

Brookline Branch, Brookline, MA: Delivery Operations

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 24-154-1-R25 | December 10, 2024



Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

December 10, 2024

MEMORANDUM FOR: DERMOT G. TUOHY,
MANAGER, MASSACHUSETTS-RHODE ISLAND DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph E. Wolski", is centered below the memorandum for.

FROM: Joseph E. Wolski
Director, Field Operations, Atlantic & WestPac

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Brookline Branch, Brookline, MA: Delivery Operations
(Report Number 24-154-1-R25)

This report presents the results of our audit of delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookline Branch in Brookline, MA.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Ricardo Martinez, Audit Manager, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Chief Retail & Delivery Officer & Executive Vice President
Vice President, Delivery Operations
Vice President, Retail & Post Office Operations
Vice President, Atlantic Area Retail & Delivery Operations
Director, Retail & Post Office Operations Maintenance
Corporate Audit and Response Management

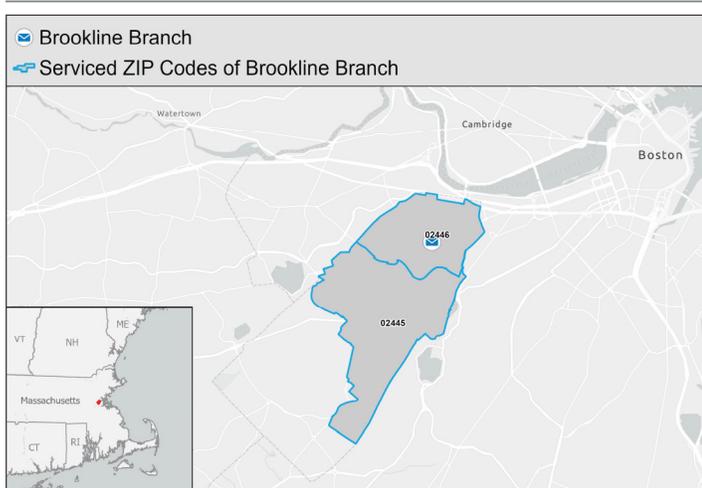
Results

Background

The U.S. Postal Service’s mission is to provide timely, reliable, secure, and affordable mail and package delivery to more than 160 million residential and business addresses across the country. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviews delivery operations at facilities across the country and provides management with timely feedback in furtherance of this mission.

This interim report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookline Branch in Brookline, MA (Project Number 24-154-1). The Brookline Branch is in the Massachusetts-Rhode Island (MA-RI) District of the Atlantic Area and services ZIP Codes 02445 and 02446 (see Figure 1). These ZIP Codes serve 54,374 people in an urban area.¹

Figure 1. ZIP Codes Served by the Brookline Branch



Source: OIG analysis of ZIP Code data.

This delivery unit has 39 city routes, 12 combination services routes,² and six parcel routes.³ From July 13 through August 16, 2024, the delivery unit had four supervisors assigned.⁴ Of these supervisors, one had been transferred to a different facility, and the unit had assigned an acting supervisor at this facility. The Brookline Branch falls under the Boston Post Office for employee availability measurement. As of August 9, 2024,⁵ the employee availability rate for the Boston Post Office was 91.7 percent year-to-date, which is under the Postal Service’s retail and delivery operations employee availability goal of 93.6 percent for fiscal year (FY) 2024. The Brookline Branch is one of three delivery units⁶ the OIG reviewed during the week of September 16, 2024, that are serviced by the Boston Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC).

We assessed all units serviced by the Boston P&DC based on the number of Customer 360⁷ (C360) delivery-related inquiries,⁸ Informed Delivery⁹ contacts, stop-the-clock¹⁰ (STC) scans performed away from the delivery point, and undelivered route information between May 1 and July 31, 2024. We also reviewed first and last mile failures¹¹ between May 4 and August 2, 2024.

We judgmentally selected the Brookline Branch primarily based on the number of C360 inquiries related to delivery, Informed Delivery contacts, and STC scans performed at the delivery unit. The unit was also chosen based on the last mile failures and undelivered routes. See [Table 1](#) for a comparison of some of these metrics between the unit and the rest of the district.

