

GAO

Report to the Honorable
Frank R. Wolf, House of Representatives

POSTAL SERVICE

Progress Made in Restoring Deteriorated Northern Virginia Mail Service



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General Government Division

B-235008

June 16, 1989

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Wolf:

To respond to your February 17, 1988, request we have reviewed the status of mail delivery operations in northern Virginia. The number of postal complaints being filed by customers in the area indicated a widespread degradation of mail services. You expressed concern that actions taken by the Postal Service to improve mail delivery service would not be long-lasting in view of the rapid and continuing growth in population and economic development of the area.

Results in Brief

The Postal Service allowed mail delivery services at post offices in northern Virginia to become a major management problem before taking corrective action. The Postal Service could not keep mail deliveries current because (1) the number of deliveries and mail volume increased and (2) there were not enough people to process and deliver mail. The Postal Service responded in November 1987 by sending "Action Teams" (employees from other post offices) to northern Virginia to

- deliver backlogged mail and
- identify and correct the underlying causes for the mail backlogs.

The manager of mail processing and delivery operations in northern Virginia, appointed in April 1988, adopted "Service to the Customer" as the theme for his primary goal of improving services. Actions he has taken and planned since his appointment demonstrate a strong commitment to restoring and maintaining an acceptable level of mail delivery services. Overburdened delivery routes have been adjusted and additional employees and vehicles have been made available. Customer complaints, as well as the volume of delayed mail, are on a downward trend.

Approach

We worked at the Management Sectional Center (MSC) in Merrifield, Virginia, and visited nine of the larger post offices reporting to the MSC. At the MSC we

- talked to the MSC manager and his top assistants about mail processing and delivery operations,
- analyzed operational reports on workload and personnel, and

-
- examined budgets and related expenditures for the current fiscal year (1989) and 3 prior years.

With selected postmasters, we discussed past and current mail delivery operations and obtained resource and workload data on delivery operations. To look at the future demand for mail delivery services we used, without verification, forecasts prepared by the Postal Service and others. Appendix I contains detailed information on the results of our review and its objectives, scope, and methodology.

Progress Made in Restoring Deteriorated Mail Services

By the fall of 1987 the Postal Service had allowed mail delivery conditions at post offices in northern Virginia to deteriorate to an unacceptable level. Customer complaints were abundant and some post offices could no longer, even with significant amounts of overtime, keep pace with daily mail deliveries. In November 1987, "Action Teams" of employees from other post offices were sent to northern Virginia to deliver backlogged mail and to identify and correct the underlying causes of delivery problems. The mail backlog was eliminated by December 1987 and hiring of additional employees was started to relieve overburdened delivery routes. Previously, the total number of employees was frozen at the number on the rolls as of March 28, 1987, and route adjustments were not allowed.

The Action Teams were a temporary expedient to avoid a collapse of the mail delivery system in northern Virginia. They left the area in March 1988, shortly before the appointment of a new manager.

The present manager, appointed in April 1988, had gained experience in another high-growth area—Phoenix, Arizona. He made "Service to the Customer" the theme for his primary goal of improved service. Additional employees have been hired, overburdened delivery routes (too much mail or too many delivery stops for an 8-hour work day) are being adjusted, and postmasters and supervisors have been given additional training in standard operating procedures.

By the fall of 1988, the volume of delayed mail at some of the larger post offices was substantially less than it was in 1987, and customer complaints were down by more than 200 percent from their peak in 1987.

In January 1989 the MSC manager sought and secured an increased budget for fiscal year 1989 within 4 months after the start of the year.

Budgeted expenses for 1989, as approved by the Richmond Division in September 1988, had been only 2 percent above 1988 actual expenses. Estimated spending for 1989 is 11.5 percent above the planned budget, or 13.5 percent more than 1988 actual expenses.

