

April 11, 2016

Megan J. Brennan  
Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer  
United States Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Postmaster General Brennan,

Mail service is important to North Dakota. Since starting my Fix My Mail initiative in January of 2014, I have heard stories from hundreds of North Dakotans about the serious problems they have experienced with mail delivery and service. It is clear many of those challenges continue since I have received more than 400 responses from across North Dakota to my new Fix My Mail survey, which was launched in late February. This level of interest and concern demonstrates how important it is for the U.S. Postal Service to continue to make a focused effort to improve North Dakota mail service.

While I have already sent your staff a comprehensive package of stories from those who responded to my survey, I wanted to follow up with a specific list of questions based on what I heard from these North Dakotans about their mail. I look forward to your prompt response, and would like to receive it by May 11, 2016.

**Global Questions:**

- 1) I heard repeatedly about slow and delayed delivery of mail from folks across North Dakota. For example, a Park City resident said it took 12 days for her to receive a letter that was sent by her mother from the other side of the state. In addition, there were a number of stories about how mail that was expected by postal customers was never received at all. Aside from inclement weather, what other reasons could account for such severe mail delivery issues? What strategies are you employing in North Dakota to improve postal delivery times and what strategies do you plan to implement?
- 2) Customer service was a chief concern brought to my attention through these stories. From customer experiences with their local post offices to their local letter carriers, a number of frustrating situations were conveyed. What is the Postal Service doing to monitor customer relations and service across North Dakota? What resources do postal

customers have when they feel like their local post office is not listening, and what steps can the Postal Service take to ensure postal customers know about these options?

- 3) Much like the recent contract postal carrier situation in West Fargo, I heard a great deal about mail that was getting mixed up and delivered to the wrong people. I heard about this issue from all across the state, and it indicates that the Postal Service faces a systemic challenge on this topic. What is the Postal Service doing to fix this problem across the state? My reports indicate that a number of the problems in this area can be linked to contract routes. Do you disagree with that assessment and what steps will the Postal Service take to improve accuracy on contracted routes?
- 4) Tax season is one of the times when people rely most on the Postal Service to deliver important and confidential information. I heard from businesses and individuals across the state who have had trouble sending and receiving their W-2s and 1099's, as well as bills, medication, and important legal documents. This is the mail that is most important to postal customers, and can especially be a lifeline for rural customers. Do postal carriers get additional training on how to process and ensure delivery of legal and tax documents such as W2s or 1099s? What is being done by the Postal Service to ensure that customers can receive and send their important and confidential documents and packages? What precautions is the Postal Service taking to keep their customers' information safe and prevent delivery of legal or confidential information to the wrong addresses?
- 5) As you know, post offices often serve as centers of rural communities. I found it concerning to hear how many customers struggle to get to their post offices during current hours of operation. In most all these situations, these post offices have had their hours of operations reduced. How does the Postal Service monitor post offices with reduced hours to ensure they continue to meet the needs of customers? What is the Postal Service doing, and what can they do, to accommodate customers who are not able to reach their post offices during their current hours of operation?
- 6) A Fargo resident indicated their concern that letters they send to other Fargo addresses first go to Minneapolis for sorting before returning to Fargo. That echoes other concerns I heard from customers who feel it makes no sense for intercity mail to be shipped first to places such as Bismarck for sorting. How can the Postal Service improve service performance and efficiency in these situations? What would cause a piece of mail to be sent to Minneapolis for sorting since Fargo has its own processing facility?
- 7) Delayed delivery of newspapers is an issue that continues to plague North Dakota. When newspapers are not delivered in a timely fashion, both people who depend on those papers for news and the overall newspaper business is harmed. It is crucial that the Postal Service get a better handle on consistent newspaper delivery, and develop strategies for improvement. What is the Postal Service doing to ensure that newspapers are delivered expeditiously? Are there specific challenges that plague this type of mail and, if so, how can the Postal Service work with businesses and customers to overcome them?

- 8) What percentage of mail routes in North Dakota are contracted out, and how does that percentage compare to the national average and similar rural states such as South Dakota and Montana? What sort of training are these contractors being given by the Postal Service? What is the turnover rate of contracted routes in North Dakota? Can these routes be subcontracted?
- 9) The population rise in the Bakken region of North Dakota due to the oil boom has led to a number of challenges in the federal workforce. Given the investments the Postal Service made in the region over the past several years, how are the post offices in the heart of that region functioning to date?

### **Specific Questions:**

- 1) An Amidon resident reported that the post office there has been reduced to two hours of operation per day, and mentioned that the Postal Service intends to close this office completely. Does the Postal Service plan to close the Amidon post office? If so, why does the Postal Service intend to close this post office if the next nearest one is 25 miles away?
- 2) A Carpio resident said it has taken nine days for a letter from Kenmare to reach Langdon, North Dakota, which is a distance of approximately 180 miles. Aside from inclement weather, what else would account for this severe delay in mail delivery?
- 3) A Fairmount resident reported that the doors at the post office have been locked at night repeatedly in the past year or so, meaning that postal customers are unable to get mail out of their P.O. boxes. Why is this happening? Does this reflect a change in Postal Service policy?
- 4) A large business in Fordville relayed how an entire batch of checks that was sent out last July went wayward. Some checks took 10-20 days to arrive at their destinations, while others vanished altogether. Issues such as this can be incredibly problematic for rural businesses that are very reliant on mail service. Aside from inclement weather, what else would cause problems of this sort? What strategies does the Postal Service have in place to identify when such a problem occurs and how to prevent such occurrences from ever happening?
- 5) A resident of Larimore said they were required to pay for a P.O. Box in order to receive mail. Is this the only option for this postal customer to receive mail? Have other postal customers in the Larimore region been impacted in the same way?
- 6) A Mandan postal customer's home mail service was discontinued for no reason, and the customer was told the carrier decided there were no longer residents at this address. What oversight responsibilities do management/supervisors have over local carriers to ensure they are accountable to the needs of postal customers?

- 7) Since the Minot mail processing facility operations have been dramatically reduced, a mailing company in Minot said they have been forced to move their drop off time at the post office from 7 p.m. to 5 p.m. The company said this has posed a number of challenges for their 65 business customers in terms of needing to have their mail ready earlier for collection. What steps can the Postal Service take to alleviate such negative impacts on local businesses?
- 8) A number of West Fargo residents wrote in to complain about poor delivery service, mixed up mail, and customer service concerns at their post office. What steps will the Postal Service take to monitor and improve that post office?
- 9) A number of Williston residents have customer service concerns with postal personnel at their post office. What steps is the Postal Service taking to monitor and improve this situation?

I appreciate your timely attention to these questions, and I will look forward to hearing the Postal Service's response to them. If you have any additional questions, please contact Ashley Poling on my staff at 202-224-4664.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp  
United States Senator