

# Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express Service

## AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 25-056-R25 | August 18, 2025



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# Highlights

## Background

Priority Mail Express (PME), formerly Express Mail, was introduced in the 1970s as the U.S. Postal Service's fastest product, and as the best option for customers to send time-sensitive documents and packages by offering a next-day to two-day service guarantee. Recent transformations to postal operations under the Delivering for America plan are changing the service standards for this premium product. Specifically, in October 2023, the Postal Service deployed a major operational change called Local Transportation Optimization (LTO) that reduced the number of transportation trips to and from select post offices. With LTO, mail collected at optimized post offices remained overnight, delaying its entry into sorting operations. As a result, most optimized post offices can no longer offer PME with a next-day service guarantee. To support this change, on April 1, 2025, the Postal Service revised PME to a one-to-three-day service guarantee.

## What We Did

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's initial communication of PME service changes within local communities. For this audit, we interviewed headquarters management, judgmentally selected three LTO regions to conduct site visits at post offices and mail processing facilities, and performed a limited-scope mail test.

## What We Found

While the Postal Service took steps to notify the public of the revised one-to-three-day PME service standard change that occurred on April 1, 2025, there is room for improvement in its communications on a local level. Specifically, the Postal Service did not provide adequate communication to local post office customers affected by the LTO implementation of the impacts on PME service commitments. The impacts were exacerbated as retail clerks were not provided training on how to accurately advise customers. Further, the Postal Service did not effectively implement a suspension of the PME service commitment guarantee. As a result, we determined the Postal Service incurred approximately \$189,600 in questioned costs, over a two-day period.

## Recommendations and Management's Comments

We made seven recommendations to address these issues, and management agreed with three and disagreed with four. Management's comments and our evaluation are at the end of each finding and recommendation. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 3, 6, and 7, as corrective actions should resolve the issues. We will work with management on the remaining four recommendations through the audit resolution process. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

# Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

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August 18, 2025

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** JENNIFER VO  
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL AND POST OFFICE OPERATIONS

SHEILA HOLMAN  
VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING

JEFFERY ADAMS  
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

MARGARET PEPE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRODUCT SOLUTIONS

GREGORY WHITE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS INTEGRATION AND  
PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE

ROBERT CINTRON  
VICE PRESIDENT, LOGISTICS

*Mary K. Lloyd*

**FROM:** Mary K. Lloyd  
Deputy Assistant Inspector General  
for Mission Operations

**SUBJECT:** Audit Report – Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express  
Service (Report Number 25-056-R25)

This report presents the results of our audit of Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express Service.

All recommendations require U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. All recommendations should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Brandi Adder, Director, Delivery Operations, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General  
Corporate Audit Response Management

# Results

## Introduction/Objective

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of the communication of local changes to Priority Mail Express (PME) service (Project Number 25-056). Our objective was to evaluate the U.S. Postal Service’s initial communication of PME service changes within local communities. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

## Background

In the 1970s, the Postal Service introduced Express Mail as a product for customers to send time-sensitive documents and packages. In 2013, Express Mail was renamed to PME, and offered a next-day to two-day service guarantee.<sup>1</sup> Additional PME features included \$100 of insurance, tracking, and a money-back guarantee if the delivery did not take place by 6 p.m. on the scheduled day.

As part of its Delivering for America plan, the Postal Service announced several initiatives to modernize its processing and delivery network. One of those initiatives was to redesign its surface transportation network to create high performing, lower cost, efficient and reliable transportation capable of moving more volume on fewer trips. To support this plan, in October 2023, the Postal Service began piloting its Local Transportation Optimization (LTO) initiative in Richmond, VA. Under this initiative, optimized post offices<sup>2</sup> no longer receive an afternoon pick-up to return the day’s collection mail to the plant for processing. Rather, the mail collected during the day, including PME, remained at the post office until the next day. The transportation that dropped off mail for delivery the next morning would also pick up the collection mail from the previous day. This delayed the entry of mail to processing

operations and removed the ability for most optimized post offices to offer PME with a next-day service guarantee.

Roughly a year after the initial implementation of the LTO pilot, the Postal Service asked for an advisory opinion from the Postal Regulatory Commission regarding its intention to implement LTO nationwide, renaming it Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO).<sup>3</sup> The Postal Service also proposed revising its service standards<sup>4</sup> based on the 5-digit ZIP Code from where the mail was sent to the 5-digit ZIP Code to where it was delivered, and the class of mail.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, for the ZIP Codes impacted by RTO, the Postal Service would add an additional day of service to Priority Mail and PME. As a result, PME would be offered as a one-to-three-day mail product, depending on location. Post offices not subject to RTO would still offer a one-to-two-day PME product, while most post offices subject to RTO would now offer a two-to-three-day PME product (see Table 1). With the revised service standards, PME sent from most optimized post offices would now have similar delivery times to Priority Mail.

**Table 1. Optimized vs. Non-Optimized Facility PME Service Standards**

Priority Mail Express Service		
Sent From:	Non-Optimized ZIP Code	1-2 Days
	Optimized ZIP Code	2-3 Days

Source: Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis.  
Note: This chart displays most situations.

1 Next-day service is available at designated Postal Service facilities when sent to specified ZIP Code delivery areas, with two-day service available for most of the remaining ZIP Code delivery areas.  
2 Post offices 50 miles or more from the associated processing plants were optimized.  
3 RTO would impact post offices greater than 50 miles away from a Regional Processing and Distribution Center.  
4 Service standards are delivery benchmarks for how long customers can expect it to take to deliver different types of mail and packages from origin to destination ZIP Codes.  
5 Prior to this change, standards were based on plant to plant driving distances, meaning they were based on 3-digit ZIP Code pairs.

Through November 2024, the Postal Service had implemented these PME service standard changes for 16 LTO regions across the nation.<sup>6</sup> It further identified within a Postal Regulatory Commission filing,<sup>7</sup> about 24,400 additional post offices, which provide service to over 131 million Americans, that are eligible for optimization and will have impacts to PME service. Then on April 1, 2025, the Postal Service formally revised the PME service standards. PME continues to be a money-back guaranteed product but is now sold with a one-to-three-day service guarantee, depending on various factors.<sup>8</sup>

For this audit, we evaluated the communication of the revised PME service standards at the local post office-level across the 16 LTO regions, interviewed Postal Service Headquarters management, and judgmentally selected three LTO regions to conduct site visits. Specifically, within the Mid-Hudson, NY, Palatine, IL, and the Phoenix, AZ, LTO regions, we visited 10 optimized post offices, four non-optimized post offices, and three mail processing facilities. During our site visits in February 2025, we conducted observations, interviewed local Postal Service personnel, and performed a limited-scope mail test. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

## Findings Summary

While the Postal Service published industry alerts about the one-to-three-day nationwide PME service standard change that occurred on April 1, 2025, opportunities exist to improve communications within the communities impacted by LTO. Specifically,

“About 24,400 additional post offices, which provide service to over 131 million Americans, that are eligible for optimization and will have impacts to PME service.”

communities impacted by LTO did not have access to location-specific information and were not notified that they may no longer be able to send PME with a next-day service guarantee. Further, signage displayed at impacted post offices, and information on the Postal Service’s public website and in its pricing manual, was not updated as changes occurred. In addition, retail clerks lacked proper training to inform customers about or answer questions on the PME service changes. Collectively, these issues may negatively impact the Postal Service brand and goodwill,

and drive customers to competitors, who offer products like PME, for their mailing needs. Lastly, during our site visit observations and mail tests, the Postal Service did not effectively communicate and implement a suspension of the PME service guarantee, incurring questioned costs of about \$189,600.