In justifying the revised spending level, the manager told his Regional Postmaster General that estimated expenses were reduced where such reductions would not jeopardize service or cause even greater future costs. The estimated increase for 1989 (13.5 percent) is consistent with actual increases in 1987 and 1988.

In March 1989, the manager furnished us fiscal year 1989 data showing that

- overnight delivery performance improved by 8 percent over the same 4-week period in 1988, and
- the volume of letter mail not ready for shipment at scheduled times was 84 percent less than volume for the same 5 months in fiscal year 1988.

Conclusions

In April 1988, the Postal Service appointed a new manager who made improved service to the customer his primary goal. This commitment is currently being fulfilled. However, on the basis of future population forecasts by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the demand for mail delivery services in northern Virginia will not reverse its growth trend during the next decade. The Postal Service must make provisions to handle this growth through realistic planning and commitment of sufficient resources. If such provisions are not made, mail delivery service problems similar to those in the past will recur.

Comments of the Postmaster General

By letter dated May 10, 1989, the Postmaster General informed us that this report accurately describes both the mail delivery problems experienced in northern Virginia and the corrective actions taken. (See app. II.) He said that actions taken are proving effective, and emphasized that the situation leading to the service deterioration identified in the report will not be allowed to recur.

As you requested, we plan no further distribution of the report until 30 days from its date unless you publicly release its contents earlier. At that time, we will send copies to the Postmaster General; the Regional Postmaster General, Eastern Region; and the General Manager/Post-

master, Northern Virginia Division. We will also send copies to other interested parties upon request.

The principal contributors to this report are listed in appendix III. If you have any questions concerning this report, please call me on 275-8676.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Nye Stevens". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

L. Nye Stevens
Director, Government Business
Operations Issues

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Abbreviations

COG	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
MSC	Management Sectional Center

Progress Made in Restoring Deteriorated Northern Virginia Mail Service

In the fall of 1987, mail delivery problems in northern Virginia had reached a point where customers filed large numbers of mail complaints because of delayed mail, late mail, misdelivered mail, and other service inadequacies. Critical articles in the local press appeared frequently. The increasing number of complaints directed to Congressman Frank Wolf's office prompted him to request the Postal Service to look into the delivery problems and take appropriate corrective action. Following a response from the Postmaster General in February 1988 detailing corrective actions, the Congressman requested that we assist him in determining whether improvements reported by the Postal Service were sufficient to bring mail service back and keep it at an acceptable level, considering the continuing growth in mail services.

Background

The northern Virginia Management Sectional Center (MSC), located in Merrifield, Virginia, processes all mail that originates in or has been sent to northern Virginia. The MSC is headed by a manager who is appointed and can be removed by the Postmaster General.

The U.S. Postal Service has 74 operating divisions.¹ An MSC reports to a division, which in turn reports to a regional office. The northern Virginia MSC is the largest of the four MSCs in the Richmond Division. The Richmond Division is one of 14 divisions in the Eastern Region. The Eastern Region, with headquarters in Philadelphia, includes 11 states and the District of Columbia.

The MSC has the overall administrative and operational responsibility for processing and delivering mail to about 1.8 million postal customers in an area covering about 4,000 square miles. This service area stretches from the Potomac River to the West Virginia border and south to Quantico, Virginia. Within the MSC area there are 155 post offices and branches.

The management sectional center concept of mail processing uses centralized processing of all mail collected from and/or destined to all post offices within the delivery area designated by ZIP code prefixes 220 to 223, and 226. This maximizes the use of equipment and personnel by taking all mail collected from and destined to post offices into a central

¹On January 14, 1989, the Northern Virginia MSC became a postal division office, with the manager assuming the Division General Manager/Postmaster position. Throughout this report we refer to the Division General Manager/Postmaster as the MSC manager, observing the organizational status in effect at the time of our review.

facility where mechanized and automated equipment can process mail more rapidly and economically than by manual methods.

