

economy in the 21st century, what should America's postal system be like (or transform to) in the next decade?

Responses to the following specific questions would also be appreciated:

- *Should that system provide "universal service" and what should that entail?*

Traditional concepts of universal service in the United States have included a number of characteristics including delivery scope and standards, access to Post Offices, uniform pricing, product offerings, and security services. Should all of these features continue to be a part of postal services? For example, should the Postal Service deliver to every neighborhood every day? Should delivery frequency be reduced for low mail volume neighborhoods? Should retail service to nearly 40,000 outlets continue? Should alternative delivery methods be encouraged?

- *What should the "core" services of the future Postal Service be?*

Some observers such as the Comptroller General have challenged the Postal Service to define its core service more rigorously. What comparative advantages does the publicly owned Postal Service (versus other providers) bring to the mailing industry? What services should be left to the marketplace and to private competitors, and what services should be provided by the national postal system?

- *How should the nation structure a future postal system to be as productive and efficient as possible and while ensuring that consumers pay only what they wish to pay for as much service as they can afford?*

The design of the operations of the future postal network has many variables. Often improvement in productivity and efficiency through cost-cutting can come at a cost to improved service. Which values are most important? Should maintenance of affordable pricing be more important than improving service? Or the reverse? What level of productivity and efficiency will guarantee that the cost of postal services is low but that service remains high? Should there be more rigorous automation standards as there are in other countries? What should the characteristics of the future postal operations network be?

- *Can the Postal Service continue to provide universal service under the current financial arrangements if volume slows or declines significantly? Are there other financing mechanisms needed?*

The critical threat to the current economic model is thought by many

observers to be connected to volume decline. How should the Postal Service seek to finance its operations in the event that volume does decline? Should the future Postal Service seek support through the appropriation of tax revenues? Should the universal services be narrowed? Are there other financing mechanisms that should be explored even without potential volume declines? Should the Postal Service be granted more freedom in financing investments?

- *What steps should be taken today to anticipate the human capital requirements of the future postal system in a manner that embodies core values of respect, dignity, and diversity while providing incentives to encourage continuous service improvement?*

How should the balance be struck between individual values and improving the efficiency of the postal system? Is there a trade-off today? What investments should be made in attracting, training, managing, and providing incentives to people to build the future postal system? Should incentives be tied to performance? Is the collective bargaining process, as it is structured today, going to serve the needs of the future Postal Service? Should salary caps be removed? Where should the priorities be?

- *Is it possible to design a government postal system in the United States that operates more commercially and still serves important social objectives including universal coverage?*

How might the Postal Service offer competitive products? If the private sector is offering similar services, should the publicly owned Postal Service enter markets where it would compete with the private providers? There are both advantages and disadvantages for a public agency offering services in competitive markets. Is the playing field uneven in favor of the public- or private-sector service provider?

- *How would a privately owned postal entity or entities perform against public expectations for postal services? Are there other models that may do a better job for the American people?*

A number of key postal policy voices in recent years have called for the privatization of the Postal Service. Is this desirable? Would a corporatized Postal Service be able to be more productive? To provide better service? To grow the mailing business for the postal industry? Or are there other models of fundamental structural reform that should be considered? Should the postal system be franchised out to private-sector providers? Should fundamental structural reform retain the

continuity of the infrastructure that exists today?

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RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD

Agency Forms Submitted for OMB Review

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has submitted the following proposal(s) for the collection of information to the Office of Management and Budget for review and approval.

Summary of Proposal

(1) *Collection title:* Report of Medicaid State Office on Beneficiary's Buy-In Status.

(2) *Form(s) submitted:* RL-380-F.

(3) *OMB Number:* 3220-0185.

(4) *Expiration date of current OMB clearance:* 12/31/2001.

(5) *Type of request:* Extension of a currently approved collection.

(6) *Respondents:* State, Local or Tribal government.

(7) *Estimated annual number of respondents:* 600.

(8) *Total annual responses:* 600.

(9) *Total annual reporting hours:* 100.

(10) *Collection description:* Under the Railroad Retirement Act, the Railroad Retirement Board administers the Medicare program for persons covered by the railroad retirement system. The collection obtains the information needed to determine if certain railroad beneficiaries are entitled to receive Supplementary Medical Insurance program coverage under a state buy-in agreement in states in which they reside.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Copies of the forms and supporting documents can be obtained from Chuck Mierzwa, the agency clearance officer (312-751-3363). Comments regarding the information collection should be addressed to Ronald J. Hodapp, Railroad Retirement Board, 844 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60611-2092 and to the OMB Desk Officer for the RRB, at the Office of Management and Budget, Room 10230, New Executive Office Building, Washington, DC 20503.

Chuck Mierzwa,

Clearance Officer.

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