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USPS Oversight Update 3

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United States Senate Committee on
**Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs**

U.S. Senator Gary Peters | Ranking Member

USPS Oversight Update

A HSGAC Minority Staff Report

USPS OVERSIGHT UPDATE

October 23, 2020

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member

This update continues Ranking Member Peters' ongoing oversight of the United States Postal Service (USPS) and review of its service performance for on-time mail delivery. The update assesses data provided to Congress covering the week of October 10–16, 2020. As with the two prior updates released by Ranking Member Peters, the analysis continues to find that widespread fluctuations in on-time mail delivery continue months after problems were first identified and that some parts of the country are facing increasing delays.

In August 2020, Senator Peters launched an investigation into operational changes to mail delivery directed by U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy in July 2020, one month after Mr. DeJoy took office. Senator Peters released a series of reports detailing the extent of the delays and the harmful impacts Postmaster General DeJoy's directives had on seniors, small business owners, and others who depend on the Postal Service for critical deliveries.¹ An October 20, 2020 report from the nonpartisan USPS Office of Inspector General confirmed that changes initiated by Mr. DeJoy and other senior Postal Service executives in July resulted in widespread delays.²

On October 9 and 20, 2020, Senator Peters released oversight updates assessing the Postal Service's recent efforts to address delivery delays.³ This update finds that while the Postal Service has taken certain steps in response to congressional oversight and litigation to roll back prior changes directed by Postmaster General DeJoy and improve on-time mail delivery across the country, those steps have fallen short as on-time delivery continues to decline in several major cities across the U.S.

I. On-time delivery rates remain significantly below levels prior to Postmaster General DeJoy's July 2020 changes. Mail delays increased slightly nationwide during the week of October 10–16.

During the week of October 10–16, 2020 (the most recent for which data is available), the Postal Service delivered 85.6% of First-Class mail within the one-to-five-day timeframes specified in the USPS service standards—a 0.5 percentage point drop from the previous week.⁴ Nationwide, on-time delivery has

¹ U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Minority Staff Report, *Failure to Deliver: Harm Caused by U.S. Postmaster General DeJoy's Changes to Postal Service Mail Delivery* (Sept. 16, 2020); United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Minority Staff Report, *Interim Report on the Threat of Postmaster General DeJoy's Postal Service Delays* (Aug. 21, 2020).

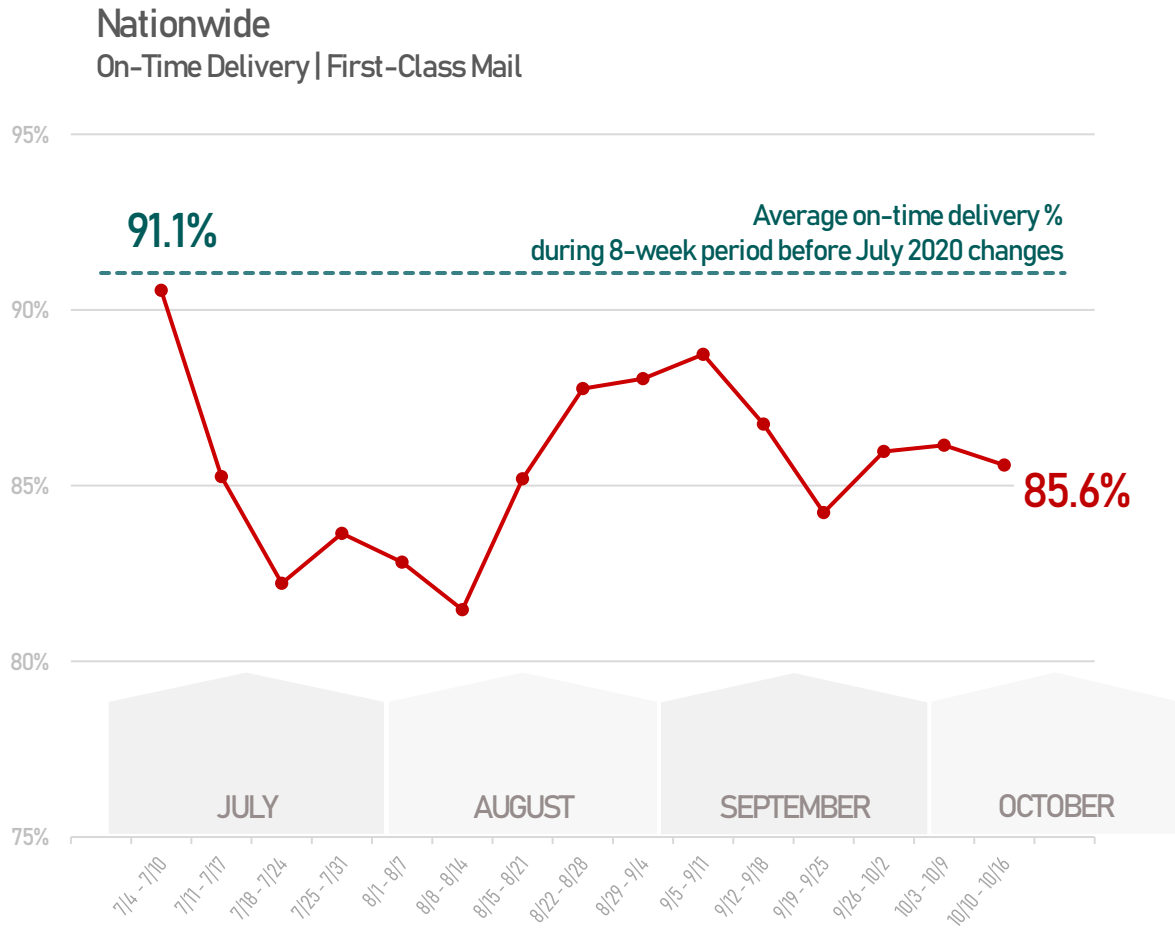
² U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, *Operational Changes to Mail Delivery (20-292-R21)* (Oct. 19, 2020) (<https://www.uspsoidg.gov/document/operational-changes-mail-delivery>).

