through the population. In short, no one cares.

In the meantime, the postal regulator Postcomm is embarking on its next major shake-up of the postal network as it solicits opinion from all postal operators on how best to reshape the market to further encourage more competition. Somehow, I still think postal workers have their eye completely off the ball. The dispute last year was at root, the result of sweeping changes across Europe but most settled on laying the blame squarely at Royal Mail Chairman Allan Leighton's door - much to the glee of Royal Mail's competitors who promptly went into overdrive capitalising on Royal Mail's sudden inability to deliver.

CWU leader Billy Hayes who at the start of last year's dispute was apparently geared up to go for the jugular, now seems resigned to massive change and has apparently faded into the background. Postal workers are already talking about a replacement for him. The Socialist Worker has switched attention from postal workers to other public sector workers - the postal strike ceasing to be a potential political goldmine any more.

Last years dispute, seemingly solid when at its most vocal, appears to have been based on fickle loyalties and Royal Mail simply sang the same tune until the dispute fell apart. Some may never come to accept the result of the final ballot on the modernisation of Royal Mail but the wheels have already picked up speed and change is being rolled out across the network.

I still strongly believe that a postal service is better served under state ownership but if we are to commercialise it, lets get it right. It should run efficiently yes, but at the same time it would be foolhardy to put all our eggs into one digital communications basket. Whether Royal Mail will be forced to split its collections and deliveries operations in order to further open up the market is yet to be seen but my guess is that it will be. Rivals will be keen to see a widening of opportunity and until the service is broken up further, competition will be limited at best.

© Hellmail.co.uk (20 January 2008)

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Monday, 21st January 2008

7. Maltapost privatisation latest red-letter day in postal history

The successful sale to the public of government shares in Maltapost is the latest salient episode in Malta's postal history which, some researchers say, is unrivalled by any other country of an equivalent size.

Despite the lack of precise knowledge on the origins of mail in Malta, the work of a number of dedicated postal historians has contributed towards piecing together information that can enlighten postal enthusiasts on the happenings throughout the centuries, going back to the Order of St John.

The notable dates that follow have been sourced from the limited edition publication of 500 copies entitled The Malta Stamp Collection 1964 - 2004, issued by Maltapost plc. Acknowledgement is due to the late Anthony Fenech who wrote the chapter entitled Stamping Our Mark On The World.

Prior to 1530: Business letters carried privately for a fee by masters of small sailing vessels such as the Speronara (featured on the 7c European 1979 issue) between Malta and Sicily.

Circa 1532: Earliest known letter from the period of the Knights from Grand Master L'Isle Adam to the Bishop of Auxerre dated June 14, 1532.

Circa 1708: The high cost of running a postal service prompts the Order's Treasury to establish a fixed postal tariff based on the weight, the number of sheets in a folder and the destination of a letter.

July 20, 1708: A commission proposes that the Grand Master appoints a Commissary of Post to be responsible for the running of the postal service. Such a postal service

seems to have been carried out in Piazza Tesoreria from a building serving as La Casa del Comun Tesoro in Republic Street now housing the Casino Maltese.

Circa 1755-1791: First postal marking hand stamps recorded on Maltese mail; the MARS mark thought to be an abbreviation for Marseilles.

June 18, 1798: During his short stay during the French Occupation of Malta, Napoleon focused his attention on the financial sector of the postal services and a decree was issued in which article 13 contemplated the reorganisation of the post in a manner to cover expenses through a charge on postal matter.

October 7, 1799: Alexander Ball issues a notice from his headquarters in San Anton Palace, stating the setting up of a regular mail delivery service and reserving a few rooms in San Anton to be used as a post office. The notice also stated that mail would be conveyed by boat to Sicily every Thursday.

July 3, 1806: A Packet Service was established to carry mail from England to Gibraltar and Malta through privately-owned vessels on contract to the Post Office sailing from Falmouth on the first Wednesday of each month.

August 20, 1806: The first Packet Boat arrived in Malta.

