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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

JUN 19 1974

Mr. Edward V. Dorsey
Senior Assistant Postmaster
General for Operations
U. S. Postal Service



Dear Mr. Dorsey:

During the 1973 Christmas season, we reviewed postal operations at eight large post offices. Since one of our objectives was to ascertain how well mail was processed, we conducted a test mailing between the cities served by the eight post offices and used this data to analyze delivery performance. We believe that the data obtained in our analysis of the test mailing would be useful in your current re-evaluation of the Origin-Destination Information System (ODIS).

Specifically, our analysis indicates that ODIS may overstate mail delivery performance. Our computations, based upon posted collection times and actual delivery to the addressee, showed that 1,380, or 37 percent, of the 3,729 test letters were not received within delivery standards. By applying the criteria used for ODIS, the measurement of delivery performance from postmark date to the time the letter reaches the carrier, only 1,067, or 29 percent, of the test letters would have been counted late. The most prominent factor contributing to this disparity was 282 letters which had delayed postmarks; that is, postmarks considerably later than should be reasonably expected based on posted collection times. Of the 282 letters, the Service would have counted 167 letters on time using ODIS criteria. The remaining 115 letters, however, were delivered so late that they still would have been counted late under ODIS despite the delayed postmark.

To illustrate the problems of delayed postmarks, we mailed eight letters in a mailbox in Chicago, Illinois, at 8:00 a. m., December 12, 1973. The next collection time posted on the mailbox was 10:30 a. m., December 12, 1973. Four of the letters were properly postmarked December 12, 1973; three were postmarked December 13, 1973; and one was not postmarked. One letter which had a delayed postmark was one day late, but would

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have been counted as on-time under ODIS. Similar situations occurred in each of the post offices.

The variance between the two methods of measuring our test mailing is shown below. The results using our computation procedure are shown as Method 1 and the results using the ODIS computation procedure are shown as Method 2. Also shown, for reference, are the published results of ODIS tests for similar type mail performed during the same period as our test mailings.

Percentage of mail delivered within standards to

| <u>Mailed from</u> | <u>Overnight areas</u> | | | <u>Two-day areas</u> | | | <u>Three-day areas</u> | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | <u>Method</u> | <u>Method</u> | <u>ODIS</u> | <u>Method</u> | <u>Method</u> | <u>ODIS</u> | <u>Method</u> | <u>Method</u> | <u>ODIS</u> |
| | 1 | 2 | ODIS | 1 | 2 | ODIS | 1 | 2 | ODIS |
| Chicago | 33 | 39 | 71 | 50 | 52 | 72 | 77 | 80 | 82 |
| Dallas | 71 | 72 | 82 | (a) | (a) | 83 | 74 | 75 | 77 |
| Denver | 66 | 82 | 89 | (a) | (a) | 80 | 69 | 71 | 75 |
| Detroit | 75 | 88 | 91 | 30 | 41 | 54 | 49 | 64 | 66 |
| New York | 42 | 74 | 51 | 55 | 64 | 80 | 55 | 67 | 79 |
| Philadelphia | 56 | 67 | 90 | 66 | 79 | 75 | 64 | 68 | 75 |
| San Francisco | 57 | 64 | 96 | (a) | (a) | 75 | 60 | 61 | 76 |
| Washington, D. C. | 86 | 91 | 95 | 72 | 74 | 77 | 74 | 77 | 77 |

(a) No letters mailed to two-day areas from these locations.

Other significant data obtained from our test mailings follow:

- 331 of the 3,729 test letters were not postmarked or had unreadable postmarks, and of these, 123 were late.
- 67 of the 469 letters mailed within overnight delivery areas were delivered two or more days late.
- 171 of the 775 letters mailed between two-day delivery areas were delivered two or more days late.
- 418 of the 2,485 letters mailed between three-day delivery areas were delivered two or more days late.
- 82 letters were identified as having been missent.

While we recognize that our test was conducted during the Christmas period when the Service was experiencing peak mail volumes, we believe

the problems noted are basic to ODIS, and should be considered by the Service during the current re-evaluation of ODIS.

We hope this information will be of value to you. Our staff is available to discuss any questions you may have.

Sincerely yours,


John Landicho
Associate Director