<sup>6</sup> As of November 30, 2024, LTO had been implemented at the following regions: Richmond (VA), Wisconsin, Phoenix (AZ), Atlanta (GA), Portland (OR), Alabama, Mid-Hudson (NY), Santa Clarita (CA), Columbus (GA), Boise (ID), Santa Barbara (CA), Tulsa (OK), New Orleans (LA), Palatine (IL), San Bernadino (CA), and Bakersfield (CA).

<sup>7</sup> Postal Regulatory Commission filing 131287, *USPS-LR-N2024-1-1 — RTO Determination Based on Distance From RPDC*, dated October 4, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> PME service guarantee is determined based on the date on which the item is deemed accepted by the Postal Service and the origin and destination ZIP Codes.

## Finding #1: Lack of Consistent, Localized Messaging on Priority Mail Express Service Changes

On April 1, 2025, the Postal Service announced the revision of PME service standards through an Industry Alert,<sup>9</sup> noting changes would take effect immediately. About one month prior to this, the Postal Service began public outreach regarding the changes to PME. Specifically, news releases were issued on February 26, 2025, and March 20, 2025, to acknowledge refinements to its service standards. With this announcement, PME would now be sold with a one-to-three-day service guarantee.

“While the Postal Service made efforts to communicate the service standard change occurring on April 1, 2025, individually affected post office customers were not informed of the impact of these changes at their local post office.”

While the Postal Service made efforts to communicate the service standard change occurring on April 1, 2025, individually affected post office customers were not informed of the impact of these changes at their local post office. In accordance with the Administrative Support Manual,<sup>10</sup> the Postal Service must provide timely notification regarding changes in service to impacted communities. However, impacted communities were not given any notification from the Postal Service that their local post office would be optimized, or that it was already optimized, and that as a result,

they would be offered only a one-to-three-day PME product. If customers went to their local post office, browsed the PME webpage on USPS.com, or reviewed the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM),<sup>11</sup> PME was advertised with a next-day to two-day or one-day to two-day service guarantee.

### Inadequate Local Service Information

Starting in October 2023, most customers served by post offices optimized under LTO experienced an additional day added to PME service with no notification provided by the Postal Service, either in retail lobbies or online. After requesting an advisory opinion from the Postal Regulatory Commission in October 2024, which was issued January 31, 2025, the Postal Service provided public notice of its plan to refine service standards in a news release the next month. It was not until an Industry Alert, dated April 1, 2025, that the revised one-to-three-day PME service guarantee was announced (see Figure 1).

During site visits, we discussed the PME changes with clerks, supervisors, and postmasters and asked what information, if any, was proactively shared with customers. Of the 10 optimized post offices visited,<sup>12</sup> five (or 50 percent) expressed limitations on the information they could communicate to the public regarding the impacts of optimization on PME. Specifically at one post office, staff informed us that their request to add signage on the changes to the PME service guarantee was not approved by management. They would only inform the customer of the changes at the time of purchase. At another post office, staff informed us that they limited their communication due to safety concerns surrounding mail being held overnight.

<sup>9</sup> Industry Alerts inform stakeholders about important information regarding Postal Service webinars, promotions, products, and other news.

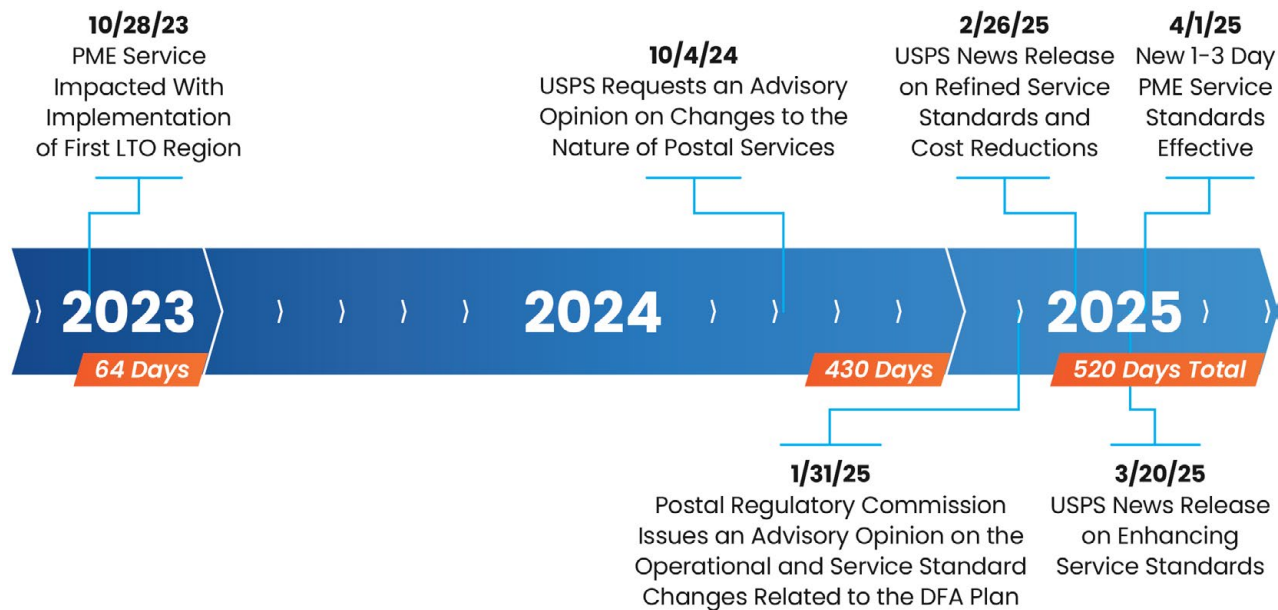
<sup>10</sup> Administrative Support Manual, Section 333, dated January 31, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> The *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service, Domestic Mail Manual* (DMM) provides the Postal Service's official prices and standards for all domestic mailing services (see [pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/welcome.htm](https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/welcome.htm)).

<sup>12</sup> We visited 14 post offices. Of the 14, 10 were optimized.



**Figure 1. Impacts and Communication of Changes to Priority Mail Express Service**



Source: OIG Analysis.

As a result, customers who purchased PME at an optimized post office could only be advised of the extended service standard during the course of the transaction: by the retail clerk; on the Customer Display Unit (CDU) before purchase (see Figure 2); or on their receipt after purchase. However, the location specific service standard information was not available either in the lobby or online to inform customers prior to their transaction.

“The Postal Service was unable to clearly define roles and responsibilities for conducting public outreach regarding these changes.”

Regarding communication to customers within the 16 LTO regions, we contacted members of USPS teams from Marketing, Retail, LTO Implementation, Logistics, and Public Relations. After conducting these interviews, the Postal Service was unable to clearly define roles and responsibilities for conducting public outreach regarding these changes. As a result, no one was responsible for informing customers of PME service impacts at the local level.

