



OFFICE OF **INSPECTOR GENERAL**

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Congressional Inquiries- Gateway District

Audit Report

Report Number
MS-AR-17-004

March 14, 2017





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Highlights

Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis' office raised concerns to our office about how inquiries from congressional officials were handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management.

Background

The U.S. Postal Service frequently receives inquiries from members of Congress and their staff. Congressional inquiries might include questions about service or changes in processing facility operations, or they might include complaints about mail delivery or decisions to change facilities.

The Postal Service has various processes for handling and coordinating congressional inquiries. Informal inquiries, such as questions about local hours, can be handled rather quickly and generally are not recorded or tracked. Formal inquiries, such as written congressional letters, are typically handled by the following Postal Service groups:

- *Government Relations officials* – inquiries are tracked in the Correspondence Tracking System and the goal is to respond within 15 work days 90 percent of the time.
- *District staff* – inquiries are tracked in the Enterprise Customer Care system and the goal is to respond within 7 business days.

Both groups coordinate with other field or headquarters staff (such as those within Facilities, Delivery, or Retail Operations) for assistance when needed.

Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis' office raised concerns to our office about how inquiries from congressional officials were

handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management, including those directly related to two leased post offices within his district:

- Waggoner, IL – the Post Office was placed under emergency suspension due to hazardous building conditions on March 2, 2015.
- Stonington, IL – on April 6, 2016, its retail area was closed and relocated to the back of the Post Office due to hazardous building conditions. This facility was not placed under emergency suspension.

In an emergency suspension, a district manager suspends operations of a retail facility because an emergency or other condition requires such action. As of November 2016, eight Gateway District leased facilities were vacant or placed in emergency suspension, including the Waggoner Post Office.

Our objective was to evaluate how congressional inquiries were handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management in the Gateway District. We specifically focused on the formal inquiries handled by the Gateway District staff members in fiscal years 2015 and 2016, and their responsiveness to informal inquiries from the Stonington and Waggoner post offices.



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What the OIG Found

The Gateway District effectively handled and coordinated the 61 formal congressional inquiries, responding in an average of 7 days. In addition, the district was generally responsive to informal inquiries regarding the Stonington Post Office, but did not adequately respond to several informal inquiries about the Waggoner Post Office due to a lack of information from headquarters' Facilities staff.

Specifically, Facilities staff was unable to provide complete information to the district about the timeline or estimated opening of the Waggoner office in response to various inquiries from Representative Rodney Davis' staff between 2015 and 2016. For example, in April and June of 2016, the district was asked about opening dates. It did not adequately respond, instead waiting for specific actions by Facilities staff members who were responsible for coordinating and enforcing repairs.

While Facilities staff continue to work with the landlord to complete needed repairs, as of February 2017 the Post Office remains in emergency suspension without a timeline or estimated opening date.

Facilities staff attributed the lack of information to staffing shortages and complexities in working with the landlord. We recognize these challenges; but, a lack of timely and complete information impeded the district's ability to be responsive and also negatively impacted the Postal Service's brand, image, and interaction with customers.

What the OIG Recommended

We recommended Facilities management provide the Gateway District timelines and a potential estimated opening date for the Waggoner Post Office and, upon receipt, the Gateway District management should provide the information to Congressman Rodney Davis' office.

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

March 14, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: TOM A. SAMRA,
VICE PRESIDENT, FACILITIES

CHARLES J. MILLER,
DISTRICT MANAGER, GATEWAY DISTRICT

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen
VERIFY authenticity with eSign Desktop

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Janet M. Sorensen", is displayed within a rectangular box.

FROM: Janet M. Sorensen
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Retail, Delivery and Marketing

SUBJECT: Audit Report - Congressional Inquiries – Gateway District
(Report Number MS-AR-17-004)

This report presents the results of our audit of the Congressional Inquiries - Gateway District (Project Number 16RG020MS000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Joe Wolski, director, Retail, Marketing and International, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Vice President, Great Lakes Area
Corporate Audit and Response Management

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Findings

The Postal Service has various processes for handling and coordinating congressional inquiries.