³ U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Ranking Member Sen. Gary C. Peters, *USPS Oversight Update* (Oct. 9, 2020); U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, Ranking Member Sen. Gary C. Peters, *USPS Oversight Update* (Oct. 20, 2020).

⁴ Service standards for First-Class mail specify a delivery timeframe of one to five days, depending on the distance between the sender and the addressee. See also U.S. Postal Regulatory Commission, *Analysis of the Postal Service's FY 2019 Annual Performance Report and FY 2020 Performance Plan* (June 1, 2020) (<https://www.prc.gov/sites/default/files/reports/USPS%20Perf%20Rpt%20and%20Plan.pdf>).

fluctuated over the past couple of weeks, but remains 5.5 percentage points below the on-time delivery rates prior to Postmaster General DeJoy’s July 2020 directives. See Figure 1.

Figure 1



Source: Staff analysis of weekly service performance data provided by USPS

First-Class Mail

Prior to Postmaster General DeJoy’s July 2020 directives, the Postal Service consistently delivered about 91% of First-Class Mail within the applicable timeframes.⁵ Nationwide on-time delivery plummeted starting in mid-July, and fell to 81.5% during the week of August 8–14, the lowest level seen all year. Service performance improved by the end of August, but has fluctuated in recent weeks and has failed to match previous on-time delivery levels.

⁵ During the 8-week period from May 16 – July 10, nationwide on-time delivery rates for First-Class Mail ranged from a low of 90.4% to a high of 92.3%. The average on-time delivery score during this 8-week period was 91.1%.

Nearly all of the recent delays have extended delivery times by 1–3 days for First-Class Mail. As discussed in previous updates, delay of even one day can have a significant impact on important mail, including medicine, bills, or election mail.⁶

- In each of the seven geographic Areas across the U.S., on-time delivery for the week of October 10–16 remained below the levels prior to the July changes. In six Areas, performance declined from the previous week.⁷
- In **60** of the **67** Postal Districts, on-time delivery performance remains below the average levels during the 8-week period prior to Postmaster General DeJoy’s July directives.
- During the week of October 10–16, **54** of the **67** Postal Districts had on-time delivery rates below 90%. In **10** of those Districts, on-time performance was below 80%. *See Figure 2.*

