My Ideas of what needs to be addressed with FSS

DPS/FSS Issues that must be addressed effectively for implementation of any change in standards.

By John Amtsfield

First, it is important to recognize that automation is necessary and it makes a lot of sense. There is no way to effectively stop it, impede it or obstruct it. The parties must, however, recognize that the different parts of automation taken a step at a time, must be fairly evaluated so that the adjustments are fair to all involved. It is not right for USPS to take a major advantage in restructuring compensation after the implementation of each phase of automation as if, each phase puts that automation behind us.

Automation is actually a good thing for rural carriers as long as it is fair. If you surveyed rural carriers receiving DPS mail now and asked if they would rather get all of their mail raw or do they want the mail sorted; few rural carriers would opt to go back to 100% raw mail. The only question then is, how to we ensure that it is fair for rural carriers.

The following are my issues, concerns and recommendation for the Future Developments Task Force for submission and consideration by all members of the district and area review committees. I herein authorize any and all union and Postal personnel to freely use these issues, concerns and recommendations unless I have specifically notified specific people that use of any material that I created requires express permission due to previous instances where my work product was used without attribution and under someone else's name

1. The issue of casing DPS/FSS mail. This is an obvious and over-riding issue and will likely be the one with the most priority. USPS will push hard to be able to require that automated mail be taken directly to the street (their overall plan is based on eliminating or minimizing office time. If USPS mandates that all automated mail be taken directly to the street, carriers will end up collating the mail in their vehicles which will expand street time, waste time and fuel without compensation in expanding street time, create an endless cycle of what carriers will do and what management will do to stop them including managing street time by requiring scanning at c ertain key points in mailboxes throughout a rural route. Until the issues of inefficient work methods of multiple bundles is finally resolved, USPS must agree to modified standards and modified requirements at least until automation can eliminate the need for multiple sortation of different types of mail. If USPS is going to take the position that automated mail must be taken directly to the street, then additional time standards have to be created to handle the new responsibilities that DPS and FSS require of carriers such as missort, misthrow, holds, forwards, , address sequence breakdowns, waiting time for arrival of DPS/FSS, Sortation glitches, machine failures and any other circumstances that affect the route order of sorted mail (such as dropped and spilled trays or parts of trays of sorted mail).

2. USPS needs to candidly share complete automation plans including delivery hubs, route consolidations, next generations of automated mail, projected building and staffing for the next twenty years organizationally, and by area and district and locally. Only when the Unions can see clearly where USPS is going can they evaluate changes in standards and assess automation progress from an employee's perspective and impact. It is not fair to unions to have to decide on the efficacy of some time standards without knowing how the job functions are projected to change and if time standards will be made obsolete or less appropriate as new automation initiatives are int roduced. This is especially critical since time standards are increasingly more contentious and hard to modify as time goes on even with changing circumstances. Without that information, union personnel cannot evaluate

time standards in a knowledgeable way. USPS must be more candid and more forthcoming than they have ever been before with access to R & D people so that there is a clear understanding not only of what is planned but also what is being reviewed, considered and determined to be in need of evaluation and improvement.

3. A lot of issues need to be addressed concerning the practical ramifications of multiple bundles foe rural carriers. Rural carriers have a very, very long tradition of working one bundle systems often casing boxholders and just working parcels separately. The issue of multiple bundles especially in areas that receive multiple sets of boxholders every day, is a major culture shock coming for rural carriers who used to think they worked on an incentive system. Also USPS is going to have to determine the safety impact of multiple bundles, including reaching, stretching, turning, twisting and the physical impact on shoulders, elbows, wrists, backs, ribs and hips. How many bundles is acceptable and how many is too many. Can USPS mandate a carrier work 7 bundles? Eight bundles? What is the limit? How will compensation be affected for duplicating fingering of mail and collating mail and determining if mail is available in each bundle that the carrier is working.(see number 6) Should the carrier have a delivery case to separate each bundle of mail in the truck?