1 We obtained ZIP Code information related to population and urban/rural classification from 2020 Census Bureau information.
2 Motorized routes that provide a variety of services such as collecting inbound mail, delivering mail, and placing mail in lockable receptacles located along carrier routes for carriers to pick up and deliver.
3 A city route in which the principal function is to deliver large packages.
4 According to the Postal Service’s Time and Attendance Collection System (TACS).
5 The last day of Pay Period 17.
6 The other two units were Revere Carrier Annex, Revere, MA (Project Number 24-154-2) and Fort Point Station, Boston, MA (Project Number 24-154-3).
7 A cloud-based application that enables Postal Service employees to diagnose, resolve, and track customer inquiries.
8 A compilation of package inquiry, package pickup, daily mail service, and hold mail inquiries.
9 Informed Delivery is a free and optional notification service that gives residential customers the ability to digitally preview their letter-sized mail and submit inquiries for mailpieces that were expected for delivery but have not arrived.
10 A scan event that indicates the Postal Service has completed its commitment to deliver or attempt to deliver the mailpiece. Examples of STC scans include “Delivered,” “Available for Pickup,” and “No Access.”
11 First mile failures occur when a mailpiece is collected and does not receive a processing scan at the P&DC on the day that it was intended. Last mile failures occur after the mailpiece has been processed at the P&DC on a final processing operation and is not delivered to the customer on the day it was intended.

Table 1. Delivery Metric Comparison Between May 1 and July 31, 2024

Delivery Metric	Unit Average per Route	District Average per Route
C360 Delivery Inquiries	6.5	4.0
Informed Delivery Contacts	10.8	8.4
STC Scans at the Unit	18.6	9.9

Source: OIG analysis of Postal Service's C360, Informed Delivery, and Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) System data extracted on August 6, 2024. PTR is the system of record for all delivery status information for mail and packages with trackable services and barcodes.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate mail delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookline Branch in Brookline, MA.

To accomplish our objective, we focused on the following audit areas: delayed mail, package scanning, arrow keys,¹² carrier separations and transfers, and property safety and security conditions. Specifically, we reviewed delivery metrics, including the number of routes and carriers, mail arrival time, amount of reported delayed mail, package scanning, and carrier complement. During our site visit we observed mail conditions; package scanning procedures; arrow key security procedures; employee separation procedures; and unit safety and security conditions. We also analyzed the scan status of mailpieces at the carrier cases and interviewed unit management and employees. We discussed our observations and conclusions as summarized in Table 2 with management on November 25, 2024, and included their comments, where appropriate.

We are issuing this interim report to provide the Postal Service with timely information regarding conditions we identified at the Brookline Branch. We will issue a separate capping report¹³ that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for all three delivery units, as well as the district. The capping report will include actions taken by management to address the issues identified in this interim report. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about our scope and methodology.

Results Summary

We identified issues affecting delivery operations and property conditions at the Brookline Branch. Specifically, we found issues with all five of the areas we reviewed (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Results

Audit Area	Deficiencies Identified	
	Yes	No
Delayed Mail	X	
Package Scanning	X	
Arrow Keys	X	
Separations and Transfers	X	
Property Conditions	X	

Source: Results of our fieldwork during the week of September 16, 2024.

We analyzed employee data and did not identify any issues with employee separations. However, we did identify issues with an employee transfer (see [Finding #4](#)).

¹² A distinctively shaped key carriers use to open mail-receiving receptacles, such as street collection boxes and panels of apartment house mailboxes equipped with an arrow lock. Arrow keys are accountable property and are subject to strict controls.
¹³ Project Number 24-154.

Finding #1: Delayed Mail

What We Found

On the morning of September 17, 2024, we identified 7,992 delayed mailpieces¹⁴ at 36 of 39 carrier cases. Specifically, we identified 4,272 letters, 3,711 flats, and 9 packages. In addition, management did not report this mail as undelivered in the Delivery Condition Visualization (DCV)¹⁵ system. See Figure 2 for an example of delayed mail found at carrier cases. Further, the carriers did not complete PS Forms 1571, *Undelivered Mail Report*,¹⁶ to document reasons for undelivered mailpieces.

Figure 2. Example of Delayed Mail in a Carrier Case



Source: OIG photo taken September 17, 2024

Why Did It Occur

These conditions occurred due to inadequate management oversight. Management stated that most of the delayed mail identified occurred because carriers assisted with other routes and did not complete the route deliveries. For example, the route of a carrier on extended leave was split among other carriers at the unit, and the carriers assigned did not deliver all mail because they were not familiar with the route. The AM supervisor stated that she did not report the delayed mail in the DCV system because

other duties took priority that day, such as assigning staff to case and deliver mail for the uncovered routes. In addition, the PM supervisor stated that she did not know that mail brought back to the unit had to be entered in the DCV system. Further, she relied on carriers to provide her copies of PS Form 1571 instead of conducting a thorough walkthrough to ensure that all mail was cleared from the unit herself.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have conducted an adequate walkthrough of the workroom to verify that all mail was delivered, and that carriers documented on PS Form 1571 the reason for undelivered mail brought back from the street. Postal Service policy¹⁷ states that all types of First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Express Mail are always committed for delivery on the day of receipt. In addition, managers are required¹⁸ to report all mail in the delivery unit after the carriers have left for their street duties as either delayed or curtailed in the DCV system. Further, management must update the DCV system if volumes have changed prior to the end of the business day.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When mail is delayed, there is an increased risk of customer dissatisfaction, which may adversely affect the Postal Service brand. In addition, inaccurate reporting of delayed mail in the DCV system provides management at the local, district, area, and headquarters levels with an inaccurate status of mail delays and can result in improper actions taken to address issues.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