Figure 2

Districts with on-time delivery rates below 80% week of 10/10 – 10/16

District Name	First-Class Mail On-Time Delivery%
Baltimore	65.5%
Detroit	71.6%
Philadelphia Metro	76.9%
Colorado/Wyoming	77.4%
Mississippi	78.1%
Capital	78.1%
Northern Ohio	78.7%
Alabama	78.8%
Greensboro	79.3%
Central Pennsylvania	79.6%

Election Mail

While delays in First-Class Mail delivery may impact election mail, comprehensive on-time delivery data is not available for election mail as a separate group, due to the lack of tracking technology on most election mail.⁸ Recent USPS data shows that on-time processing rates for the subset of election mail able to be tracked is above 90%.⁹

⁶ During the week of October 3 – 9, over 97% of First-Class Mail was delivered within three days of the target delivery timeframes. *See* U.S. Postal Service, Service Variance Report through week of October 3 – 9.

⁷ In the Capital Metro, Eastern, Great Lakes, Northeast, Southern, and Western Areas, on-time delivery fell by between 0.2 and 1.7 percentage points compared to the previous week. In the Pacific Area, performance improved by 0.6 percentage points.

⁸ *See* Letter to Hon. Victor Marrero, United States District Judge, from Audrey Strauss, Counsel for Defendant U.S. Postal Service (Oct. 16, 2020), *Jones et al. v. United States Postal Service et al.*, S.D.N.Y (No. 1:20-cv-06516), ECF No. 90.

⁹ The on-time processing rate was 92.1% during the week of October 3-9 and 97.9% during the week of September 26 – October 2. *See* Exhibit 4, Letter to Hon. Victor Marrero, United States District Judge, from Audrey Strauss, Counsel for Defendant U.S. Postal Service (Oct. 16, 2020), *Jones et al. v. United States Postal Service et al.*, S.D.N.Y (No. 1:20-cv-06516), ECF No. 90-4.

On September 21, September 25, and October 13, USPS issued guidance to its managers detailing procedures for moving election mail. The guidance includes instructions to treat all election mail as First-Class Mail, postmark all ballots, use extra and late trips to deliver mail on time, allow employee overtime to handle increased mail volumes, and reconnect machines necessary to process election mail. USPS also established internal oversight mechanisms, including “ballot ambassadors,” union members who monitor election mail procedures and work with management to resolve problems.¹⁰ In recent weeks, in response to congressional oversight and court orders, the Postal Service has made commitments and issued directives to expeditiously move election mail. However, USPS must ensure that it can implement these procedures as promised, to meet on-time delivery goals.

On October 20, USPS issued additional guidance detailing “extraordinary measures” local managers should take in the days leading up to, and after, Election Day to ensure ballots are delivered. The memo states “the use of extraordinary measures beyond our normal course of operations is authorized and expected to be executed by local management between October 26 and November 24” to deliver election mail, including: postmarking and sorting mail at local post offices rather than routing it to a distant processing facility; extending post office hours by 30 minutes on both ends; creating options at post offices such as a “ballot postmark” line at the retail counter or a drive-through ballot postmark/drop; conducting extra collections to pick up mail from all addresses; and using expedited routing procedures to get election mail to its destination.¹¹ Congress has not yet received complete information on the extent and thoroughness of USPS implementation of these extraordinary measures.

II. In Michigan, on-time delivery of First-Class mail remains 7–13 percentage points below levels prior to Postmaster General DeJoy’s July 2020 directives.

In the Detroit and Greater Michigan Postal Districts, mail delivery delays increased overall in September and during the week of October 3–9. The most recent week for which data is available, October 10–16, saw a small improvement in the Detroit District and a slight decline in the Greater Michigan District. *See Figures 3 and 4.*

During the week of October 10–16, only 71.6% of First-Class Mail was delivered on time in the Detroit District—a 0.6 percentage point improvement from the previous week. This small improvement follows four consecutive weeks of declining performance in the Detroit District, which remains one of the worst-performing Districts in the country.¹² Since the week of September 5–11, on-time delivery in the Detroit District has fallen by 11.6 percentage points.

In the Greater Michigan District, on-time delivery has trended downward in recent weeks. During the week of October 10–16, service performance declined by 1.6 percentage points from the previous week

¹⁰ U.S. Postal Service, Memo to Officers, PCEs, and Pay Band Managers: *Clarifying Operational Instructions* (Sept. 21, 2020); *Additional Resources for Election Mail Beginning October 1* (Sept. 25, 2020); U.S. Postal Service, Memo to Officers, PCEs, Pay Band Managers, and EAS Employees: *Supplemental Guidance Memorandum* (Oct. 13, 2020).