**Figure 2. Example of CDU Identifying the Scheduled Delivery Date**

The screenshot shows a USPS CDU interface with the following information:

- Package Weight: 0 lb 08.20 oz
- Mailing to Dracut, MA 01826 - Zone: 1
- Scheduled Delivery Date:** Thursday 04/10/2025 06:00 PM
- Additional services may be available. Ask clerk for details.
- Selected:
  - Priority Mail Express \$31.95
  - Insurance
  - Signature Waived
- Available Services:
  - Insurance Up to \$100.00 included
  - Return Receipt \$4.10
- Sub-Total \$31.95

At the bottom, there is a USPS logo and a 'data encrypted Chip' icon.

Source: OIG recreation of a photo taken April 9, 2025, at the Woburn, MA, Sorting and Delivery Center.

## Inaccurate and Outdated Retail Signage

Use of inaccurate and outdated retail signage was observed in all three LTO regions visited. While the Postal Service updated PME signage in January 2025, the signs did not reflect the extended three-day service guarantee in optimized regions. Rather, the signs advertised PME as a one-day to two-day service guarantee “to many destinations”, which did

not accurately reflect the level of service offered at most optimized post offices. Additionally, two of the post offices visited still had outdated signage that marketed PME service guarantee as next-day to many destinations. See Figure 3 for an example of the retail counter signage from October 2024 and January 2025.

Figure 3. Retail Counter Signage From October 2024 and January 2025

Source: USPS Blue Retail Marketing Updates, dated October 2024.

Source: USPS Blue Retail Marketing Updates, dated January 2025.

As mentioned, the 10 optimized post offices visited primarily advertised PME with a one-to-two-day service guarantee. However, only two of those optimized offices could offer one-day.<sup>13</sup> When it was available, the timeframe for offering this service guarantee was extremely limited. For example, an office we visited had a one-day service guarantee cutoff time<sup>14</sup> of 9:30 a.m., only half an hour after the retail window opened. PME accepted after the 9:30 a.m. cutoff would receive no better than a two-day service guarantee. The remaining eight optimized offices visited could only offer a two-to-three-day PME service guarantee, which contradicted the retail signage observed.<sup>15</sup> We expanded our review of cutoff times to all optimized post offices in the 16 LTO regions and found that 69 percent (or 1,700 post

“69 percent (or 1,700 post offices out of 2,456) could not offer a one-day service guarantee due to the cutoff time occurring before the retail window opened.”

offices out of 2,456) could not offer a one-day service guarantee due to the cutoff time occurring before the retail window opened (for example, the cutoff time was 12:15 a.m., but the retail window did not open until 8:30 a.m.).

<sup>13</sup> Offering a one-day service guarantee would be based on the distance to travel to be delivered.

<sup>14</sup> The latest time that mail can be accepted by the Postal Service to meet service.

<sup>15</sup> These offices had cutoff times before the retail window opened, and therefore, could not offer one-day service.

According to headquarters representatives from Marketing and Retail, they do not intend to create and re-issue retail signage for location-specific PME service standard guarantees. Further, they stated updates to more generalized retail signage take place at regular intervals throughout the year and doing it more frequently to address changes, such as with PME, would be cost prohibitive. These intervals are based on changes to postage prices, typically effective in January, July, and October of each year. As a result, retail signage will not reflect the revised PME service standards until July 2025, which is three months after nationwide implementation.

**Outdated and Limited Information on Public Website**

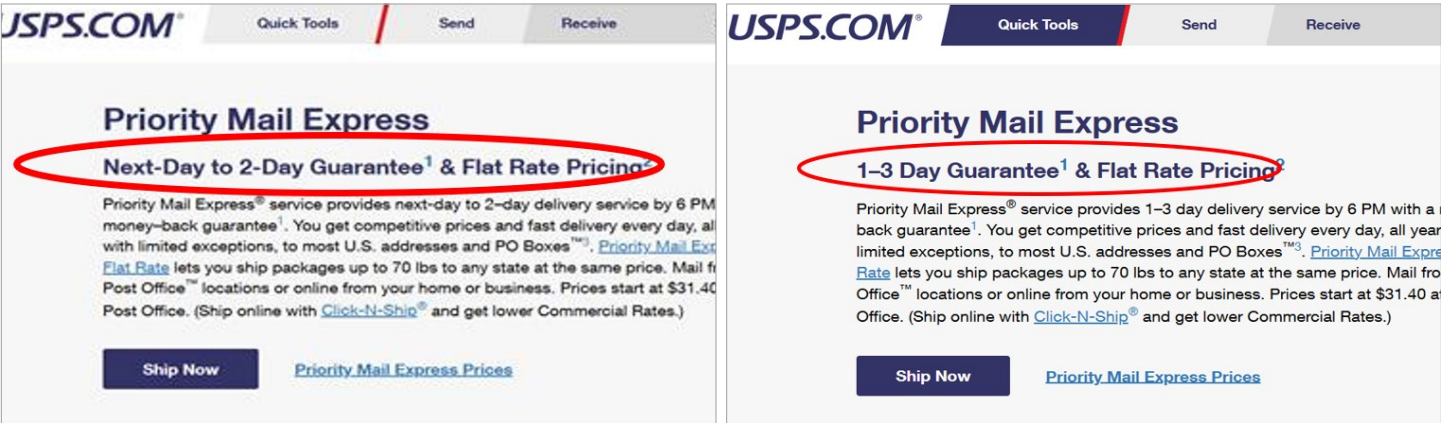
The Postal Service’s public website was not updated in January 2025 to match the new PME service guarantees shown in retail signage, and information available on the service changes was limited. Through March 2025, the Postal Service website continued to market PME with a next-day to two-day guarantee, even though retail signs advertised PME as a one-day to two-day service guarantee. Headquarters personnel stated that the need to update the website was not identified when

“The Postal Service’s public website was not updated in January 2025 to match the new PME service guarantees shown in retail signage.”

they changed retail marketing in January 2025. The website was updated April 1, 2025, when the revised service standard changes became effective nationwide (see Figure 4).

Prior to April 1, 2025, information on the new service standards — including news releases, a fact sheet, and links to resource tools — was posted by the Postal Service to its Delivering for America webpage.<sup>16</sup> However, none of the documents disclosed the extended three-day service guarantee. Additionally, an interactive map was developed as a tool for customers to view expected delivery times based on the specific ZIP Code they were shipping from. Yet, as of June 18, 2025, PME is one of the few Postal Service products excluded from this map. See Figure 5 for an example of the interactive map, and the products available to view expected delivery times.