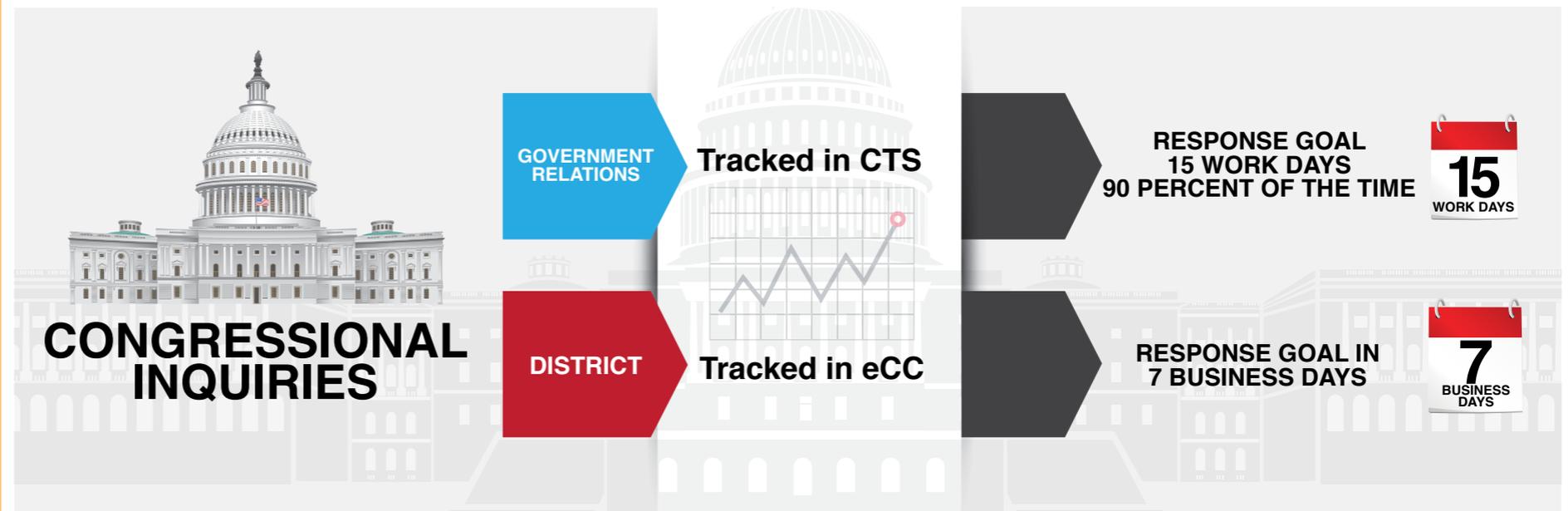
Introduction

This report presents the results of our audit of Congressional Inquiries - Gateway District (Project Number 16RG020MS000). Our objective was to evaluate how congressional inquiries are handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management at the Gateway District. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

The Postal Service frequently receives inquiries from members of Congress and their staff. Congressional inquiries might include questions about service or changes in processing facility operations, or they might include complaints about mail delivery or decisions to change facilities.

The Postal Service has various processes for handling and coordinating congressional inquiries. Informal inquiries, such as questions about local hours or requests for information, can be handled rather quickly and generally are not recorded or tracked. More formal inquiries (such as written congressional letters) are typically handled by the following Postal Service groups:

- **Government Relations** – Inquiries are typically submitted directly from members of Congress. Government Relations received 355 of these inquiries in fiscal years (FY) 2015 and 2016 for the Gateway District. These inquiries are tracked in the Correspondence Tracking System (CTS) and the goal is to respond within 15 work days 90 percent of the time.
- **District staff** – Inquiries are typically received by the district consumer and industry contact manager. The Gateway District received 61 of these inquiries from October 2014 and August 2016. These inquiries are tracked in Enterprise Customer Care (eCC) system and the goal is to respond within 7 business days.



Both groups coordinate with other field or headquarters staff (such as those within Facilities, Delivery, or Retail Operations) for assistance when needed.

Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis' office raised concerns to our office about how inquiries from congressional officials were handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management, including a review of specific actions relating to the facility decisions at the Stonington and Waggoner post offices in his district. The Waggoner Post Office was placed

The Gateway District effectively handled and coordinated the 61 formal congressional inquiries, responding in an average of 7 days.

under emergency suspension¹ due to hazardous building conditions on March 2, 2015. Also, the Stonington Post Office's retail service area was closed and relocated to the back of the Post Office on April 6, 2016, due to hazardous building conditions. This facility was not placed under emergency suspension.

