

DOCUMENT RESUME

00646 - [A0590633]

[Carrier Technician Program]. B-114874. December 8, 1976. 5 pp.

Report to Benjamin F. Bailer, Postmaster General, Postal Service; by Victor L. Lowe, Director, General Government Div.

Issue Area: Personnel Management and Compensation (300).

Contact: General Government Div.

Budget Function: Commerce and Transportation: Postal Service (402).

Organization Concerned: National Association of Letter Carriers.

Although a 1972 study concluded that the Postal Service's Carrier Technician Program was ineffective and expensive and should be discontinued, the program has continued. An investigation was conducted to determine why the program has been continued and to make a current evaluation of the program. Findings/Conclusions: The National Association of Letter Carriers objected to the program's termination because it would reduce promotion opportunities for city carriers. As a result of the union's objections, the program was continued. The Postal Service, however, elected not to expand the program. Some of the duties assigned to carrier technicians duplicate those being performed by other Service employees. The higher salaries received by the technicians resulted in additional Postal Service costs of \$7.2 million in 1972 and \$9.2 million in 1975. The number of technicians continues to increase. The Carrier Technician Program, as currently operated, is too costly for the benefits received. Recommendations: The Postal Service should negotiate with the National Association of Letter Carriers to discontinue the program. (RRS)

00646



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION

DEC 8 1976

B-114874

The Honorable Benjamin F. Bailar
Postmaster General, United States
Postal Service

Dear Mr. Bailar:

In 1962, the Carrier Technician Program was established to improve service by providing promotional opportunities for senior city carriers, to reduce delivery errors, and to reduce turnover in utility carrier positions. A new position--carrier technician--was created to perform certain duties to assist supervisors as well as specific training duties and to fill-in on not less than five delivery routes each week when "regular carriers" have their days off. In August 1965, the Service ceased to expand the program because of budgetary limitations and indications from field management that the program was ineffective. A February 1972 Service study of 150 post offices concluded that the program was an expensive failure and should be discontinued because it was not meeting all of its objectives.

The Carrier Technician Program has, nonetheless, continued. GAO reviewed the program to (1) find out why, and (2) to make a current evaluation.

Our review was conducted at Postal Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.; Western Regional Headquarters, San Bruno, California; and the San Jose, Sacramento, Oakland, and Fremont Post Offices in California.

WHY THE PROGRAM CONTINUES

The National Association of Letter Carriers objected to termination of the program because it would reduce promotion opportunities for city carriers. In September 1972, as a result of the union's objections, the Service agreed to give the program further opportunity. The Service and the Association signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to continue the program in offices where it existed but not extending it to additional offices.

The Service planned to obtain greater benefits from the program by requiring carrier technicians to carry out all of the duties specified in their job description.

The 1973 National Agreement stipulated that the Service could initiate the Carrier Technician Program in offices where it had not been instituted, and this same stipulation is included in the 1975 National Agreement. The Service, however, has elected not to expand the program to additional offices.

ADDITIONAL DUTIES ARE DUPLICATIVE

Carrier technicians are required to perform certain duties to assist supervisors and on-the-job training duties in addition to delivering not less than five different mail routes each week on regular carriers' days off. Our review showed that these additional duties also are assigned to and carried out by delivery managers and city carriers.

Carrier technicians are required to observe the coverage of routes in their group during scheduled or unscheduled absences of carriers, and report this finding to the supervisor-in-charge. The delivery managers are also responsible for observing route coverage and insuring that absences are filled.

Carrier technicians are required to report changes in delivery conditions such as road construction, new housing, and building demolition to delivery managers. Delivery managers are also required to observe conditions on routes and make recommendations for improving delivery service. Additionally, city carriers are required to complete reports each 4-week accounting period describing changes in delivery conditions on their routes.

Carrier technicians are supposed to work with carriers in their group on improving delivery services and obtaining cooperation from patrons. According to a 1972 Postal survey, the regular carrier performs this duty rather than the carrier technician, due to his interest in his own route.

The carrier technician's job description specified that he will provide mail delivery training to new carriers in his group on office and street duties and responsibilities. Postal directives state that carrier technicians will carry out the training duties to fulfill the basic requirements of the job.