Figure 4. Postal Service Website Updates on Priority Mail Express

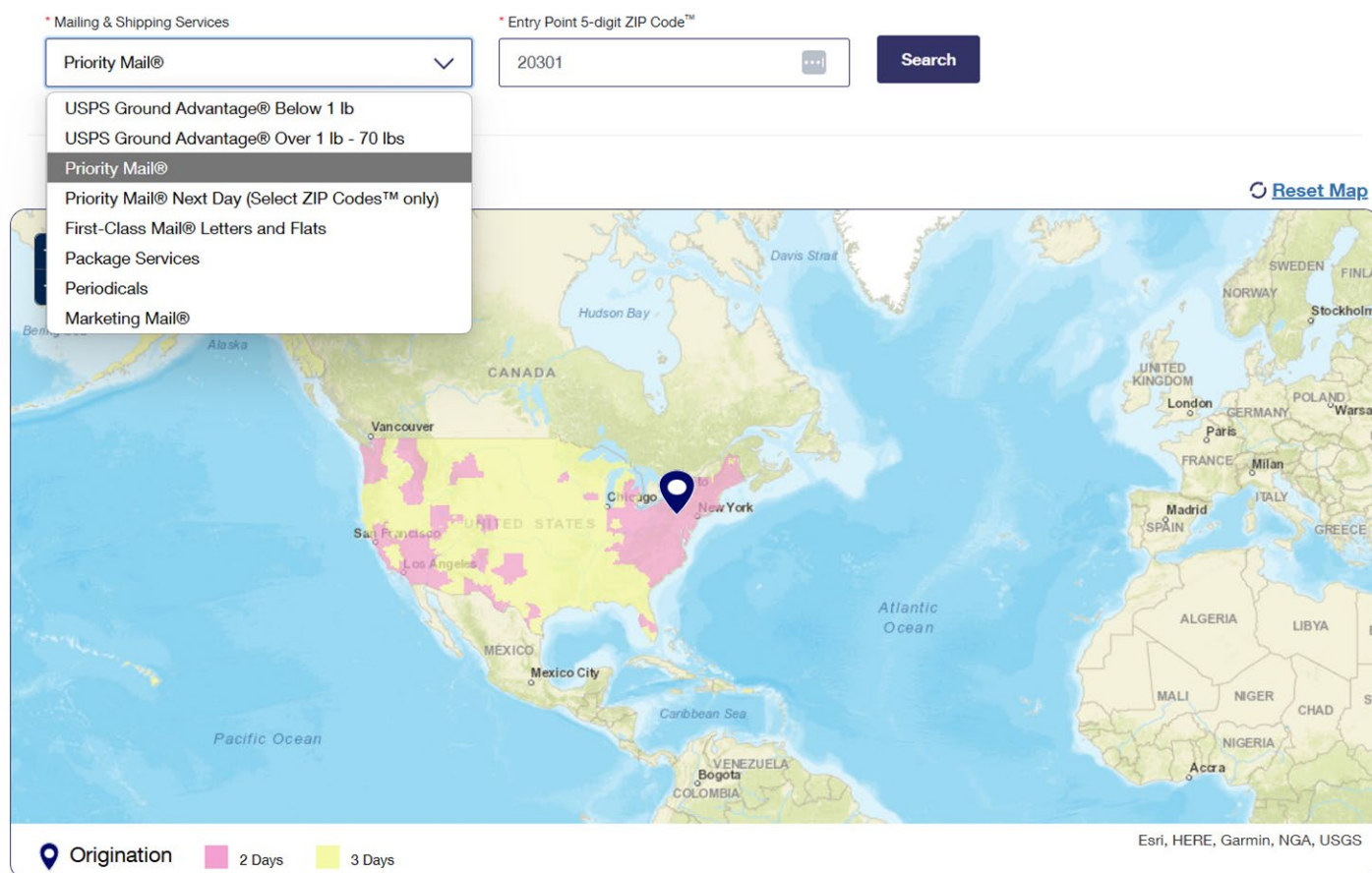


Source: Postal Service public website, as of March 31 and April 1, 2025, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> usps.com/servicestandards.



Figure 5. Example of Postal Service's Interactive Map



Source: Postal Service public website, as of June 18, 2025 (<https://www.usps.com/service-standards/>).

### Outdated Pricing Manual

The quarterly revision to the DMM, dated April 7, 2025, did not include the new PME service standards that took effect on April 1, 2025. The DMM provides the official prices and standards for all domestic mail services and is publicly available on the Postal Explorer website.<sup>17</sup> Even though Postal Explorer is part of the Postal Service's continuing effort to make the mail system easier and simpler for all customers, Headquarters personnel stated that the updates to the DMM on Postal Explorer are made on a quarterly basis, delaying the release of PME service standard changes effective on April 1, 2025, until the update in July 2025.

The lack of localized customer outreach about PME changes, combined with inconsistencies at the optimized post offices and at USPS.com, reflects negatively on the Postal Service's brand and

“It is critical to promptly notify customers of changes to mailing schedules, so customers can adjust their mailing practices, if needed.”

goodwill. It is critical to promptly notify customers of changes to mailing schedules, so customers can adjust their mailing practices, if needed. While the Postal Service views communication as key to allowing communities, customers, and oversight bodies to understand the full benefits of network modernization, it fell short regarding the local variations in the PME service changes.

<sup>17</sup> Pe.usps.com.



### Recommendation #1

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, implement policy and procedures that require coordination with all responsible parties to create and display notices in retail lobbies on any changes to service by the date the change becomes effective.

### Recommendation #2

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, identify and implement the best method for updating retail signage that aligns with the Priority Mail Express service guarantee offered by individual post offices.

### Recommendation #3

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, implement policy and procedures to ensure that the Postal Service public website is updated to reflect current service standards by the date the change becomes effective, and implement procedures to routinely review the website for accuracy.

### Recommendation #4

We recommend **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, implement policy and procedures to post revisions to the Domestic Mail Manual on the Postal Explorer website in the next quarterly update after the change becomes effective.

### Postal Service Response

Management disagreed with the finding, agreed with recommendation 3, and disagreed with recommendations 1, 2, and 4. Management stated that because LTO was a pilot project, retail signage and the public website was not updated, but service commitments could be communicated at the time of purchase. Additionally, management stated that the DMM does not include adjustments to local service standards, so no changes were made for LTO.

Regarding recommendation 1, management stated that updates to retail signage happen

at regular intervals to manage production and distribution costs. As a result, it is not cost effective to create and display notices in retail lobbies by the date the service change becomes effective.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated that it will develop retail signage for PME that accounts for the range of delivery time (one-to-three days) from the originating post office, and that specific service information for a particular mailpiece can be obtained from retail personnel.

Regarding recommendation 3, management stated that it will implement policy to ensure the public website is updated to reflect current service standard changes by the date the change becomes effective and will routinely review the website for accuracy. The target implementation date is August 31, 2025.

Regarding recommendation 4, management stated that updating the DMM is a complex and carefully coordinated process that occurs on a quarterly basis and is limited to changes that are national in scope. Management added that it strives to make changes transparent and accessible via other means.

### OIG Evaluation

Regarding finding 1, the OIG acknowledges that LTO was a pilot. However, in accordance with the *Administrative Support Manual*, the Postal Service must provide timely notification regarding changes in service to impacted communities, which did not occur.

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendation 3, as the corrective action should resolve the issue identified in the report.

Regarding recommendation 1, the OIG agrees that a cost-effective solution should be considered in creating and displaying notices. However, we contend that customers should be

notified of any change to service (by the date it becomes effective), without requiring interaction with retail personnel.

Regarding recommendation 2, although management stated it would develop retail signage that included a range of time for delivery, this does not meet the intent of the recommendation. We found that 69 percent of optimized post offices cannot sell PME with a one-day service guarantee. Advertising a delivery range of one-to-three days at these post offices does not accurately reflect the product being offered, as delivery is unlikely to take place within one day.

Regarding recommendation 4, the OIG acknowledges that updating the DMM is a

complex and carefully coordinated process. However, the nationwide change to PME service was first communicated by the Postal Service October 4, 2024, in its request for an advisory opinion from the Postal Regulatory Commission. The response to that advisory opinion was provided January 31, 2025. Based on that timeframe, management should have coordinated to ensure that changes in PME service were included in the April 7, 2025, revision to the DMM.

The OIG considers management's disagreement with recommendations 1, 2, and 4 as unresolved and will pursue them through the audit resolution process.