Summary

The Gateway District effectively handled and coordinated the 61 formal congressional inquiries, responding in an average of 7 days. In addition, the district was generally responsive to informal inquiries regarding the Stonington Post Office, but did not adequately respond to several informal inquiries about the Waggoner Post Office due to a lack of information from headquarters' Facilities staff.

Specifically, Facilities staff was unable to provide complete information to the district on the timeline or estimated opening of the Waggoner office in response to various inquiries from Representative Rodney Davis' staff between 2015 and 2016. For example, in April and June of 2016, the district was asked about opening dates. It did not adequately respond, instead waiting for specific actions by Facilities staff members who were responsible for coordinating and enforcing repairs.

While Facilities staff continue to work with the landlord to complete needed repairs, as of February 2017 the Post Office remains in emergency suspension without a timeline or estimated opening date.

Facilities staff attributed the lack of information to staffing shortages and complexities in working with the landlord. We recognize these challenges; but, a lack of timely and complete information impeded the district's ability to be responsive and also negatively impacted the Postal Service's brand, image, and interaction with customers.

Congressional Inquiries

The Gateway District effectively handled and coordinated 61 formal congressional inquiries. We reviewed these inquiries and all were addressed, resolved, and generally completed in a timely manner.² We also found that informal inquiries for the Stonington Post Office were handled effectively, but found that a lack of information hindered the district's response to informal inquiries for the Waggoner Post Office.

Waggoner Post Office Inquiries

Starting in June 2015, 3 months after the Postal Service placed the Waggoner Post Office in emergency suspension due to hazardous building conditions, Congressman Rodney Davis' staff began informally corresponding with the Gateway District regarding the status of the Post Office. The district was generally responsive to inquiries; however we found some instances where they were not responsive. For example, Congressional staffers submitted various inquiries asking for the status, timeline, or estimated opening date between 2015 and 2016 (see [Table 1](#)).

¹ In an emergency suspension, the district manager suspends operations of a retail facility in his/her jurisdiction because an emergency or other condition requires such action.

² During our fieldwork, we found one instance where a formal letter was not issued in response to a formal inquiry. Gateway District officials, however, quickly took corrective action and issued the formal response letter.

Congressional staffers submitted various inquiries asking for the status, timeline, or estimated opening date between 2015 and 2016.

Facilities' officials attributed this lack of information to staffing shortages that hindered efforts to work with the landlord to understand the issues and repairs, as well as an overall complexity in working with the landlord.

Table 1. Waggoner Post Office 16 Congressional Informal Email Inquiries*

Congressional Inquiry Date	Postal Service Response Date	Inquiry Subject
6/17/2015	6/17/2015	Opening date
7/20/2015	7/20/2015	Status
8/11/2015	8/11/2015	Status
8/20/2015	8/26/2015	Status and opening date
8/31/2015	8/31/2015	Status
9/14/2015	9/14/2015	Status
10/29/2015	unknown	Status
11/3/2015	unknown	Status
11/17/2015	unknown	Status
12/1/2015	12/1/2015	Status
1/29/2016	1/29/2016	Status
3/10/2016	3/10/2016	Status
3/23/2016	3/23/2016	Status
4/25/2016	4/25/2016	Status, timeline, and opening date
6/27/2016	7/11/2016	Status and timeline
8/1/2016	8/2/2016	Status

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of email communication.

* This list does not include phone conversations between the congressional staffer and Gateway District staff or emails from parties other than the Gateway District consumer and industry contact manager.

The Gateway District subsequently contacted Facilities staff on multiple occasions to respond to the congressional inquiries - we specifically identified eight such contacts between July 2015 and February 2016. Although Facilities staff was able to present some information to the district, it did not provide key details regarding the timelines and estimated opening date in response to inquiries in April and June 2016. Therefore, the district was not able to adequately address these congressional inquiries.³

Facilities officials attributed this lack of information to staffing shortages that hindered efforts to work with the landlord to understand the issues and repairs, as well as an overall complexity in working with the landlord — this can often take substantial time due to the iterative processes built into the leases with the landlord. Facilities continues to work with the Waggoner landlord on completing the repairs. But, as of February 2017, there still is no timeline or estimated date to open the facility. While we recognize the challenges faced by Facilities staff, a lack of timely and complete information impeded the district's ability to handle the congressional inquiry, and also negatively impacted the Postal Service's brand, image, and interaction with customers.

³ Postal Service employees are required to provide timely, customer friendly, and professional resolution to customer complaints. *Postal Service Complaint Handling Guidelines*, page 2, July 2015.