The San Jose delivery manager told us that city carriers were frequently used to provide mail delivery training instead of carrier technicians because the latter are often junior carriers and lack the experience and knowledge needed. Additionally, they told us that there is no need for such a large number of carrier technicians to handle the specified training duties.

The Sacramento and San Jose Post Offices employed 176 carrier technicians, but the mail delivery training duties at these locations were assigned to only 22 employees. Further, only 6 of the 22 employees were carrier technicians, the others were city carriers.

HOW OFFICES NOT HAVING
THE PROGRAM GET ALONG

At offices not in the Carrier Technician Program, a lower level utility carrier delivers the five different mail routes on regular carriers' days off. The utility carrier, however, is not required to perform the additional duties assigned to carrier technicians. At these non-technician offices

- delivery managers insure coverage of routes during carrier absences,
- regular carriers report on conditions of delivery routes, and
- regular carriers conduct training.

The utility carrier annually receives about \$760 less than the technician.

PROGRAM COST

As measured against the salaries of utility carriers, the higher salaries of the technicians resulted in additional Postal Service costs of \$7.2 million in 1972 and \$9.2 million in 1975.

The increase from 1972 to 1975 is due, in part, to the fact that the number of technicians continues to increase. In 1972, there were approximately 10,600 carrier technicians. By November 1975, the number of technicians had increased to 11,222. The number of

technicians continues to increase because as the population grows in areas covered by the program, one technician must be added for each group of five new delivery routes. If carrier routes are not eliminated the number of technicians cannot be reduced by attrition since each technician lost must be replaced.

There are some other additional costs of the program which cannot be readily totaled.

Under postal personnel regulations, city carriers are eligible to receive appointments to vacant carrier technician positions after delivering mail for 1 year. Eligibility to apply for and receive appointments to these positions is extended to city carriers who have been detailed to supervisory training. Upon appointment to a carrier technician position, the carrier continues training for the supervisory position and is paid the carrier technician salary even though he never works in that capacity.

The level of pay a carrier receives when promoted to a supervisor is based on the pay he received before being promoted. As a result, carriers appointed to technicians while detailed to supervisory positions are able to receive higher salaries when promoted than they otherwise would be entitled to. The higher salary could continue for 7 years before the supervisor reaches the maximum pay level. Over this period, the additional amount paid to the supervisor could be as much as \$6,600 based on current postal salaries.

We reviewed the promotion records of all supervisors who received appointments to carrier technician positions within 1 year prior to being promoted to supervisors at the San Jose and Sacramento Post Offices. Of the 20 employees, 15 were appointed to carrier technician positions after being selected for supervisory details or training.

While a carrier technician is detailed to a supervisory position or in supervisory training and not performing the technician duties, the Service must use a part-time carrier to perform these duties, and must also pay the substitute the higher technician salary. Thus, a carrier in training or detailed can receive the technician salary for extended periods without performing the duties, and the Service is also obligated to pay a substitute carrier at the higher technician pay level.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION
AND AGENCY COMMENTS

We believe the Carrier Technician Program as currently operated is too costly for the benefits received. The program provides higher salaries to carrier technicians who, for the most part, do not perform duties other than those required of the lower salaried utility carriers.

In addition, the program allows employees who do not work as carrier technicians to use appointments to these positions as a means of gaining additional salary increases when promoted to supervisory jobs.

We recognize that under terms of the National Agreement the Service cannot take unilateral action to discontinue the program. Therefore, we recommend the Service negotiate as soon as practical with the National Association of Letter Carriers to discontinue the program.

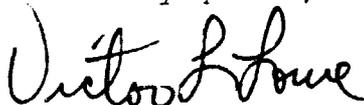
After reviewing our proposed report, the Deputy Postmaster General concurred with its findings, and agreed to carefully consider the recommendation.

- - - -

Copies of this report are being sent to the Chairman, House and Senate Committees on Post Office and Civil Service, and to the Chairmen of the appropriate subcommittees of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

We want to invite your attention to the fact that this report contains recommendations to the Service. As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

Sincerely yours,


Victor L. Lowe
Director