The MSC operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to sort all incoming and outgoing mail (5.5 million pieces of mail daily or about 1.4 billion pieces annually). For nine large post offices, mail is sorted down to individual carrier routes at the MSC. These offices serve about 79 percent of the total addresses in northern Virginia.²

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The primary objective of our review was to assist Congressman Wolf in determining whether improvements reported to him by the Postal Service would be sufficient to restore mail service in northern Virginia and keep the service at an acceptable level. Specific objectives of the review were to:

- document the growth in demand for mail services as indicated by mail volume and number of deliveries,
- provide an estimate of future growth in mail delivery services,
- identify the service problems to be corrected by the improvement efforts, and
- determine the extent to which problems have been corrected.

To accomplish these objectives we worked at the MSC in Merrifield, and visited nine of the MSC's post offices. At the offices, we talked to Postmasters about past and current mail delivery conditions. We observed MSC mail delivery to the post offices and the sorting of mail for delivery by letter carriers. We identified actions taken by the Postal Service to correct mail delivery problems, such as recommended route adjustments and the approval of router positions in the delivery offices.³ For each post office visited, we prepared a data sheet showing the change in workload and resources over 2 fiscal years.⁴

At the MSC we discussed mail operations with personnel responsible for finances, city and field operations, delivery services, human resources, and marketing. We analyzed operational reports for fiscal years 1987 and 1988. Reported expenditures for fiscal years 1986, 1987, and 1988

²The offices are: Alexandria, Amandale, Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, Herndon, McLean, Springfield, and Vienna.

³Routers are letter carriers who sort mail for a number of delivery routes and do office activities associated with preparing mail for delivery.

⁴Our data covered the period September 27, 1986, to September 23, 1988.

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were compared to budgets. The 1988 expenditures were also compared to the 1989 budget. We looked at future population forecasts for the northern Virginia area and their relation to projected needs for mail service. From Postal Service management reports we gathered information on growth in mail deliveries and mail volume for fiscal years 1987 and 1988, and the projected growth for 1989.

We reviewed MSC documents presented to the Richmond Division management in a briefing on September 29, 1988. These briefing documents provided background on the history of mail problems in northern Virginia, and highlighted management actions and resources needed to bring operations into compliance with Postal Service standards.

We interviewed the MSC manager and the past two managers.

Our work was done during the period June 1988 to March 1989 and in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Demand for Mail Delivery Services— Past and Future

The northern Virginia area is a fast-growing area. According to estimates by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), growth in northern Virginia will continue.

COG issued a report in August 1988 forecasting employment, household, and population growth in the Washington area from 1985 to 2010.⁵ Table I.1 shows COG population forecasts for jurisdictions in the northern Virginia area. An increasing population affects the number of annual mail deliveries and mail volume.

Table I.1: Summary of Population Forecasts in Northern Virginia

	Population (Thousands)		Growth Rate (Percent)
	1985	2010	1985 - 2010
Loudoun County	65.8	210.9	220.6
Prince William County	176.1	342.8	94.6
Fairfax County	668.3	936.8	40.2
City of Falls Church	9.5	11.0	15.8
Arlington County	157.8	178.8	13.3
City of Alexandria	108.5	113.7	4.8
City of Fairfax	20.3	21.0	3.5

⁵Cooperative Forecasting: Round IV Technical Report-1988. Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Aug. 1988.

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As indicated in table I.1, the outer suburbs—Loudoun and Prince William Counties—are expected to experience the region's most dramatic growth.

The number of business establishments in northern Virginia also continues to grow. In August 1988 the Office Network, an alliance of leading commercial real estate companies in 11 countries, ranked the Washington, D.C., area first internationally for office space construction. In Fairfax County, new business licenses in 1988 exceeded those granted in 1987 by more than 1,800.