¹¹ U.S. Postal Service, Memo to Officers, PCEs, Pay Band Managers, and EAS Employees: *Extraordinary Measures Memorandum* (Oct. 20, 2020).

¹² During the week of October 10 – 16, only one District had lower on-time performance than Detroit (Baltimore, 65.5%). Detroit was the worst-performing District the week of October 3 – 9, and second-worst (behind Chicago) the week of September 26 – October 2.

to 84.5% on-time delivery. This is the lowest on-time delivery rate experienced in the Greater Michigan District in over two months.

Figure 3

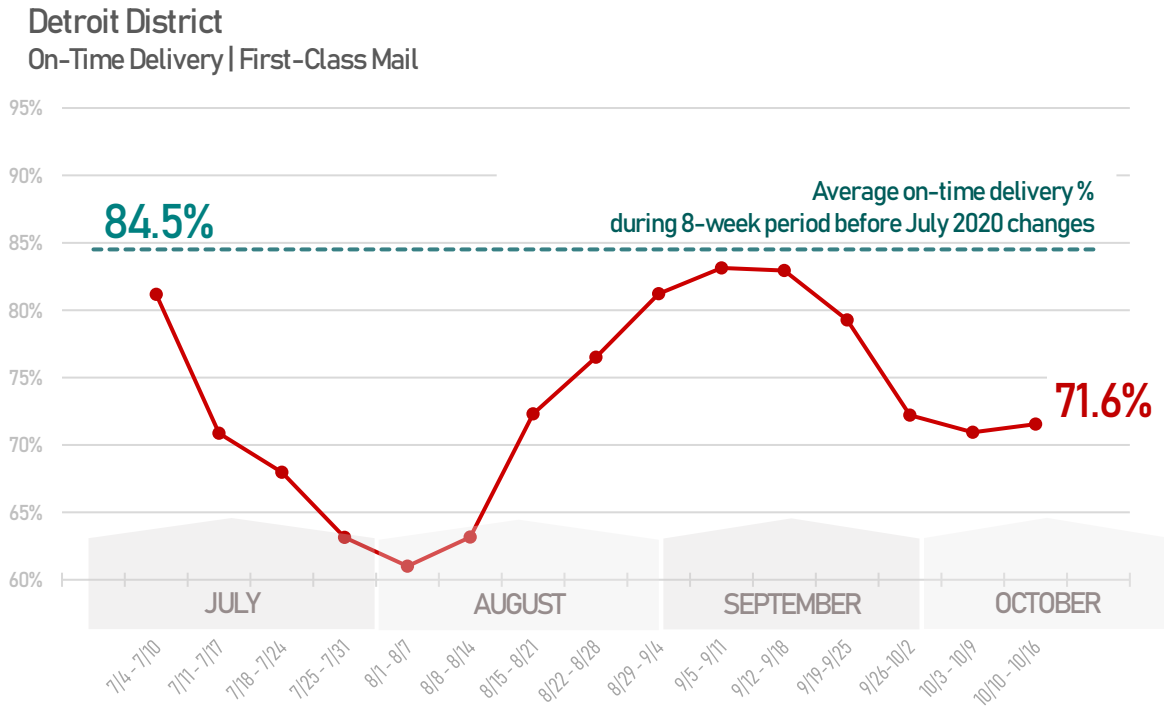
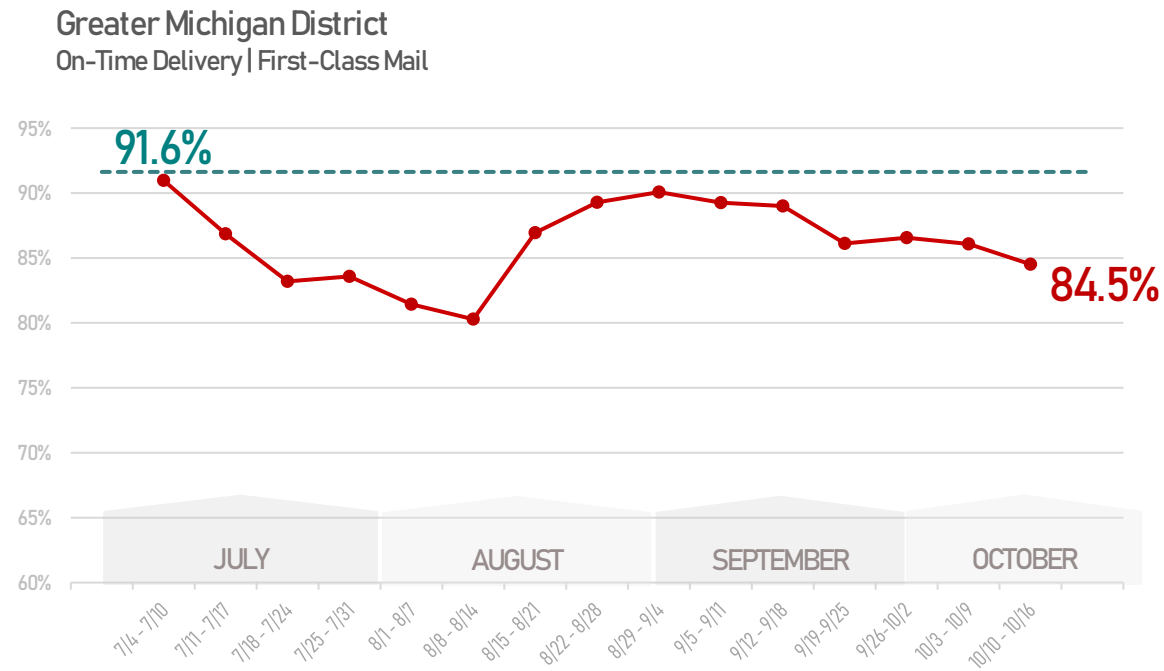