Stonington Post Office Status

We found that informal inquiries for the Stonington Post Office were handled effectively. The Stonington Post Office operations were recently terminated, and the Postal Service has temporarily moved operations into an alternate location in Stonington. The Postal Service is continuing to evaluate permanent alternate locations.

Recommendations

We recommend the vice president, Facilities:

1. Provide the Gateway District timelines and a potential estimated opening date for the Waggoner Post Office.

We recommend the manager, Gateway District:

2. Upon receiving information from Facilities staff regarding the Waggoner Post Office, provide the information to Congressman Rodney Davis' office.

Management's Comments

Management partially agreed with the findings and agreed with the recommendations. Facilities management disagreed that its staff was unable to provide timely and complete information that impeded the district's ability to handle the Congressional inquiries for the Waggoner Post Office, stating that they provided an expected re-opening date of July 2017 to district and congressional staff on February 22, 2017. Facilities management also stated it provided as much information as was available for each request between 2015 and 2016 regarding the Waggoner Post Office. Management stated they were not able to provide complete information as this information was outside its control—management noted the landlord was responsible for making the repairs necessary to open the facility, and that the lease contained several steps that needed to occur by the Lessor and the Postal Service prior to, and during, the repair process. Facilities management stated that responses were provided to the district regarding the current status of repairs based on available information at the time of each Congressional request.

Regarding recommendation 1, management agreed to provide the Gateway District with timelines and a potential opening date for the Waggoner Post Office, and stated they provided the expected re-opening date of July 2017 to the district on February 22, 2017.

Regarding recommendation 2, management agreed to provide Congressman Rodney Davis' staff the information received from Facilities regarding the Waggoner Post Office, and stated they provided the expected re-opening date of July 2017 to the Congressman's staff on February 22, 2017.

See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations.

Regarding management's disagreement that a timeframe for opening the facility was provided, we believe our finding accurately represented the lack of information provided to Congressman Davis' staff. We recognize management subsequently provided a timeframe to Congressman Davis' staff after the issuance of our discussion draft report. As such, we consider recommendations 1 and 2 closed with the issuance of this report.

Regarding Facilities management's disagreement that it was unable to provide timely information to assist the district in responding to various inquiries from Congressman Davis' staff between 2015 and 2016 regarding the Waggoner Post Office, we maintain that key details regarding the timelines and estimated opening dates were not provided. While we recognize the challenges raised by management regarding the various steps included in the lease repair processes and that some information may have been outside of their control, we believe that a lack of timely and complete information impeded the district's ability to handle the congressional inquiry.

Appendices

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Background

The Postal Service frequently receives inquiries from members of Congress and their related staff. The Postal Service has various processes for handling and coordinating these congressional inquiries. Informal inquiries, such as questions about local hours or requests for information, can be handled rather quickly, and generally are not recorded or tracked. More formal inquiries (such as written congressional letters) are typically handled by Government Relations officials or district staff. The Gateway District recorded 61 formal congressional inquiries from October 2014 through August 2016.⁴

Both groups coordinate with other field or headquarters staff (such as those within Facilities, Delivery, or Retail Operations) for assistance when needed. In instances when a leased Post Office is put under emergency suspension, the Facilities group is responsible for contacting the landlord and coordinating repairs. The Facilities group also has designated staff for handling inquiries from area and district officials, with the goal of ensuring acceptable responses are provided with the best possible resolution to areas of concern in an efficient and effective manner. As of November 2016, the Gateway District had eight leased facilities that were vacant or placed in emergency suspension, including the Waggoner Post Office.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate how congressional inquiries are handled and coordinated between Postal Service Headquarters and local management in the Gateway District. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed Postal Service policies and procedures for processing congressional inquiries.
- Identified congressional inquiries in CTS for FYs 2015 and 2016.
- Identified and verified congressional inquiries in eCC from October 2014 through August 2016.
- Evaluated congressional inquiries in eCC for timeliness and resolution.
- Reviewed informal inquiries for the Waggoner and Stonington post offices.
- Interviewed key stakeholders including headquarters Facilities staff and Government Relations officials, Great Lakes Area officials, and Gateway District officials. We also interviewed congressional representatives' staffers who represent constituents in the Gateway District and contacted the Stonington and Waggoner mayors.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2016 through March 2017, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on February 22, 2017, and included their comments where appropriate.

