

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Postal Service announces study to examine usage of area post offices

Towson Town Center location among 42 Maryland locations included on list

By Jon Meoli, jmeoli@tribune.com

July 26, 2011 | 3:28 p.m.

The United States Postal Service announced Tuesday, July 26 that it will begin a study of 3,700 of its retail locations nationwide -- including the Towson Town Center location and 41 others in Maryland -- to look at usage and the viability of those locations.

The study does not mean necessarily that postal retail locations will close, said Freda Sauter, postal service spokeswoman. Sauter also said there is no timetable for completion of the study.

However, according to a postal service release, given the close proximity of some retail locations to others, as well as options available for purchasing stamps and receiving other services, the postal service is aiming to "right-size its expansive retail network" to better align its services with customer demand based on workload, revenue, and expenses.

"Today, more than 35 percent of the postal service's retail revenue comes from expanded access locations such as grocery stores, drug stores, office supply stores, retail chains, self-service kiosks, ATMs and usps.com, open 24/7," Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe said in the statement. "Our customer's habits have made it clear that they no longer require a physical post office to conduct most of their postal business."

Before any decisions are made regarding operations at the retail locations, the postal service will solicit opinions from the community at a public meeting. Notice of the meeting will be posted at the affected office.

Sauter said that in the past, retail locations slated for closure have remained open because of community input.

Should the listed locations need to be closed, the postal service has introduced a "retail-replacement" option or a "Village Post Office" as a potential replacement option.

The Village Post Offices would be operated by local businesses, such as pharmacies and grocery stores, and would offer postal products and services such as stamps and flat-rate packaging.

If a local retail office is closed, daily mail service to residences and businesses in the area would not be affected, Sauter said. Carriers would still deliver to the same customers, but from different locations.

Overall, the measures taken are meant to increase efficiency in the postal service in the face of a changing landscape, officials said .

"The Postal Service of the future will be smaller, leaner and more competitive and it will continue to drive commerce, serve communities and deliver value," Donahoe said.

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Editorial Board Opinion

2. Postal Reform Act is imperfect, but needed

By Editorial, Published: July 28

THE BIGGEST CRISIS surrounding the U.S. Postal Service is the fact that no one seems to notice how bad the crisis is.

Further delay in addressing the system's troubles is literally unaffordable. Facing a deficit of \$8 billion this year, the Postal Service will default on its obligations by October and leave taxpayers footing the bill unless serious changes are made.

The only bill before Congress that offers any opportunity to fix this is the Ross-Issa Postal Reform Act of 2011. Is the act perfect? By no means. But the bill includes a mechanism for fundamental change, as well as several reforms that the Postal Service sorely needs: a shift to five-day delivery, which would save an estimated \$3 billion over the first four years; a requirement that the financial predicament of the Postal Service be taken into consideration in any arbitration; and the ability to renegotiate existing contracts if the Postal Service's finances require it.

Unlike at least one other bill aimed at the Postal Service, the Ross-Issa bill does not depend on a recently discovered windfall of up to \$50 billion that some actuaries claim was overpaid by the Postal Service

some years ago — a cache that has given those unwilling to change the status quo an argument for postponing critical structural reforms.

The Ross-Issa bill creates two commissions — one to focus on post office closures, excess processing capacity and unnecessary administrative offices, and the other to take charge of the USPS's finances if it goes into default and take whatever measures are necessary to bring it back into the black, including renegotiating collective bargaining agreements.

On Tuesday, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced that 3,653 local post offices are being studied for closure. But closing post offices will not resolve the USPS's problems. Eighty percent of the Postal Service's current costs stem from labor — a higher percentage than more than 30 years ago, when the USPS lacked automation. Some employees still enjoy a no-layoffs clause. Even after recent concessions, they contribute a smaller share of their salary to health-care plans than do most federal workers — a gap the Postal Reform Act would close. And rules preventing arbitrators from taking the financial crisis of the USPS into consideration have resulted in new contracts that give employees raises even in the face of ever-mounting deficits.

The USPS blames its woes on the requirement that it pre-fund employees' retirement benefits. We have repeatedly supported the prepayment, based on the simple logic that the USPS, at its present rate of decline, will not have enough money to fund the plans when employees retire. This remains the case.

In the long run, the best solution for the Postal Service would be one that cuts it loose of the cumbersome oversight structure that prevents it from efficiently downsizing or competing, allows it to negotiate more sensible contracts and behave more like a private-sector business, and rethinks its universal service obligation for a century where people no longer rely on the mail to pay bills or send messages.

Currently, taxpayers do not fund the Postal Service. But if present trends continue, they may have to. The Issa bill, while not perfect, supplies several necessary reforms and offers a path to pull the USPS out of the red.

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3. Delivering differences: Postal service consolidating rural deliveries

5:11 PM, Jul. 28, 2011 |

Postal rural route carrier Mike Quain delivers mail along Sheridan Road on Wednesday along his route in Emmett Township.

Written by

LIZ SHEPARD

Times Herald

Rural postal carrier Wynde DuBaere talks about her job Wednesday and the changes the postal service is making to the Emmett and Goodells routes.

EMMETT -- Mike Quain has spent 26 years delivering mail to residents in Emmett and the surrounding area. He plans to continue doing that, but it will be from a new location starting next month.

Quain is among a handful of local U.S. Postal Service carriers who will be affected as the agency restructures and consolidates some of its facilities.

Postal service spokesman Ed Moore said carriers from some smaller offices with 10 or fewer rural routes are being relocated to a "hub" office to save money.

Carriers in Emmett will be working out of the Capac post office starting Aug. 13. Carriers who currently work out of the Goodells post office will be relocated to the St. Clair office, Moore said.

He said the Emmett and Goodells offices will be open for retail purposes.

"We're leaving the retail unit there so the customers will basically see no change, it will be pretty seamless for our customers," Moore said.

He said the Emmett and Goodells offices were not part of the 3,700 locations the postal service announced Tuesday it planned to close. The post office in Argyle Township in Sanilac County was included in the list of offices to be studied for a closure.

Quain said there had been rumblings about moving carriers about six months ago. He said rumors included that they were going to relocate to the offices in Goodells or Port Huron before the announcement about Capac.

Quain and Wynde DuBaere, the only carriers out of Emmett, said they aren't happy about the change, but understand why it's happening as they've seen the amount of mail they deliver shrink through the years.

"I don't really like the idea, but they gotta do what they gotta do to save our jobs," Quain said.

DuBaere and Quain said they don't anticipate their customers will see much of a difference -- there possibly might be a slight change in the time the mail is delivered.

"It shouldn't change too much," Quain said.

A woman at the Goodells post office declined comment. Bridget Boseak, the union representative with the Michigan Rural Letter Carriers Association, said if the office is fully staffed, the Goodells location could have as many as eight carriers.

"They don't like it, most of them live fairly close to the offices they work in and they don't want to go to another town to work," Boseak said. "They feel their customers will suffer for it, that's extra time before they get their mail."

Contact Liz Shepard at

(810) 989-6273 or lshepard@gannett.com.

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Collected by Chairul Anwar, Bandung, Indonesia.

E-mail address : chairulanwar49@operamail.com, chairulanwar49@gmail.com.