Figure 4



Source: Staff analysis of weekly service performance data provided by USPS

While on-time delivery rates in both Michigan Postal Districts have improved since the height of the delays in early-August, performance remains significantly below the levels before Postmaster General DeJoy's July 2020 directives.¹³ During the week of October 10–16, on-time delivery in the Detroit District (71.6%) was 13.0 percentage points below average levels prior to the changes (84.5%), and in the Greater Michigan District on-time performance (84.5%) remained 7.1 percentage points below prior on-time delivery levels (91.6%).

CONCLUSION

As discussed in prior updates, while the Postal Service has made some improvements since congressional oversight and federal litigation against Postmaster General DeJoy's actions began, on-time delivery levels remain unacceptably low. Postmaster General DeJoy must also answer for the September decline and continuing fluctuations in First-Class Mail on-time delivery performance and take all necessary actions to restore service to target levels.

¹³ Following DeJoy's July directives, on-time delivery in the Detroit District fell dramatically, reaching a low-point of only 61.0% in early-August. In the Greater Michigan District, the decline was less severe, with on-time delivery falling to 80.3%.

USPS OVERSIGHT UPDATE - APPENDIX

October 23, 2020

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member

The following service performance data was provided to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs by USPS.

TABLE A-1: NATIONWIDE FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE PERFORMANCE

<i>Week Start Date</i>	<i>On-Time Delivery %</i>
5/16/20	91.19%
5/23/20	92.30%
5/30/20	90.39%
6/6/20	90.69%
6/13/20	91.74%
6/20/20	90.86%
6/27/20	90.70%
7/4/20	90.56%
7/11/20	85.26%
7/18/20	82.22%
7/25/20	83.64%
8/1/20	82.82%
8/8/20	81.47%
8/15/20	85.19%
8/22/20	87.76%
8/29/20	88.04%
9/5/20	88.74%
9/12/20	86.75%
9/19/20	84.23%
9/26/20	85.97%
10/3/20	86.15%
10/10/20	85.58%

TABLE A-2: FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE PERFORMANCE BY USPS AREA