¹⁴ Count of mail included individual piece counts and OIG estimate based on Postal Service conversion factors in Handbook M-32, *Management Operating Data Systems*, Appendix D.

¹⁵ A tool for unit management to manually self-report delayed mail, which provides a snapshot of daily mail conditions at the point in time when carriers have departed for the street.

¹⁶ PS Form 1571, *Undelivered Mail Report*, lists all mail distributed to the carrier for delivery that was left in the office or returned undelivered.

¹⁷ *Committed Mail & Color Code Policy for Marketing Mail* stand-up talk, February 2019.

¹⁸ *Informed Visibility Delivery Condition Visualization User Guide*, August 2023.

Finding #2: Package Scanning

What We Found

Employees scanned packages improperly at the delivery unit and away from the intended delivery point.

We reviewed package scanning data for scans that occurred at the unit and removed any potentially accurate scans performed.¹⁹ In total, employees improperly scanned 724 packages at the delivery unit between May 1 and July 31, 2024 (see Table 3). Further analysis of the STC scan data for these packages showed that 93.8 percent of them were scanned “Delivered.”

Table 3. STC Scans at Delivery Unit

STC Scan Type	Count	Percentage
Delivered	679	93.8%
Delivery Attempted - No Access	31	4.3%
Refused	5	0.7%
Delivered to Agent for Final Delivery	5	0.7%
No Secure Location Available	3	0.4%
No Authorized Recipient Available	1	0.1%
Total	724	100%

Source: OIG analysis of the Postal Service’s PTR System data.

We also reviewed 91 scans occurring away from the delivery unit and over 1,000 feet²⁰ from the intended delivery point between May 1 and July 31, 2024, but did not identify any significant issues.

Why Did It Occur

These scanning issues occurred because unit management did not adequately monitor and enforce proper package scanning procedures. Unit management stated that carriers sometimes get packages intended for customers with Caller Service²¹ and Premium Forwarding Service.²² To ensure packages get a “delivered” scan, the carriers stated they scanned these packages as “delivered” in the office before handing them to other unit employees for final processing and delivery. Since the unit management was aware that carriers scan packages as “delivered” in the office during the morning, they only checked scanning reports for improper afternoon scans.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have monitored scan performance daily and enforced compliance. The Postal Service’s goal is to ensure proper delivery attempts for mailpieces to the correct address with proper service,²³ which includes scanning packages at the time and location of delivery.²⁴ Forwarded mailpieces requiring a delivery scan should be rerouted and not be sent utilizing Premium Forwarding Service.²⁵

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Customers rely on accurate scan data to track their packages in real time. When employees do not scan mailpieces correctly, customers are unable to determine the actual status of their packages. By improving scanning operations, management can improve mail visibility, increase customer satisfaction, and enhance both the customer experience and the Postal Service brand.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding.

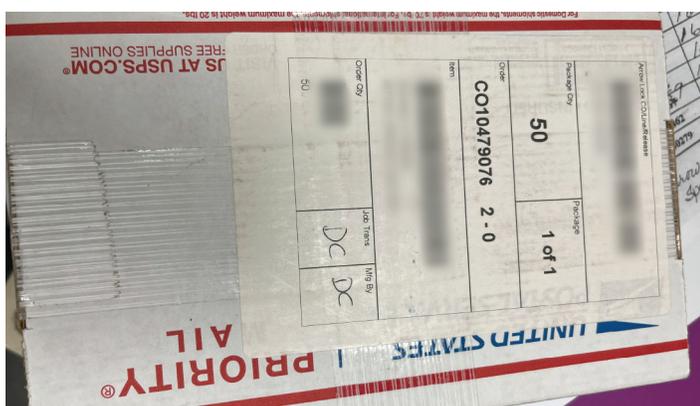
¹⁹ This data does not include scans that could properly be made at a delivery unit, such as “Delivered – PO Box” and “Customer (Vacation) Hold.” Additionally, PO Box scans at the unit were only counted when the delivery point was an address away from the unit. This category does not include mail addressed for a PO Box.
²⁰ Packages are expected to be scanned within a designated buffer distance from the delivery point. The OIG evaluates any package that was scanned more than 1,000 feet from the delivery point.
²¹ Provides optional delivery services to customers willing to pay a fee, such as those with large volumes of mail.
²² Provides residential delivery with a forwarding service for customers who are away from their primary residences. Most mail from the permanent address is forwarded once a week via Priority Mail service to the temporary address.
²³ *Delivery Done Right the First Time* stand-up talk, March 2020.
²⁴ *Carriers Delivering the Customer Experience* stand-up talk, July 2017.
²⁵ Publication 621, PFS-Guidebook for Employees, Sections 1 and 8, dated May 2014.