February 1807 onwards: The earliest hand stamps used by the British Packet Agent in Malta date from this time and consisted of the word MALTA in cursive script within a curved box.

Circa 1841: The Packet Office, which together with the Island Post Office had operated from rooms at the Casa del Comun Tesoro, was transferred to 197, Strada Mercanti, Valletta.

April 1, 1849: The Island Post Office is also relocated to 197 Strada Mercanti and the two offices commence operations under Richard James Bouchier as Postmaster.

June 8, 1853: A notice issued heralded the commencement of an experimental free daily postal service as from June 10, 1853 for letters and newspapers between Valletta, Cospicua, Vittoriosa, Senglea, the Casals and the island of Gozo by daily post.

August 1857: A supply of British stamps was sent to Malta and this was made available to the public later that month.

September 1857: □ The first of three types of M hand stamps known to exist was sent to Malta from London.

February/March 1858: A Post Office Notice of February 1, 1858 by order of the Postmaster General, John S. Coxson, stated that the prepayment of postage on letters would be compulsory from March 1, 1858 onwards.

November 16, 1860: Malta Government Gazette No. 2061 dated November 16, 1860 announces the forthcoming daily delivery of inland mail in Valletta, Floriana and Sliema.

December 1, 1860: A red-letter day in the annals of the Malta Post Office signifying the birth of the first Maltese postage stamp, the Queen Victoria Half-Penny Yellow, which could be purchased from the Post Office, police stations and at principal stationers.

July 1, 1875: Malta joins the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

November 1, 1880: Roger Duke given the title of Imperial Postmaster and assumes Superintendence of the Island Post Office.

Circa 1883: The British Imperial government consents to the transfer to the Post Office to the control of the local government.

January 1, 1885: Roger Duke appointed Postmaster under the new law for a period of one year. UK postage stamps were no longer valid for payment of postage on correspondence posted in Malta and Gozo.

January 1, 1886: Ferdinando Vincenzo Inglott succeeds Roger Duke as Postmaster.

May 17, 1886: The General Post Office starts functioning from its new leased headquarters in Palazzo Parisio, in Strada Mercanti.

Circa 1891: Police stations in 27 mainland villages were permitted to sell postage stamps thus becoming postal agents.

1894: As part of its re-organisation to improve postal services, the General Post Office creates postal districts and re-classifies letter carriers and auxiliaries into First Class and Second Class Postmen who were also given a personal hand stamp to mark all letters on the back before delivery.

September 13, 1897: The first hand stamp bearing the name Valletta CO was introduced.

August 1899: Five values of the postage stamps of 1885 issued for fiscal use.

July 10, 1900: 28 single circular date stamps are despatched to Malta from the GPO in London for use in the villages in Malta and Gozo.

1903-14: Various stamp issues were released between these dates, notably; the King Edward VII head issues of 1903-04, 1904-06 and 1907-11 showing the profile of the king. King George V definitive stamps were not issued until 1914 when the King Edward VII stamps ran out.

March 1919: The GPO released for sale the 10/- Black Stamp inscribed Postage And Revenue, depicting St Paul's Shipwreck, nowadays considered by philatelists as Malta's rarest and most expensive stamp in a Malta collection.

1921: The Post Office set-up was reorganised towards the latter part of 1921 where all the village hand stamps were withdrawn.

1922: The Melita Definitives set of postage stamps to commemorate self-government to Malta in 1921 was issued.

1931: Direct flights from Malta become possible.

1935-1963: The Malta Post Office issued various commemorative stamps, which were also emulated by a good many British colonies.

April 24, 1942: Palazzo Parisio, the headquarters of the General Post Office, is hit by enemy action and the GPO transfers its activities to Hamrun primary school at Villambrosa Street.

1954-1981: After World War II life started returning to normal and in less than a decade the Post Office had to start expanding its network to deal with the deluge of correspondence and the growing demand for its services. Branch post offices were opened permanently in various localities.