## Finding #2: Inadequate Training on Priority Mail Express Service Changes

Retail clerks were not trained on how to inform customers about the changes to the PME product, identify alternatives to receive faster service, or answer questions about why their post office sold PME with a three-day service guarantee. During site visits at three optimized post offices, we conducted a mail test and evaluated the customer experience related to PME service. On one occasion, we purchased PME with a three-day service guarantee and were not advised that another facility about 10 miles away offered faster service. On another occasion, a retail clerk advised us that they could only offer PME with a two-day guarantee. However, when we purchased the service, we received a three-day guarantee. We asked why the delivery would not take place within two days as discussed, but the clerk could not explain and stated they only knew PME as a two-day product.

Headquarters management stated that training was given to every postmaster within an LTO region, regarding the impacts of the changes, and included discussions on PME service. Headquarters management expected postmasters to communicate this information to their staff. However, we found that retail clerks at four of 10 optimized post offices visited did not receive any training or communication regarding the changes to the PME product. Additionally, three of the five postmasters interviewed at optimized post offices stated there was no change to the PME product, even though all three sold PME with up to a three-day guarantee.

The Postal Operations Manual (POM) states it is Postal Service policy for retail employees to accurately advise customers on the rules of mail

“Retail clerks were not trained on how to inform customers about the changes to the PME product.”

acceptance and to assist them in selecting the service best suited to their needs.<sup>18</sup> When retail personnel are unaware of changes to mail products, they cannot accurately advise the customer. This can result in the customer selecting a mail class that does not suit their needs, which could increase dissatisfaction and potentially cause them to take their business to a competitor. As the Postal Service moves forward with its modernization initiatives, it is important for retail personnel,

who are the face and voice of the Postal Service, to communicate changes and educate customers to maintain transparency and earn their trust.

### Recommendation #5

We recommend **Executive Director, Product Solutions** in coordination with **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, develop policy and procedures to communicate mail product changes to retail personnel, ensuring they can accurately advise customers on those changes.

### Postal Service Response

Management disagreed with the finding and with recommendation 5. Management stated training was provided to postmasters with the expectation that it be communicated to all retail personnel.

Regarding recommendation 5, management stated that retail personnel should use the point-of-sale system to provide the most accurate information on service standards and pricing updates to customers. Management added that this system will continue to be used, along with other resources, to communicate mail product

<sup>18</sup> POM, Issue 9, Section 137.12, dated July 2002 and updated online through May 31, 2024.

changes to employees and customers.

#### **OIG Evaluation**

Regarding finding 2, the OIG acknowledges that training was provided to postmasters. However, in interviews with three postmasters, they stated they were unaware of changes to the PME product, which limited their ability to communicate these changes to retail personnel.

Regarding recommendation 5, although the retail point-of-sale system presents accurate information to the customer, advising the customer on why they are receiving the service as determined by the system requires context that retail personnel, as required in the POM, should be able to provide. The OIG considers management's disagreement with recommendation 5 as unresolved and will pursue it through the audit resolution process.



## Finding 3: Poor Execution of Priority Mail Express Service Guarantee Suspension

During our site visit observations and mail tests, the Postal Service did not effectively communicate and timely implement a suspension of the PME service guarantee. On February 18, 2025, a winter storm passed through the Midwest, cancelling or delaying most flights in and out of the Postal Service's air network provider's hub in Memphis, TN. This ultimately led the Postal Service to suspend the PME service guarantee nationwide from 3 p.m. CST on Thursday, February 20, 2025, through Sunday, February 23, 2025.

### Ineffective Communication of PME Suspension

During our site visits to the Phoenix, AZ, and Palatine, IL, LTO regions, we sent 12 PME mailpieces to recipients across the country on February 19, 2025, and four PME mailpieces on February 20, 2025. Of those 16 mailpieces, 13 (or over 81 percent) did not meet the service guarantee printed on the receipt. We (as the customers) were not advised by the retail clerk of the inclement weather impacting the Postal Service's PME air network, nor of the suspension of the service guarantee when PME was purchased on February 20. As a result, we attempted to collect refunds for the late arriving mailpieces at four post offices.<sup>19</sup> At one post office, the retail clerk informed us they could not process the refund due to a weather-related suspension. The clerk provided a Retail Service Talk,<sup>20</sup> dated February 20, 2025, to support their determination (see [Figure 6](#)– right column). The other three post offices issued refunds.

Prior to the Retail Service Talk being issued, the Postal Service issued an Industry Alert on February

“We (as the customers) were not advised by the retail clerk of the inclement weather impacting the Postal Service's PME air network, nor of the suspension of the service guarantee when PME was purchased on February 20, 2025.”

19, 2025, publicly announcing the suspension of the PME service guarantee (see [Figure 6](#) – left column). According to headquarters management, the suspension was not effective until 3 p.m. CST Thursday, February 20, 2025. However, neither document included an effective start or end date/time. Headquarters management later confirmed that all 13 late arriving PME mailpieces were eligible for a refund as they were accepted before the implementation of the suspension.<sup>21</sup>

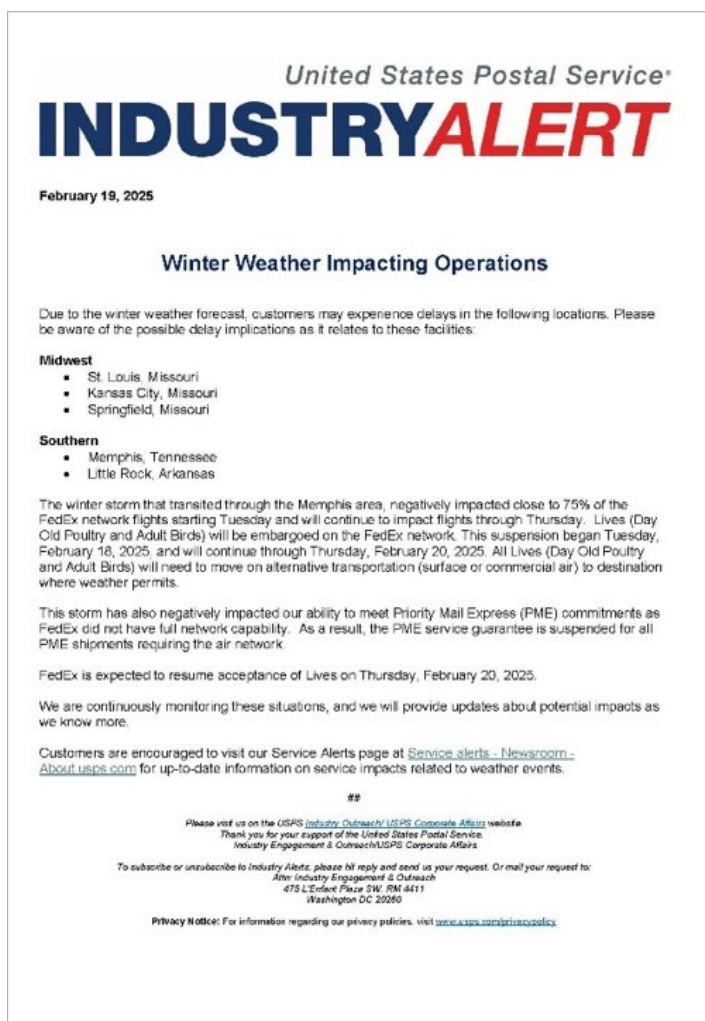
As noted in Finding 2, the POM states it is Postal Service policy for retail employees to assist customers in selecting the service best suited for their needs. When retail employees are not properly informed about the latest developments in retail operations, they cannot accurately assist customers and handle transactions effectively.