Finding #3: Arrow Keys

What We Found

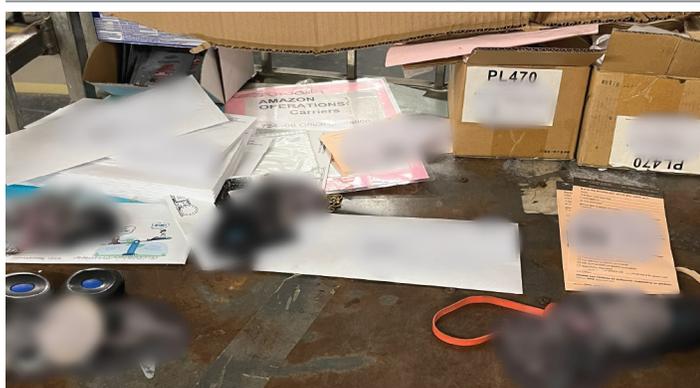
Unit management did not properly manage and safeguard arrow keys. On the morning of September 18, 2024, we reviewed the unit's arrow key certification list in the Retail and Delivery Applications and Reports (RADAR)²⁶ system and conducted a physical inventory of keys at the unit. We determined 55 keys located at the unit were not on the list. This included an unopened box of 50 spare keys purchased a year and a half ago that were not in the RADAR list (see Figure 3). Also, there were 24 arrow keys on the list that could not be located at the unit. In addition, arrow keys were not always kept secure. Further, we observed in the morning the arrow keys were left unattended [REDACTED] (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Unopened Arrow Keys Box



Source: OIG photo taken September 18, 2024.

Figure 4. Unattended Arrow Keys



Source: OIG photo taken September 18, 2024.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide sufficient oversight to properly manage and safeguard the arrow keys. The unit did not have an arrow key accountability process in place. For example, when the station manager was on extended leave, there was no one to ensure the spare keys purchased were accounted for in the RADAR system. Management was not aware that two boxes of 100 spare keys were purchased and one of the boxes was left unopened for over a year without being certified in the RADAR system. Also, management was not aware there were missing keys since a supervisor or clerk did not verify all keys had been returned and accounted for daily.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have verified that arrow key security procedures were properly followed. According to Postal Service policy,²⁷ management must keep an accurate inventory of all arrow keys. Any missing keys must be immediately reported to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. In addition, Postal Service's policy states that arrow keys must remain secured until they are individually assigned to personnel. Upon return from their routes, carriers should deposit arrow keys in a secure location and a supervisor or clerk must verify all keys have been returned and accounted for daily.

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When there is insufficient oversight and supervision of accountable items, such as arrow keys, there is increased risk of mail theft. These thefts damage the Postal Service's reputation and diminish public trust in the nation's mail system. Additionally, because arrow keys open mail receptacles, lost or damaged keys can result in undelivered mail.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding.

²⁶ The arrow key certification in RADAR provides a national platform for all facilities to verify current inventory and account for all arrow keys.

²⁷ Arrow/Modified Arrow Lock (MAL) Key Accountability Standard Work Instruction, dated May 2024.

Finding # 4: Employee Transfers

What We Found

We determined that a supervisor listed on the employee rolls had not worked at the unit for over a year. The supervisor was still employed by the Postal Service, but they reported to a different unit.

Why Did It Occur

The unit had not updated the rolls to reflect that the supervisor was transferred to another unit. Instead, they relied on the other unit to record the transfer and did not follow up when it was not done.

What Should Have Happened

Postal Service management must process timely employee transfers to properly reflect employee status and to maximize the office's employee complement.²⁸

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

When transferred employees are not removed from the employee rolls, management is unable to hire replacements.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding.