<i>Week start date</i>	USPS AREA						
	Capital Metro	Eastern	Great Lakes	Northeast	Pacific	Southern	Western
5/16/20	91.38%	91.88%	89.26%	88.56%	91.10%	92.05%	92.65%
5/23/20	92.45%	93.24%	91.17%	89.48%	92.14%	93.01%	93.25%
5/30/20	89.55%	91.66%	89.76%	87.84%	90.43%	91.22%	90.87%
6/6/20	90.07%	92.14%	90.21%	88.25%	90.74%	90.94%	91.43%
6/13/20	90.86%	92.73%	90.97%	90.14%	91.85%	92.00%	92.54%
6/20/20	90.76%	92.34%	89.81%	89.56%	89.79%	90.63%	92.13%
6/27/20	91.15%	92.27%	89.77%	89.51%	90.64%	90.45%	90.95%
7/4/20	90.81%	91.09%	88.34%	89.87%	91.17%	90.68%	91.37%
7/11/20	87.12%	85.29%	82.40%	84.25%	86.26%	84.76%	86.80%
7/18/20	83.65%	79.00%	81.14%	82.64%	82.52%	81.60%	84.66%
7/25/20	84.31%	78.04%	80.71%	85.58%	84.12%	84.82%	87.04%
8/1/20	83.36%	79.75%	79.49%	84.29%	80.80%	84.42%	86.05%
8/8/20	80.63%	78.98%	79.25%	81.26%	81.29%	82.51%	84.67%
8/15/20	83.11%	83.65%	83.71%	85.91%	86.37%	86.42%	86.23%
8/22/20	86.60%	88.25%	86.38%	88.33%	88.84%	88.25%	87.48%
8/29/20	85.46%	88.53%	87.40%	89.74%	90.24%	87.98%	87.23%
9/5/20	84.59%	88.90%	87.47%	90.13%	91.22%	89.50%	88.86%
9/12/20	83.09%	86.27%	85.18%	87.71%	90.91%	87.10%	87.12%
9/19/20	78.70%	82.98%	78.16%	85.24%	90.70%	85.15%	87.66%
9/26/20	82.65%	84.81%	81.14%	88.55%	90.77%	86.61%	87.70%
10/3/20	82.47%	83.72%	83.53%	88.25%	90.10%	86.16%	88.38%
10/10/20	80.76%	82.90%	83.25%	88.01%	90.73%	85.99%	87.48%

TABLE A-3: MICHIGAN FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE PERFORMANCE

<i>Week start date</i>	DETROIT DISTRICT	GREATER MICHIGAN DISTRICT
5/16/20	77.64%	90.69%
5/23/20	87.33%	92.60%
5/30/20	88.20%	91.77%
6/6/20	86.12%	91.62%
6/13/20	86.00%	92.45%
6/20/20	85.49%	91.81%
6/27/20	84.11%	91.11%
7/4/20	81.17%	90.96%
7/11/20	70.87%	86.85%
7/18/20	67.97%	83.19%
7/25/20	63.14%	83.58%
8/1/20	61.01%	81.44%
8/8/20	63.16%	80.28%
8/15/20	72.31%	86.94%
8/22/20	76.51%	89.28%
8/29/20	81.22%	90.08%
9/5/20	83.13%	89.26%
9/12/20	82.94%	89.00%
9/19/20	79.27%	86.12%
9/26/20	72.20%	86.56%
10/3/20	70.94%	86.08%
10/10/20	71.55%	84.52%

TABLE A-4: FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE PERFORMANCE BY DISTRICT