4. There are a lot of safety and health issues that need to be effectively addressed including each of the following and entailing a compensation issue and maybe even a new time standard for each.

a. Replenishment of mail in carrier vehicles to work for each of the multiple bundles and reexamination of parcel credit since, the multiple bundles will preclude working them from the front of the truck.

b. All of the functions of working extra bundles tend to distract carriers from being aware of there surroundings, being aware of when people are approaching the truck and especially with extra time collating mail for each deliver point at each stop, carriers will necessarily have to spend additional time at each stop (which calls into question the time standard for each box)

c. Stacking trays, tubs and other equipment into finite space especially in private vehicles used for mail delivery. The use of much of this equipment will cause extra stress and extra exertion especially in POVs where space is at a premium and where the trays designed for PO vehicles will be problematic. Just storing empty equipment in some of these vehicles will require adjustments and effort to work around as mail is delivered and a carrier works through the route.

d. I am more than concerned, literally worried that in these intermediate automation steps, carriers with added responsibilities at each delivery point will necessarily be distracted from the safe approach and exit from each mailbox and that the number of accidents and frequency will increase alarmingly. Speical effort and attention needs to be made to modify carrier vehicles to address these specific issues. To not do so is to be grossly negligent. There is a reasonable expectation that carriers alertness will suffer and positive action must be taken in a productive and non-threatening way to improve carrier visibility, carrier awareness of what is around the vehicle, traffic patterns, etc.

e. Efforts should be made to evaluate and possibly redesign and retrofit carrier deliver vehicles to maximize safety with the expanded street time. It is high time that carrier's visibility be the highest priority instead of outmoded ideas of what constitutes security of the mail and ergonomic engineering must be a critical part of the re-evaluation.

5. USPS and NRLCA have approached automation in a piecemeal fashion. Planning, deploying,

implementing and than capturing AUTOMATION savings after each phase is rolled out. The evidence clearly demonstrates that such a process does not adequately address extra requirements that implementation of each phase requires even if they are temporary, modfications and practical results that were unforeseen and unanticipated are not accounted for and as the automation plan evolves, even if some standards and the absence of standards become glaringly obvious, the issues are not addressed or are basically dismissed since one or the other party did not raise or negotiate that issue. The "Fletters" arbitration should be very instructive to all persons evaluating time standards. EACH NEW PHASE OF AUTOMATION IS JUST A PART OF THE OVERALL AUTMATION PLAN. WHEN TIME STANDARDS ARE CREATED, SERIOUS EFFORT NEEDS TO BE DIRECTED TO EVALUATING THE CREATION OF NEW TIME STANDARDS AND IN CREATING TIME STANDARDS WHEN AUTOMATION DOES NOT WORK PERFECTLY OR CREATES ADDITIONAL WORK. There also needs to be a concrete and clear qualification and commitment about what USPS will provide and what carriers should expect and what happens when that clear and concrete qualification is not met either daily, weekly , sporadically, regularly, once, twice and for every time automation is not perfect. (see Number 7)

6. Just because USPS wants to standardize processes, procedures, SOPs, equipment and everything else, they should not have the right or be given license to simply mandate changes in long standing carrier past practices that have been accepted jointly by management and the employee for decades if not a century. If USPS wants to standardize employee equipment, employee procedures, employee work assignments, employee responsibilities there shouldbe an incentive for doing so. It is the approach that USPS has taken with customers to promote and encourage standardization of addressing conventions, address placement, carrier pre-sorts, and a whole host of other critica l elements in USPS "transformation plan". The same approach needs to be taken with employees. When carriers casing equipment needs to be standardized, even placement of carrier labels on carrier cases (above or below the separations), sensible changes in carrier casing equipment, delivery orientation through a carrier case (whether labels run bu row or by case in delivery order), standardized BBM, Hold and forward procedures and how they are handled on equipment and any other standardization effort; employees should be given an incentive in the form of compensation for the extra effort and retraining necessary for case familiarization and with a lump sum for both carrier and relief employee. It is what USPS does with vendors, with customers and with everyone else they deal with. It is time that employees were treated the same way. Standardization is a critical part of the USPS transformation plan especially if route consolidations down the in the future create carrier "delivery hu b s".

7. It is absolutely critical that USPS and NRLCA jointly develop a reasonable and easy method of properly recording, tracking and paying rural carriers for extra requirements not built into route evaluations. The process needs to be completely changed so there is transparency in what time is recorded and approved, what payments are being made and for what by date, the payments can be tracked and verified with precision. This is absolutely critical especially when managers can camouflage, hide, alter, minimize these unscheduled payments that simply appear on payroll check stubs as "adjustment". Rural carriers have to know they are being properly and timely paid f or extra work functions and especially when automation causes extra work or extra time. Knowing that they are properly compensated and can check and verify proper compensation will promote rural carrier buy-in for automation.