We relied on data obtained from Postal Service operational systems, including eCC and CTS. We assessed the reliability of data by confirming the data with management and determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of this audit.

⁴ The actual number in eCC was 63 congressional inquiries, however two congressional inquiries were incorrectly classified.

Prior Audit Coverage

The OIG did not identify any prior audits or reviews related to the objective of this audit.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



March 9, 2017

LORI LAU DILLIARD via email (audittracking@uspsaig.gov)
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Draft Audit Congressional Inquiries – Gateway District (Report Number MS-AR-17-Draft)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Congressional Inquiries-Gateway District Draft Audit Report. The Gateway District and Facilities generally agree with most of the findings and recommendations made during this audit as they pertain to the Congressional Inquiries for the Gateway District. However, Facilities management disagrees in part with the finding that Facilities staff was unable to provide timely and complete information that impeded the Gateway District's ability to handle the Congressional Inquiries for the Waggoner Post Office, as discussed further below.

Findings

Finding #1: Waggoner Post Office Inquiries - As of February 2017, there is still no timeline or estimated date to open the facility.

Management disagrees with this finding. On February 22, 2017, the Gateway District was provided with an expected re-open date of July 2017 and that timeline was subsequently shared with Representative Rodney Davis' staff assistant, Megan Kettelkamp on the same day by John Boeger, Gateway District Manager Consumer Industry & Contact.

Finding #2: Waggoner Post Office Inquiries - A lack of timely and complete information impeded the district's ability to handle the congressional inquiry.

HQs Facilities disagrees with the statement that the Facilities staff was unable to provide timely information to assist the District in responding to various inquiries from Representative Rodney Davis' staff between 2015 and 2016 regarding the Waggoner Post Office. Facilities staff did provide information regarding the current status of the Waggoner Post Office. Facilities staff provided as much information as was available at the time of each request as the landlord was responsible for making the repairs necessary to re-open the facility. Facilities was not able to provide complete information on the specific re-open date as that date was not within the control of Facilities. The office in question is a leased facility and the landlord is responsible for making repairs, including those repairs needed to re-open the facility. There are certain processes that have to be followed by both the Postal Service and the landlord and contractual provisions honored before timelines and completion dates can be identified. Given that the landlord and Postal Service are bound by provisions in the lease with respect to repairs by the landlord, including the time allotted for such repairs, the Postal Service could not provide an exact opening date as it was unknown whether the landlord would honor its obligations, whether there would be any Force Majeure events delaying landlord and whether the work, upon completion, would be satisfactory to the Postal Service. It is important to note that there are several steps that need to occur by both the Lessor and Postal Service prior to and during the repair process. At the time of each Congressional request, responses were provided to the District regarding the current status of repairs based on available information. Estimates of completion times would have been speculative and possibly misleading.

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Recommendations

1. Vice President Facilities: Provide the Gateway District timelines and a potential opening date for the Waggoner Post Office.

Management agrees with this recommendation. Management has notified the Gateway District that the Waggoner Post Office is expected to re-open in July 2017, subject to any unforeseen events that delay the work, including for example, discoveries of unknown physical conditions that may be uncovered during the scheduled repairs. Management provided this anticipated July 2017 re-opening information to the Gateway District on February 22nd as shown in the attached email.

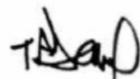
Target Implementation Date: Recommendation completed

2. Gateway District: Upon receiving information from the Facilities staff regarding the Waggoner Post Office, provide the information to Congressman Rodney Davis' office.

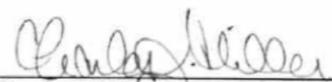
Management agrees with this recommendation. Management agrees to provide information regarding the Waggoner Post Office received from Facilities staff to the office of Congressman Rodney Davis from time to time upon request by the Congressman. Note that the anticipated re-opening date for the Waggoner Post Office was provided to Representative Rodney Davis' staff assistant, Megan Kettelkamp, on Wednesday, February 22, 2017.

Target Implementation Date: Recommendation completed

In conclusion, Management appreciates the OIG's efforts in preparing this Draft Report. The Draft Report and Management's responses do not contain information that Management believes may be exempt from disclosure under FOIA.



Tom A. Samra
Vice President, Facilities



Charles J. Miller
District Manager, Gateway District

CC: Sally K. Haring, Manager CARM via email (CARManager@USPS.GOV)



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