Over each of the last 10 years the northern Virginia MSC has faced increasing demand for mail delivery services. Between 1978 and 1988 the number of daily mail deliveries in northern Virginia increased by 38 percent, from 371,114 to 511,636. Over the same 10 years, mail delivery volume increased by 164 percent, from 2.8 to 7.4 million feet.⁶

In 1978 a letter carrier's work day averaged 8.4 hours to deliver 2,182 pieces of mail to 458 residents and businesses. By 1988 the average was 10.2 hours a day to deliver 4,097 pieces of mail to 437 delivery stops. This is an 88 percent increase in the daily volume of mail delivered by letter carriers. The average number of pieces of mail per delivery rose from 4.8 to 9.4 pieces between 1978 and 1988.

A delivery route at the Belleview station of the Alexandria Post Office illustrates the impact of this increase in mail volume. In 1980, the carrier for route 306 made 941 daily deliveries and had an expected delivery volume of 15.75 feet per day. In August 1988, route 306 had the same 941 deliveries but the expected daily delivery volume had grown to 42.5 feet.

COG and the Postal Service's own forecasts show no let-up in the future demand for mail delivery services. Table I.2 shows the actual volume and number of deliveries for the past 3 fiscal years, and projections for fiscal year 1989.

⁶The standard used by post offices in northern Virginia is 195 pieces of mail in 1 foot of mail.

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Table I.2: Northern Virginia Mail Volume and Deliveries, Fiscal Years 1986 to 1989

Fiscal Year	Deliveries	Volume (feet of mail)
1986	477,010	6,170,544
1987	490,859	6,772,986
1988	505,153	7,368,063
1989 (Projected)	518,034	7,614,570 ^a

^aThe 1989 totals were adjusted downward by the Richmond Division. The MSC estimated 7,974,731 feet of mail.

Available data show that the greatest future increase in demand for mail delivery services will be in Loudoun County. According to COG, Loudoun County will have a 220 percent increase in population from 1985 to 2010. Ashburn, located in northwest Loudoun County, is a small rural community presently experiencing a boom in housing and business construction. The small post office in Ashburn consists of one postmaster, one clerk, and one rural carrier. The one rural carrier served an average of 248 homes daily between 1978 and 1985. The MSC predicts that by the end of 1989 the Ashburn Post Office will be serving 2,800 homes and 300 businesses a day.

Proposed for construction near Dulles International Airport is a new mail processing facility to handle the rapid growth of the outer suburbs. The project, now in the planning stage, is scheduled for funding consideration in September 1989. Approval could mean an operating facility by 1991.

Demand for Delivery Services Exceeded Capacity

By the fall of 1987 some post offices in northern Virginia had reached the point where they could no longer, even with significant amounts of overtime, keep pace with daily mail deliveries. To stop the deterioration in mail service, the Richmond Division in November 1987 sent "Action Teams" of employees from other post offices to the northern Virginia MSC. The Action Teams were a "quick fix" to avoid a collapse of the mail delivery system in northern Virginia. They left the area in March 1988, shortly before the appointment of a new MSC manager.

The first priority of the Action Teams was to deliver backlogged mail. The second priority was to identify and correct the underlying causes for the mail backlogs. The teams were not limited to any specific amount of money in carrying out their duties. Through the use of overtime and unscheduled deliveries on Sundays and holidays, the mail backlog was eliminated by December 1987.

To correct the underlying causes of the backlogs, the teams identified delivery routes needing adjustment and accelerated the hiring of additional personnel. Before the Action Teams started work, hiring of additional letter carriers had been restricted by a limitation on total MSC employees. This restriction resulted in an immediate release of staff and minimal hiring of additional people from April to the fall of 1987.

During the first 9 months of fiscal year 1988, 91 route adjustments were completed, almost 8 times as many as in 1987. An additional 70 routes were approved for adjustment.

Conditions Did Not Occur Overnight

Conditions that made it difficult to keep pace with the growth in mail volume and deliveries were a long time in the making. They existed under all three of the recent MSC managers.

MSC Management Changes

There has been considerable instability in the northern Virginia MSC management during the past 2 years. The current manager has been in the job since April 1988; his predecessor was in the position for only 1 year before leaving. Table 1.3 shows the last three MSC managers.