<sup>19</sup> Refunds were requested from the local post office of the auditors who mailed the PME.

<sup>20</sup> Retail Service Talks aim to keep retail employees informed about the latest developments in USPS retail operations, ensuring they can accurately assist customers and handle transactions effectively.

<sup>21</sup> The last PME mailpiece was purchased February 20, 2025, at 12:42 p.m. CST.

Figure 6. Industry Alert and Retail Service Talk on Suspension of Priority Mail Express Service Guarantee



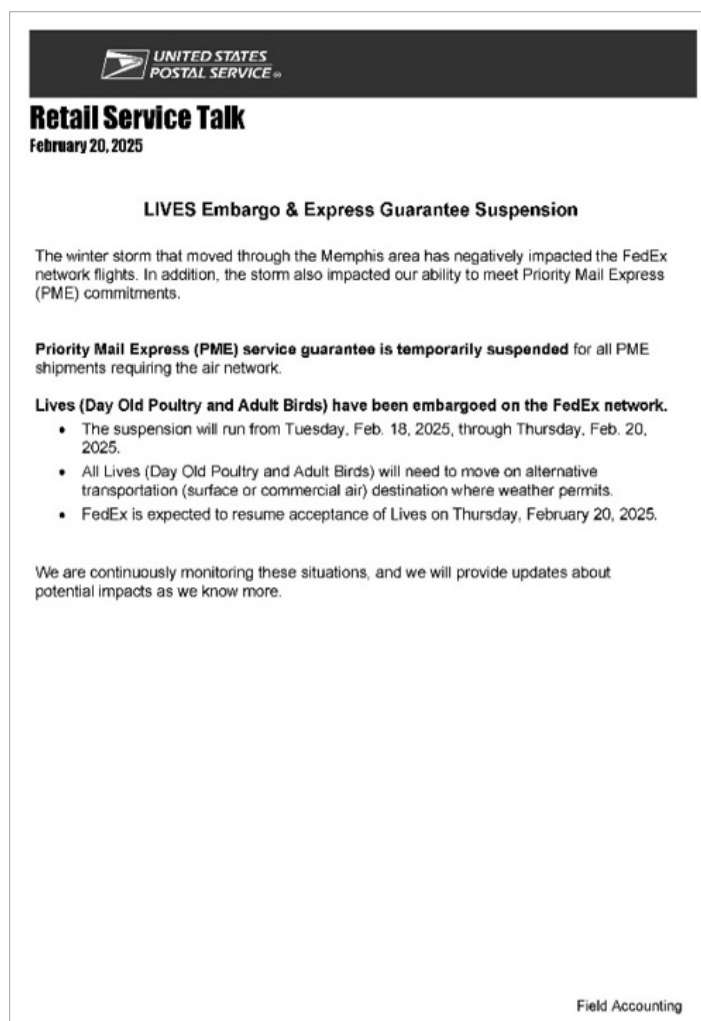
Source: USPS Industry Alerts, dated February 19, 2025 (see <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/13891>).

### Delayed Implementation of PME Suspension

The Postal Service did not suspend the PME service guarantee until about two days after inclement weather began affecting its air network operations.<sup>22</sup> According to headquarters management, the suspension was delayed as the Memphis storm was unique, and it needed time to determine the parameters of the suspension and receive approval from the postmaster general. Additionally, it noted that the process for updating the retail point-of-sale system to remove the service guarantee is manual and requires verification before uploading. While the

<sup>22</sup> On February 18, 2025, a winter storm passed through the Midwest, cancelling or delaying most flights in and out of the Postal Service's air network provider's hub in Memphis, TN; however, the PME service guarantee was not suspended until 3 p.m. CST February 20, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Domestic Mail Manual, Section 604.9.9.5, dated April 7, 2025.



Source: USPS Retail Service Talk, dated February 20, 2025.

Postal Service provided a Word document outlining the steps for implementing a suspension of the PME service guarantee within its point-of-sale system, these steps were undated and did not appear to be standard operating procedures. However, if these steps are followed expeditiously when operational impacts are identified, it should prevent PME from being sold with a service commitment guarantee when it is unlikely to be met. It also would reduce the Postal Service's liability for refunds. According to the DMM<sup>23</sup> and when authorized by headquarters, postage will not be refunded if the delay was

caused by a breakdown of much of Postal Service's transportation network resulting from events or factors outside its control.

Between February 19 and 3 p.m. CST February 20, 2025, the Postal Service sold over 38,100 PME mailpieces nationwide requiring air transportation, totaling over \$1.4 million in postage. Of those mailpieces, only about 15,300 (or around 40 percent) arrived on time. The remaining 22,800 did not meet the service commitment. Even though roughly 22,800 PME mailpieces did not meet the service commitment and were eligible for a refund, only about 4,400 refunds were requested from customers. As a result, the Postal Service incurred questioned costs of about \$189,600, but it was at risk of having to refund an additional \$664,600.

#### Recommendation #6

We recommend the **Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence**, in coordination with **Vice President, Logistics**, establish a requirement to clearly define the start and end date/time of any Priority Mail Express service guarantee suspension to be used by respective business units in communications, including Retail Service Talks, with retail personnel.

#### Recommendation #7

We recommend the **Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence**, in coordination with **Vice President, Logistics**, establish standard operating procedures for requesting approval and implementing a Priority Mail Express service guarantee suspension expeditiously once impacts to nationwide operations are identified.

#### Postal Service Response

Management disagreed with the finding and monetary impact, but agreed with recommendations 6 and 7. Management stated that time is needed to analyze service restrictions when a suspension event occurs, and this was not taken into consideration.

Regarding the monetary impact, management stated the calculation was overstated by about \$110,000 because it included failures that occurred prior to the issuance of the February 19, 2025, Industry Alert — which is the official notification to customers of service restrictions.

Regarding recommendation 6, management stated that procedures for defining start and end dates for PME service suspensions will be included as part of the new process being created for the recommendation. The target implement date is October 31, 2025.

Regarding recommendation 7, management stated a new process will be created for requesting approval and implementing nationwide PME service guarantee suspensions. The target implement date is October 31, 2025.

#### OIG Evaluation

Regarding finding 3, the OIG acknowledges the Industry Alert, issued February 19, 2025, served as the official notification to customers of service restrictions. However, based on information within the Industry Alert, the Postal Service became aware of substantial impacts to its air transportation network on February 18, 2025. The delay in issuing the Industry Alert resulted in the acceptance of 22,800 PME mailpieces that failed to meet service commitments.

Regarding the monetary impact, the OIG included refunds for only PME mailpieces requiring air transportation that were accepted after substantial impacts to the air transportation network were known — which was February 19, 2025 — through the implementation of the suspension at 3 p.m. CST, February 20, 2025.