September 1957-1979: Over a 23-year period, artist Emvin Cremona designed some of the most noteworthy Maltese stamps covering historical events, renowned Maltese and foreign personalities, purely abstract forms and 16 Christmas sets comprising 62 sets of stamps.

November 12, 1963: The Parcel Post Office is relocated to a new building in Victory Square, Valletta.

July 4, 1973: After 87 years housed within Palazzo Parisio in Merchants Street, the General Post Office is relocated to the Auberge d'Italie and the Central Mail Room, the registered letter branch and the Poste Restante were relocated to the previous Garrison Chapel, Castille Place, which now houses the Malta Stock Exchange.

1994: The British Postal Consultancy Service recommends to the Malta Government that the postal services should be run commercially.

October 1, 1995: Posta Ltd is set up to run the General Post Office.

October 1997: The Parcel Post Office, the Central Mail Room, the Philatelic Bureau and the Postal Administration were transferred to 305, Qormi Road, Marsa. The Valletta counter services start to operate from Dar Annona in Castille Place.

May 1, 1998: Postal services, run by Posta Ltd, a private limited company, are taken over by a new public limited company Maltapost plc.

January 31, 2002: Maltapost plc is partially privatised with the Maltese government selling 35 per cent to Transend Worldwide Ltd, a subsidiary company of New Zealand Post Ltd with a view to prepare the company to meet the EU postal directives and further liberalisation of the postal market.

September 6, 2007: The government sells 25 per cent of its shareholding to Lombard Bank plc where Lombard Bank effectively became the majority shareholder in Maltapost plc with 60 per cent shareholding. The government undertakes to sell to the public the remaining 40 per cent of shares it owns by floating them on the Malta Stock Exchange.

January 8, 2008: The government announces the sale of 40 per cent of its shareholding in Maltapost in an initial public offering.

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8. Decisions on ZIP code changes awaited

Oxnard facility might take over mail processing

From staff reports
Monday, January 21, 2008

Postal officials expect to announce soon whether an Oxnard regional postal facility will take over the processing of mail headed for addresses in the Conejo Valley area.

The U.S. Postal Service is considering the change, which would be effective July 1 and would require assigning new ZIP codes for 57,941 street addresses and 3,895 post office boxes in the cities and unincorporated areas of Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village and Newbury Park.

Mail for those areas is processed at a regional facility in Santa Clarita.

A decision to change has not been made yet, said Richard Maher, a spokesman for the Postal Service. He said an announcement is likely "within the next few weeks."

"To move processing from one facility to another, we do have to change the ZIP code," Maher said, emphasizing that it would not be practical to shift the work to Oxnard while retaining the current ZIP codes.

"We do have a one-year transition period when we'll recognize both ZIP codes," he said. After that, first-class letters with the old ZIP codes would still be delivered although they would be delayed.

The proposed change is intended to control transportation costs and save time by slicing 35 miles off the distance trucks must travel to the post offices in Thousand Oaks and Newbury Park.

"It's going to save us money and cut down on the time it takes to get the mail to Thousand Oaks," Maher said. "We feel like we'll be able to get it to the post office earlier in the day."

The Oxnard Processing and Distribution Facility, 2901 Camino del Sol, is a 400,000-square-foot facility that opened in 1991. It operates 24 hours a day with three shifts, totaling about 250 employees, he said.

Postal authorities "have been looking at this transportation issue for a while. With the cost of gasoline and 35 miles difference on every truck and every trip, that makes a difference."

Each day, postal trucks make 12 to 15 round trips between the regional mail processing facility and the post offices in Thousand Oaks and Newbury Park, he said.

"We have the capacity at Oxnard to absorb that," Maher said. "Oxnard has a lot of capacity."

If the change is made, postal customers will be notified by mail, he said. The change would affect people whose ZIP codes for street delivery are 91320, 91360, 91361 and 91362, and those whose ZIP codes for P.O. box delivery are 91319, 91358 and 91359.

Those interested in contacting the Postal Service about the issue can write to USPS Consumer Affairs Office, 28201 Franklin Parkway, Santa Clarita, CA 91383.

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