Table 1.3: Northern Virginia MSC Managers From 1982 to 1989

	From	To
Gerald Merna	May 1982	March 1987
Carl Johnston	April 1987	April 1988
Leroy Brewer	April 1988	Present

Also effective April 1, 1987, was the reassignment of the Division General Manager/Postmaster of the Richmond Division.

Changing managers was not the only factor affecting management continuity at the MSC. A 1986 restructuring of postal field organizations also contributed to the MSC's instability. The restructuring resulted in top management positions being filled by temporary assignments. For example, one of the major MSC offices, the Office of City Operations, has had three different acting directors since 1987. The manager of the MSC at the time of the restructuring said several key personnel left for better job opportunities at division offices created by the restructuring. Stability was again affected in January 1988 by a realignment of MSC management functions in which nine management positions were lost.

In July 1988 only one of the six MSC directorates (Office of Finance) was headed by a permanent director. The remaining five offices were headed by acting managers. A permanent Director of Marketing was appointed in August, 1988.

In commenting on a draft of this report, the Regional Postmaster General said that the upgrade of the MSC to Division status enhances its ability to attract a highly qualified Director-level staff.

Hiring Freeze

In April 1987, the Richmond Division informed the MSC that the total number of employees could not exceed 5,687—the number on the rolls as of March 28, 1987. This hiring freeze kept total employment stable while the demand for services continued upward. (See table I.5 on p. 18.)

Shortly after his appointment, the manager who headed the MSC from April 1987 to April 1988 was told by the acting manager of the Richmond Division that

“The salary and benefit estimates for the remainder of the year . . . are not acceptable. The goal is to operate the remainder of this year within your remaining original planned salary and benefit dollars, regardless of the workload variances to plan. The key to achieving that result is to initiate positive actions which will ensure that better-than-planned productivity is consistently achieved.”

The manager was also told that his success would be measured against the provided targets (expenditures and number of employees) and that he would be held personally accountable for the achievement of the targets. The manager said he voluntarily left northern Virginia after 1 year because he could not get the job done with the resources provided.

Conditions Reported to GAO by Former Manager

The MSC manager from May 1982 to March 1987 provided us with documents showing that in February 1987 he informed the Regional Postmaster General of constraints that prevented the MSC from fully attaining its safety, service, and financial goals. As written by the manager, the constraints were

“Budget Constraints - we have never received a budget which is achievable and sufficient enough to handle the abnormality of mail volume.

Facility Capacity - severe lack of adequate space impedes service, productivity and

financial performance.

Accommodation of Growth - the Eastern Region's posture of the past five years of no new city routes . . . severely impact our ability to adequately accommodate growth.

Equipment/Vehicle Shortage - additional equipment and vehicles are in urgent need to maintain the efficiency of daily operation.

Hiring Constraint - we have difficulty hiring enough employees to cover a 33% high turnover rate.

Administrative Staffing - slow to retarded response to request for additional operation, as well as, administrative positions preclude proper management and oversight of day to day activities and long and short range planning."

Conditions Reported to the Richmond Division

In a September 1988 briefing, the MSC manager and his top assistants provided Richmond Division officials their assessments of conditions faced by the MSC. The Director of Field Operations linked the service problems to what he described as the failure to

- plan (growth management),
- train, and
- document the need for and request additional resources.

He also said the number of routes created since 1978 was far short of the number needed to handle increases in deliveries and mail volume. On the basis of a 38 percent increase in mail deliveries and 164 percent increase in mail volume, the Division was told that at least an additional 262 routes should have been created to handle the growth over the 10-year period.

The briefing material said that personnel actions were not processed on time; vacancies were not recorded and posted; and, at one point in time, 100 feet of records were not filed. When hiring restrictions were eased in November 1987, hiring registers were depleted and qualified people were not readily available to fill vacant positions.