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 6 and 7, as corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

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# Appendix A: Additional Information

## Scope and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's initial communication of PME service changes within local communities. Specifically, we focused on the PME service standard changes for the 16 LTO regions nationwide through April 4, 2025. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Interviewed Postal Service Headquarters management to gain an understanding of management responsibilities for internal and external communication, employee training, and the internal control environment regarding the implementation of the refinements to PME service standards.
- Reviewed applicable laws and regulations and Postal Service policies, procedures, and service standards.
- Obtained and analyzed ZIP Codes where LTO and PME changes were implemented and reviewed associated service standards.
- Judgmentally selected fourteen post offices and three mail processing facilities in the Palatine, IL, Phoenix, AZ, and Mid-Hudson, NY, LTO regions, and conducted unannounced site visits in February 2025. During site visits we:
  - Interviewed employees and management, and observed the acceptance, processing, dispatching, and delivery practices for PME.
  - Performed a limited-scope mail test to compare the PME service between optimized and non-optimized offices and evaluated the customer experience related to PME service.
    - At each of the three regions visited, auditors selected one optimized and one non-optimized post office to mail four PME

packages each — for a total of 24 PME packages sent.

- After mailing, each package was tracked to determine whether it was delivered by the guaranteed date on the receipt (see [Table 2](#)).
- Obtained and analyzed one-day PME acceptance cutoff times and transportation schedules from the Postal Service's Facilities Database and Surface Visibility system, respectively. Compared the acceptance cutoff times to the transportation schedules to determine if updates were made for optimized post offices.
- Obtained and analyzed Customer 360 complaints from the Arizona-New Mexico, New York 3, and Illinois 1 Retail Districts to determine if there was a change in customer complaints trends related to "express" mail.
- Obtained and analyzed PME refund and volume data from Product Tracking and Reporting to calculate the impacts of not properly executing a PME service guarantee suspension.

We conducted this performance audit from January through July 2025 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 July 11, 2025, and included its comments where appropriate.

**Table 2. Judgmentally Selected Site Visit Locations**

LTO Region	Facility	Optimized (Y/N)	Mail Test (Y/N)	Date of Mail Test
Palatine, IL	Belvidere Post Office	Y	N	
	Cherry Valley Post Office	Y	N	
	Rockford Post Office	N	N	
	Downtown Rockford Post Office	Y	N	
	East Rockford Post Office	Y	Y	February 19, 2025
	Loves Park	N	Y	February 20, 2025
	Carol Stream Processing and Distribution Center			
Phoenix, AZ	Tonopah	Y	N	
	Gila Bend	Y	Y	February 19, 2025
	Arlington	Y	N	
	Buckeye	N	Y	February 19, 2025
	Phoenix Processing and Distribution Center			
Mid-Hudson, NY	Arlington	Y	Y	February 26, 2025
	Pine Bush	Y	N	
	West Newburgh	N	Y	February 26, 2025
	Vails Gate	Y	N	
	Mid-Hudson Processing and Distribution Center			

Source: OIG analysis based on Postal Service data from Facilities Database and site visits.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of the internal control structure for implementing the revised PME service standard in 16 LTO regions and the procedures for PME acceptance, processing, transportation, and delivery 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 five components were significant to our audit objective:

- Control environment
- Risk assessment
- 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 the control environment, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and monitoring components that were significant within the context of our objectives. Our recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of Customer 360, Product Tracking and Reporting, Facilities Database, Surface Visibility, and Enterprise Data Warehouse data by performing testing for data completeness, reasonableness, and validity. We determined that the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

## Prior Audit Coverage

We identified the following prior audits that had findings and recommendations related to the PME product within the past five years.

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>Network Changes: Local Transportation Optimization in the Wisconsin Region</i>	To determine the impacts associated with the U.S. Postal Service's LTO initiative in the Wisconsin region.	<a href="#">24-145-R25</a>	March 28, 2025	\$0
<i>Priority Mail Express: Michigan 1 District</i>	To evaluate the efficiency and service performance of the Postal Service's PME product in the Michigan 1 District.	<a href="#">24-135-R25</a>	December 16, 2024	\$610,738
<i>Network Changes: Local Transportation Optimization</i>	To determine the impacts to service performance, customer service, mail security, and expected cost savings from the implementation of the LTO initiative.	<a href="#">24-142-R25</a>	December 18, 2024	\$0
<i>Impacts Associated with Local Transportation Optimization in Richmond, VA</i>	To determine impacts associated with the Postal Service's new LTO initiative in Richmond, VA.	<a href="#">23-161-1-R24</a>	April 12, 2024	\$0
<i>Online Priority Mail Express Refunds</i>	To determine if the Postal Service properly processed and supported online refund requests for PME.	<a href="#">20-268-R21</a>	July 20, 2021	\$1,802,108

# Appendix B: Management's Comments



August 1, 2025

VICTORIA SMITH  
ACTING DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Management Response - Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express Service (25-056)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express (PME) Service.

**Finding #1: Lack of Consistent, Localized Messaging on PME Service Changes**  
Management **disagrees** with this finding as it relates to OIG's reference to:

- **Inadequate Local Service Information:** The LTO activity was a pilot project, and communications was done with retail employees. For the LTO sites the service commitments for a particular destination were available in the Retail System Software (RSS) and in our Self-Service Kiosks (SSK). Retail clerks were able to communicate that to customers at the time of their purchase. The same applies to the changes made on April 1.
- **Inaccurate and Outdated Retail Signage:** In the LTO pilot we did not update the static retail signage to indicate that PME could be up to 3 days. As a pilot it was unclear that the changes would be permanent, so we did not change the static signage. As above, retail clerks were able to communicate service commitments for a particular piece at the time of their purchase. For April we issued decals to the Retail Offices with QR codes directing customers for additional information on the service standards for PME and other services. In the July Price Change, all static retail signage was updated to indicate PME as a 1- to 3-day product.
- **Outdated and Limited Information on Public Website:** In the LTO pilot we did not update the public website to indicate that PME could be up to 3 days. As a pilot it was unclear that the changes would be permanent, so we did not change the static signage. As above, retail clerks were able to communicate service commitments for a particular piece at the time of their purchase. The website was updated to indicate PME as a 1- to 3-day product for April 1.
- **Outdated Pricing Manual:** Updating the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) and publishing it on Postal Explorer is a complex and carefully coordinated process that currently occurs on a quarterly basis. Updates are limited to changes that are national in scope and tied to the foundational mailing standards and requirements applicable to all products and customers, excluding Negotiated Service Agreements

475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW  
WASHINGTON DC 20260  
WWW.USPS.COM



(NSAs). It does not include adjustments to local service standards, weather-related disruptions, or emergency agreements so no changes were made for the LTO.

**Finding #2: Inadequate Training on Priority Mail Express Service Changes**

Management **disagrees** with this finding.

Management disagrees with the OIG's assessment that it failed to train retail clerks on Priority Mail Express (PME) changes. Training was provided to Postmasters at the piloted locations by the Local Transportation Optimization Teams - with the expectation that it be communicated to all retail employees. Instances cited in the report appear to be isolated and do not reflect a system-wide failure. Likewise, OIG suggests retail clerks should know service standards for other locations outside their assigned unit. SSA's rely on the Retail System Software (RSS) terminals that are programmed to provide the most accurate pricing and product service information for a singular location - and not for other sites. Finally, Management believes OIG minimizes the successful use of RSS as its key customer facing tool for conveying service standards and pricing updates. (i.e.: Customers are asked to view the RSS Customer Display Units (CDUs) prior to finalizing their selection of product choice and likewise reference product and service information that is printed on every PME receipt.)

**Finding 3: Poor Execution of Priority Mail Express Service Guarantee Suspension Monetary Impact:**

Management **disagrees** with the Monetary Impact.

Management **disagrees** with this finding.