8. A new time standard for collating bundles either in the office time or in route time. It is a new carrier function and it is a temporary function until USPS fully implements their overall transformation plan beyond the 2010 plan and as long as it is a new requirement, a new standard should be created to account for compensation for collating as well as for replenishing loads and rearranging mail

throughout the day in the trucks.

a. New time standards must also be used for handling missorts and any other undeliverable mail in automation pre-sorts on the road and for proper placement and time for completing disposition by carriers in the office after they return for the route.

b. New time standards must be created that deal with anomalies and automation problems that surface on the road during street time and policies need to be established when significant errors in the automation sortation show up out on the road.

c. A new miscellaneous time standard needs to be created to deal with unforeseen occurrences, procedure modifications, evolving machine protocols that produce unintended consequences and general errors that occur die to machine maintenance issues, evolving address issues, evolving standardization issues, etc.

9. The entire classification of office time and street time needs to be re-evaluated and reassessed since USPS is committed to minimizing office time and expanding street time. Many street time functions are now necessarily being added that duplicate office time responsibilities and the functions, standards and procedures for street time need to be looked at very carefully. Obviously if USPS wants to reduce office time from a high of 60-70% of carrier workdays 10-15 years ago to a low of 5-10% as a final goal, with a projected goal of 80 % street time in the next five years, serious attention needs to be devoted to the way the time standards reflect such a major change. Also and most important; if USPS goal is to expand street time to 80%, it makes little sense to just take 30-40% of the office time and make it street time; especially since most of the office functions are far more efficient in the office. Some very candid and frank disclosure needs to be made so union personnel clearly understand that USPS goal is expanding street time is to expand number of deliveries, consolidate and reduce routes and excess rural craft employees. Only when all of that is on the table, can union officials evaluate the time standards in a knowledgeable way.

10. One of the most contentious issues will be those that affect rural carriers who provide their own vehicles. USPS plans have failed to seriously address the ramifications of the transformation plan as it is aimed squarely at carriers POVs much as if a division of Abrams Tanks was aimed at minimum wage workers to control productivity. Added street time will place an disproportionately burdensome responsibility on carriers supplying their own vehicles who mare already seriously under compensated for the cost of providing their own vehicle. As it stands not the EMA rate which is supposed to provide reimbursement for carrier expenses in providing a vehicle is about the same as the IRS r ate for regular travel and yet POV carriers route miles are very hard miles of stop and start, heavy brake usage, cooling issues that require oftentimes specialized custom equipment. The new automation standards will make a mockery out of Equipment maintenance allowance even more so than it is now.

Adding additional street time and additional street time at each deliver point dramatically increases carrier expenses without any commensurate increase in vehicle reimbursement. Since most EMA especially for routes covered by POVs in more rural areas, the route reimbursement is based on mileage. If street time is dramatically increased without adding any miles as is anticipated in the initial phases of FSS deployment and implementation, the cost for that vehicle per mile will skyrocket because so much of the additional time will be with the vehicle idling. The entire EMA concept is then worthless and bears even less a relationship to the actual cost of providing a vehicle then it does at

present.

Carriers will be forced to employ fleets of old, big, cheap, gas guzzling vehicles that are just moving junk heaps keeping spare vehicles stored at or near post offices and just running them until they stop. EMA is a very serious concern and a pressing need that has to be addressed. Time for idling and extra route time with no additional mileage needs to be evaluated and if it takes reworking the mileage time credit and the time credit for each box, so be it.

Just sorting additional flats in a plant and providing them to a carrier does not necessarily mean USPS is justly entitled to the full measure of time savings by eliminating carrier sorting of raw flats, but it does arguably mean that some measure of fair compensation restructuring is called for. It must be done in incremental steps as each automation phase in the USPS transformation plan is implemented and until USPS completes the transformation planned, the full measure of cost savings needs to be incremental as well. The union has to stop setting up situations where they have approached each new automation initiative as a separate issue. The issue is not multiple levels of automation. But fair compensation for work performed at each level of USPS transformation.

To do this piecemeal, one step at a time and look at each bridge when it is time to cross it; is not a good approach. USPS has been implementing this grand vision for twenty years and still has grander visions in their plans. Let's do the whole plan incrementally, but let's do it on a level playing field where both sides see the goals and know what is coming.

If it is going to be a joint process. There is no other way to do this.

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