Actions Taken by the Present Manager

In April 1988 the new MSC manager announced to his postmasters that "Service to the Customer" would be the theme for his primary goal of improving services. One of his first actions was to open hiring registers. In fiscal year 1988, the northern Virginia MSC hired 1,770 new employees, a 93 percent increase over 1987 when 916 people were hired.

Route Adjustments

Overburdened routes (too much mail or too many delivery stops for an 8-hour work day) were a major contributing factor to poor mail service in northern Virginia. The MSC manager, in a June 1988 memorandum to delivery offices, said, "We can never again afford to find ourselves with most of the routes out of adjustment." An administrative procedure on route adjustments and related sorting schemes (a systematic plan for the distribution of mail) accompanied the letter. Postmasters were told to check on compliance with basic mail preparation and delivery standards before adjusting routes. All delivery routes were to be inspected by May 1989 and needed adjustments made by the end of June 1989. The latest MSC schedule shows that 834, or 72 percent, of the 1,166 city delivery routes will be inspected and adjusted by June 1989. These 834 routes account for 91 percent of the possible daily mail deliveries.

It should be noted that route adjustments are not made without incurring costs and causing problems. Before adjustment, a route must be inspected to confirm that it cannot be completed in as close to 8 hours as possible. Work that falls outside this standard is transferred to other routes, or new routes are created. Initially, route adjustments may also cause errors that annoy customers. Clerks who sort mail to carrier routes must learn new sorting schemes (sorting errors can cause delayed mail). If new routes are created, letter carriers must be hired, trained, and become proficient. Customers on a route with a recently hired letter carrier will usually experience later than normal delivery and sometimes receive their neighbors' mail.

Training

Postmasters, managers, and supervisors were provided standard operating procedures training. One such class provided 40 hours of instructions on how to manage a delivery office, including how to make route inspections and adjustments. A separate class was provided on clearly labeling the cases that letter carriers use to sort mail in delivery sequence. Many case labels at the delivery units were unreadable.

MSC Manager Sought and Secured an Increased Budget

To maintain and to continue restoring service to a level that he considered acceptable, the MSC manager, shortly after the start of fiscal year 1989, sought and secured an increase in the MSC's budget. The planned budget for 1989, as shown in table I.4, was about 2 percent more than actual expenditures for fiscal year 1988.

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**Table I.4: Northern Virginia MSC Budget
 Planned and Actual Expenditures, Fiscal
 Years 1986 to 1989**

Dollars in thousands				
Expenditures	1986	1987	1988	1989
Planned	\$173,884	\$186,269	\$214,877	\$230,201
Actual	174,770	197,479	226,104	•

Spending during the first 4 months of fiscal year 1989 was at an estimated annual level of \$262 million, or about \$32 million more than the budget authorized by the Richmond Division. To reduce expenditures to budgeted levels, the Regional Postmaster General, Eastern Region, told the MSC manager in January 1989 to stop hiring additional employees and requested a plan to recover losses incurred during the first quarter of 1989.

In response, the MSC manager informed the Regional Postmaster General that it was not possible to recoup already incurred losses. In explaining that spending would continue to exceed planned amounts, he said that "We started too far behind" to keep 1989 spending at budgeted levels. He furnished a revised plan showing estimated annual expenses of \$257 million, or \$27 million more than authorized by the budget. He told the Regional Postmaster General that estimated expenses were reduced where such reductions would not jeopardize service or cause even greater future costs. The revised plan projects increased spending consistent with actual increases in 1987 and 1988, 13 percent and 14 percent respectively. (See table I.4.)

The Regional Postmaster General's instruction to stop hiring additional employees was reversed by the Postmaster General and spending is continuing at an annual budget level of \$257 million.