OIG admitted to knowingly include failures that occurred prior to the issuance of the Industry Alert. Industry Alerts serve as the official notification to Stakeholders and a "Start the Clock" for service restrictions/service impact. Management determined the Monetary Impact was ultimately overstated by more than 2500 pieces and \$110K.

In addition, Management contends OIG failed to consider the time needed for analyzing service restrictions when a suspension event occurs. When asked what they considered to be a reasonable and expeditious time frame for implementing a service-wide suspension, they were not able to provide Management with a response.

**The following are our comments on each of the seven recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:**

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, implement policy and procedures that require coordination with all responsible parties to create and display notices in retail lobbies on any changes to service by the date the change becomes effective.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

Marketing will work with responsible parties to create and display notices in retail lobbies on any changes to service, but Marketing cannot guarantee that the notices will be in

place by the date the change becomes effective as Marketing does not control the timing of service change notifications.

There are significant costs associated with updating retail signage and creating notices as only a small portion of Post Office locations have digital signage. Most locations require printed materials. To manage production and distribution costs, retail signage is updated at regular intervals during the year. Any update to retail signage requires significant lead time for production. It is not cost effective for USPS to create and display notices in retail lobbies by the date the service change becomes effective given costs to print and ship signage outside of those planned update windows, or without timely notice of service standard changes that account for production timelines.

To address this if we put a delivery range on static signage, we will post the delivery range for the product. For example, Priority Mail Express will show a range of 1-3 days. For more details on the specifics for a particular mail piece the customer can get the specific service standard for their specific shipment from the retail associate at the window.

Suggest changing the recommendation as follows:

**Revised Recommendation #1:** We recommend **Vice President Marketing** implement procedures that require coordination with all responsible parties to create and display notices in retail lobbies within a timeframe and manner that is cost effective when changes in service occur.

**Target Implementation Date:** N/A

**Responsible Official:** N/A

**Recommendation 2:**

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, identify and implement the best method for updating retail signage that aligns with the Priority Mail Express service guarantee offered by individual post offices.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

Management will develop retail signage that accounts for the range of delivery time from the originating Post Office. For example, Priority Mail Express will show a range of 1-3 days. For more details on the specifics for a particular mail piece the customer can get the specific service standard for their specific shipment from the retail associate at the window.

**Target Implementation Date:** N/A

**Responsible Official:** N/A



**Recommendation 3:**

We recommend **Vice President, Marketing**, implement policy and procedures to ensure that the Postal Service public website is updated to reflect current service standards by the date the change becomes effective, and implement procedures to routinely review the website for accuracy.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Management will implement existing policy and procedures to ensure the Postal Service public website is updated to reflect current service standard changes by the date the change becomes effective and include callouts that direct users to the Transit Time map allowing the user to input specific entry and destinating points to determine specific delivery standards. Management will also implement current procedures to routinely review the website for accuracy.

**Target Implementation Date:** 08/31/2025

**Responsible Official:**

VP Marketing; Manager Digital Products & Platforms

**Recommendation 4:**

We recommend the **Executive Director, Product Solutions**, implement policy and procedures to post revisions to the Domestic Mail Manual on the Postal Explorer website in the next quarterly update after the change becomes effective.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

Updating the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) and publishing it on Postal Explorer is a complex and carefully coordinated process that currently occurs on a quarterly basis.

This schedule is driven by several factors:

- The volume of submitted changes
- The intricate updates required across multiple sections of the DMM
- The downstream impact on other manuals and systems
- The importance of maintaining continuity and consistency throughout the document

Updates to the DMM are limited to changes that are national in scope. It does not include adjustments related to local service standards, weather-related disruptions, or emergency agreements. Instead, the DMM represents the foundational mailing standards and requirements applicable to all products and customers, excluding Negotiated Service Agreements (NSAs).

We recognize the importance of keeping customers informed and will strive to make changes transparent and accessible. To do so:

- Our final rulemaking documents specify when updates take effect, noting that changes may precede their appearance in the next DMM release.
- Pending updates are posted on Postal Explorer under the "DMM and IMM Pending Updates" section.
- Additional update information, including Federal Register notices and Postal Bulletin articles, becomes available through links on Postal Explorer once published.
- Updates to Service Standards can be found on the Postal Pro website at [postalpro.usps.gov](http://postalpro.usps.gov).

**Target Implementation Date:** N/A

**Responsible Official:** N/A

**Recommendation 5:**

We recommend **Vice President, Corporate Communications**, in coordination with **Executive Director, Product Solutions** and **Vice President, Retail and Post Office Operations**, develop policy and procedures to communicate mail product changes to retail personnel, ensuring they can accurately advise customers on those changes.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **disagrees** with this recommendation.

While Management agrees clear communication is critical, it contends that it already has robust procedures/processes in place. Retail employees are accustomed to using RSS technology as their "Go-to" customer-facing tool and as a means for accurate pricing/service standard info. Customers are also given full visibility of service standards and pricing as shown on the RSS Customer Display Unit (CDU) and as printed on each RSS receipt. Management will continue to use this technology – along with a variety of other resources - to ensure mail product changes are communicated in a timely manner to employees and customers alike.

**Target Implementation Date:** N/A

**Responsible Official:** N/A

**Recommendation 6:**

We recommend the Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence, in coordination with Vice President, Logistics, establish a requirement to clearly define the start and end date/time of any Priority Mail Express service guarantee suspension to be used by respective business units in communications, including Retail Service Talks, with retail personnel.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

Start and end dates will be part of the newly defined process outlined in the management response to recommendation 7.

**Target Implementation Date:** 10/31/2025

**Responsible Official:**

Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence

**Recommendation 7:**

We recommend the **Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence**, in coordination with **Vice President, Logistics**, establish standard operating procedures for requesting approval and implementing a Priority Mail Express service guarantee suspension expeditiously once impacts to nationwide operations are identified.

**Management Response/Action Plan:**

Management **agrees** with this recommendation.

The Chief Performance Office will create and implement a process for requesting approval and implementing nationwide Priority Mail Express service guarantee suspensions.

**Target Implementation Date:** 10/31/2025

**Responsible Official:**

Executive Director, Operations Integration and Performance Excellence

E-SIGNED by TRACY.R RAYMOND  
on 2025-08-01 17:14:52 EDT

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JENNIFER VO  
VICE PRESIDENT, RETAIL AND POST OFFICE OPERATIONS

E-SIGNED by SHEILA.B HOLMAN  
on 2025-08-01 17:17:06 EDT

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SHEILA HOLMAN  
VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING



- 7 -

E-SIGNED by JEFFERY A ADAMS  
on 2025-08-04 12:05:26 EDT

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JEFFERY ADAMS  
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

E-SIGNED by CHRISTOPHER J KARPENKO  
on 2025-08-04 12:18:38 EDT

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MARGARET PEPE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRODUCT SOLUTIONS

E-SIGNED by GREGORY T WHITE  
on 2025-08-04 12:46:55 EDT

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GREGORY WHITE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS INTEGRATION AND PERFORMANCE  
EXCELLENCE

E-SIGNED by ROBERT CINTRON  
on 2025-08-05 07:37:58 EDT

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ROBERT CINTRON  
VICE PRESIDENT, LOGISTICS

cc: Corporate Audit & Response Management

# OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



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1735 North Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209-2020  
(703) 248-2100

For media inquiries, please email [press@uspsoig.gov](mailto:press@uspsoig.gov) or call (703) 248-2100