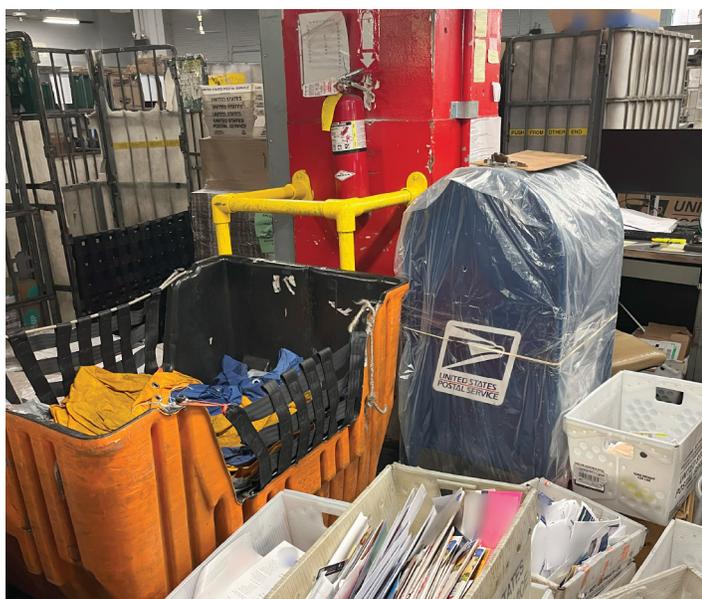
²⁸ TACS – Supervisors Responsibilities for Time & Attendance

Finding # 5: Property Conditions

What We Found

We found two safety issues at the Brookline Branch. One of the 11 fire extinguisher and two electrical panels were blocked in the workroom area (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Blocked Fire Extinguisher



Source: OIG photo taken September 18, 2024.

Figure 6. Blocked Electrical Panels



Source: OIG photos taken September 18, 2024.

Why Did It Occur

Management did not provide sufficient oversight and take the necessary actions to verify that property condition issues were corrected because other duties, such as getting the mail out for delivery each day, took priority over addressing safety issues.

What Should Have Happened

Management should have provided sufficient oversight of personnel responsible for maintaining facilities, reported safety issues as they arose, and followed up to determine completion. The Postal Service requires management to maintain a safe environment for employees and customers.²⁹

Effect on the Postal Service and Its Customers

Management's attention to safety and security deficiencies can reduce the risk of injuries to employees and customers; reduce related costs, such as workers' compensation claims, lawsuits, and penalties; and enhance the customer experience and Postal Service brand.

Postal Service Response

The Postal Service agreed with this finding.

²⁹ Postal Service Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook*, July, 2020.

Appendix A: Additional Information

We conducted this audit from September through December 2024 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.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of the Brookline Branch internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that the following three components were significant to our audit objective:

- Control Activities
- Information and Communication
- Monitoring

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to all three components that were significant within the context of our objectives. We will issue a separate report that provides the Postal Service with the overall findings and recommendations for the Brookline Branch, Fort Point Station, and Revere Carrier Annex, as well as the district.

We assessed the reliability of PTR, DCV, and the Time and Collection System data by reviewing existing information, comparing data from other sources, observing operations, and interviewing Postal Service officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Appendix B: Management's Comments



November 25, 2024

JOHN CIHOTA
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: Management Response: Brookline Branch, Brookline, MA: Delivery Operations
(Report Number 24-154-1 - DRAFT)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings contained in the draft audit report, *Brookline Branch, Brookline, MA: Delivery Operations*.

Management agrees with the five findings in the report on delayed mail, package scanning, carrier separations and transfers, arrow keys and property conditions.

Management has begun taking steps to address the five findings.

Delayed Mail: Management will conduct a service talk on proper handling and recording of delayed mail in DCV. Management will also reiterate the requirement to use PS Form 1571 *Undelivered Mail Report*. Reviews will be conducted to monitor for compliance.

Package Scanning: Management will provide a service talk on proper package handling and package scanning procedures and conduct reviews to monitor compliance.

Carrier Separations and Transfers: Management will submit the correct paperwork to record employee transfers and separations and will monitor for compliance.

Arrow Keys: Management will update the inventory log to reflect all arrow keys on hand and report missing arrow keys to the Inspection Service. Management will also provide training on proper handling and security of arrow keys. Additionally, reviews will be conducted to monitor for compliance.

Property Conditions: Management has abated the two property conditions identified in the report.

E-SIGNED by DERMOT.G TUOHY
on 2024-11-26 18:15:23 EST

Derмот Tuohy
A/Manager, MA-RI District

cc: Vice President, Area, Retail & Delivery (Atlantic)
Corporate Audit Response Management

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



This document contains sensitive information that has been redacted for public release. These redactions were coordinated with USPS and agreed to by the OIG.

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