**Other Changes in
 Operations**

The following steps are being taken to make mail processing more efficient at the MSC:

- increasing the volume of metered mail that bypasses the stamp-canceling operation, to avoid duplication of work;
- establishing central collection boxes (rendezvous boxes) for earlier pick-up and processing of mail collected by individual letter carriers; and
- studying equipment layout and the flow of mail on the workroom floor to improve mail processing efficiency.

Also, mail processing and delivery performance is being more closely monitored. Critical to keeping pace with the demand for delivery services is a growth management plan, which the manager plans to develop.

Conditions at Selected Post
 Offices Reflect
 Improvement Actions

To measure improved mail delivery conditions, we recorded information on key operations and resources at the nine post offices we visited. Data showing improved conditions at the post offices visited are summarized in tables I.5 and I.6. The data are for nine offices, which have about 74 percent of the daily mail deliveries in northern Virginia.

The disparity between fiscal years 1987 and 1988 is shown by workload and resource data in table I.5. Almost no additional resources (personnel and vehicles) were provided during 1987 to handle an increased workload. The provision of additional resources, started by the Action Teams in November 1987 (fiscal year 1988), was expedited by the MSC manager after his appointment in April 1988.

Table I.5: Workload and Resource Data for Selected Post Offices, Fiscal Years 1987 to 1988

	1987 (Start)	1988 (Start)	1988 (End)
Personnel	1,875	1,879	2,353
Vehicles	723	731	879
Routes	769	785	833
Possible Deliveries	356,508	365,906	376,127
Volume (feet of mail)	4,429,123	4,872,718	5,367,903

Table I.6 shows that performance of the nine post offices, as measured by the volume (feet of mail) of delayed mail, improved during fiscal year 1988. A large number of the complaint letters furnished to us by Congressman Wolf's office concerned delayed mail. Such complaints are down by more than 200 percent from their peak in 1987.

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**Table I.6: Comparative Schedule of
Delayed Mail Reported at Selected Post
Offices During First Week of Fiscal Years
1988 and 1989**

Post office	First week 1988	First week 1989
Alexandria	8,743	2,740
Arlington	8,332	1,079
Falls Church	7,185	259
Herndon	742	1,145 ^a
McLean	2,690	799
Sterling	5,313	344
Woodbridge	0	29
Manassas	1,002	462
Vienna	836	202

^aThe Herndon Postmaster told us that the cause of this increase has been corrected.

At a March 1989 meeting to discuss the results of our work, the MSC manager furnished data showing substantial improvements in mail processing and delivery performance. For example, during a 4-week period ending March 10, 1989, overnight delivery performance for letter mail improved by 8 percent over the same 1988 period. Also, during the first 5 months of fiscal year 1989, the volume of letter mail not ready for shipment (within and outside the MSC's delivery area) at scheduled times was substantially less (about 85 percent) than the volume not ready for shipment during the first 5 months of 1988.

Postmaster General's Comments on a Draft of This Report



THE POSTMASTER GENERAL
Washington, D.C. 20260-0010

May 10, 1989

Dear Mr. Fogel:

This refers to your draft report entitled Progress Made in Restoring Deteriorated Northern Virginia Mail Service.

See p. 4.

The report accurately describes the mail delivery problems we were experiencing in Northern Virginia, a high growth area, during 1987-88 and the corrective actions we have taken.

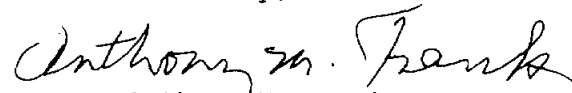
As the report notes, we have upgraded the Northern Virginia Management Sectional Center to division status and have appointed a division manager who has had experience in a high growth area and who has made service improvement his primary goal. Budgets, staffing and vehicles have been increased. Overburdened delivery routes have been adjusted and customer complaints are down.

See p. 4.

We believe the measures we have taken are proving effective and we appreciate having your independent assessment of them.

You may further rest assured the situation leading to the service deterioration identified in the report will not be allowed to recur.

Sincerely,


Anthony M. Frank

Mr. Richard L. Fogel
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