

Rate Commission Assails USPS Consolidation Plan

In a blistering criticism of the Postal Service's Evolutionary Network Development strategy, the Postal Rate Commission concluded that the "record does not provide assurance that the proposed realignment program will meet its declared goals. In particular, the record reflects flawed or absent information on certain crucial aspects of the Postal Service's plan for realignment."

In a report dated Dec. 19, the independent panel said, "The Commission advises postal management to address and remedy questionable data choices and assumptions before proceeding to completion of the design of the new mail processing network."

Recent Area Mail Processing studies, the report said, "do not comport with applicable guidelines. They do not reflect systematic, consistent, or replicable projections of costs; they provide limited review of service impacts; and they utilize no discernible standards for evaluating or balancing cost and service impacts. Furthermore, required post-implementation reviews have not been done."

"The report confirms what the APWU has asserted," said President William Burrus. "The Postal Service has failed to consider the concerns of the American people, denied citizens the information necessary to determine if the revised network will meet their needs, and excluded individuals and small businesses from having real input in the decision-making process."

The report repeatedly quoted the APWU, which intervened in the review process because of the negative impact proposed consolidations would have on service. The APWU was the only union to participate.

"APWU witness [Margaret L.] Yao, who has evaluated five Postal Service-sponsored END-related Area Mail Processing public programs and has professional experience in

the field, finds significant shortcomings in the Service's initial strategy when measured against certain recognized principles of public engagement and other approaches to involvement," the report said.

The APWU and others view the Postal Service's public input approach as "too late, too limited and too lopsided," the Commission noted.

"Review of the record reveals that the public has an interest in obtaining notice of the potential for an Area Mail Processing consolidation much earlier in the process; believes disclosure of more information on a broader range of topics is necessary; seeks more meaningful inclusion in town hall meetings and in the development of alternatives; and wants feedback on the results of consolidations," the PRC found.

"The record indicates that procedures for assuring significant public participation in the process of network reconfiguration have, thus far, been insufficient," the report concluded. "Decisions regarding current and planned postal facilities can be expected to affect mail users, postal employees, and the communities in which facilities are or may be located."

By limiting its "inquiry into the statutory adequacy of public involvement in this initiative [to] satisfying technical filing requirements with the Commission," the report concluded, the Postal Service "misreads its obligation as a public establishment that provides essential services to the nation."

"This is a stunning rejection of the Postal Service's consolidation plan," Burrus said.

Under the Postal Reorganization Act, the PRC must review any plan to realign mail processing and transportation networks that is likely to have a "substantially nationwide" impact on service.

Don't Neglect Your Ballot

The ballots for the referendum on a tentative four-year National Agreement were mailed to members Dec. 18 to Dec. 20, and must be received by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 9, at the offices of the American Arbitration Association. The vote-count will begin immediately, and results are expected to be announced that afternoon on the APWU Web site, www.apwu.org. The single-question ballot offers voters a choice of 'Yes' or 'No.'

In an effort to encourage participation in the ratification vote, APWU President William Burrus has informed local presidents that the national union will reward the locals that are the most successful in mobilizing their members to vote. "The top three locals in each of several categories will receive compensation to be used for a membership appreciation party," he said. To be eligible, locals must reach at least 50 percent in voter participation.