	<i>USPS District</i>	9/19-9/25	9/26-10/2	10/3-10/9	10/10-10/16
CAPITAL METRO AREA	ATLANTA	82.06%	83.50%	83.78%	82.22%
	BALTIMORE	60.67%	73.67%	74.49%	65.50%
	CAPITAL	70.97%	74.13%	74.44%	78.09%
	GREATER S CAROLINA	79.53%	84.88%	83.48%	81.16%
	GREENSBORO	78.49%	82.05%	80.64%	79.35%
	MID-CAROLINAS	83.41%	88.57%	86.15%	84.66%
	NORTHERN VIRGINIA	75.97%	81.42%	82.92%	84.77%
	RICHMOND	78.46%	79.09%	83.65%	83.95%
EASTERN AREA	APPALACHIAN	82.51%	82.70%	80.37%	85.41%
	CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA	84.04%	85.22%	83.23%	79.63%
	KENTUCKIANA	83.87%	86.06%	84.15%	86.60%
	NORTHERN OHIO	82.72%	85.12%	84.32%	78.67%
	OHIO VALLEY	78.72%	82.10%	82.07%	82.25%
	PHILADELPHIA METROPO	78.76%	83.04%	79.67%	76.92%
	SOUTH JERSEY	80.69%	82.61%	80.52%	83.90%
	TENNESSEE	84.93%	85.67%	85.81%	86.77%
	WESTERN NEW YORK	87.06%	90.41%	90.24%	90.85%
	WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA	89.63%	88.49%	89.40%	87.32%
GREAT LAKES AREA	CENTRAL ILLINOIS	70.32%	73.90%	81.20%	80.10%
	CHICAGO	70.66%	69.91%	82.33%	84.25%
	DETROIT	79.27%	72.20%	70.94%	71.55%
	GATEWAY	77.13%	84.96%	87.19%	87.88%
	GREATER INDIANA	86.10%	88.26%	89.42%	88.88%
	GREATER MICHIGAN	86.12%	86.56%	86.08%	84.52%
	LAKELAND	77.11%	83.52%	84.25%	84.61%
NORTHEAST AREA	ALBANY	88.32%	89.55%	89.80%	88.07%
	CARIBBEAN	90.92%	92.15%	93.61%	94.70%
	CONNECTICUT VALLEY	85.82%	88.28%	88.69%	87.43%
	GREATER BOSTON	83.58%	89.69%	89.53%	88.70%
	LONG ISLAND	85.03%	86.85%	84.85%	84.48%
	NEW YORK	85.49%	85.80%	85.06%	87.53%
	NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND	84.75%	87.44%	86.65%	87.72%
	NORTHERN NEW JERSEY	84.48%	88.98%	89.24%	89.27%
	TRIBORO	85.18%	86.32%	86.82%	87.14%
	WESTCHESTER	85.80%	86.75%	85.22%	85.09%

TABLE A-4 CONT.
FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE PERFORMANCE BY DISTRICT

	<i>USPS District</i>	9/19-9/25	9/26-10/2	10/3-10/9	10/10-10/16
PACIFIC AREA	BAY-VALLEY	90.98%	92.04%	91.64%	91.89%
	HONOLULU	85.06%	83.88%	88.06%	85.27%
	LOS ANGELES	90.24%	89.30%	89.40%	89.44%
	SACRAMENTO	91.02%	90.23%	89.16%	90.05%
	SAN DIEGO	90.29%	91.28%	90.44%	91.84%
	SAN FRANCISCO	92.04%	91.82%	92.15%	90.59%
	SANTA ANA	90.40%	91.63%	89.25%	91.99%
	SIERRA COASTAL	91.78%	92.06%	90.77%	92.13%
SOUTHERN AREA	ALABAMA	75.32%	80.02%	79.65%	78.78%
	ARKANSAS	89.37%	89.98%	90.37%	89.88%
	DALLAS	86.21%	88.38%	87.14%	85.64%
	FT WORTH	88.67%	89.41%	89.97%	88.70%
	GULF ATLANTIC	80.56%	82.56%	83.34%	82.69%
	HOUSTON	86.17%	86.78%	86.29%	89.33%
	LOUISIANA	83.83%	87.72%	87.83%	83.42%
	MISSISSIPPI	79.85%	80.81%	77.46%	78.09%
	OKLAHOMA	90.23%	90.68%	90.36%	92.42%
	RIO GRANDE	88.77%	88.10%	89.64%	90.46%
	SOUTH FLORIDA	84.80%	84.38%	82.79%	83.47%
	SUNCOAST	86.67%	88.41%	88.13%	86.49%
WESTERN AREA	ALASKA	94.07%	90.97%	90.56%	87.43%
	ARIZONA	88.94%	87.44%	88.29%	85.84%
	CENTRAL PLAINS	90.52%	88.88%	90.76%	90.54%
	COLORADO/ WYOMING	82.78%	83.20%	84.41%	77.41%
	DAKOTAS	91.77%	92.08%	91.77%	91.26%
	HAWKEYE	85.86%	87.93%	88.46%	88.23%
	MID-AMERICA	85.99%	85.80%	84.38%	84.63%
	NEVADA SIERRA	89.76%	92.23%	91.48%	90.36%
	NORTHLAND	81.46%	82.88%	84.65%	85.95%
	PORTLAND	89.29%	90.97%	88.96%	89.83%
	SALT LAKE CITY	89.78%	91.24%	90.97%	89.23%
	SEATTLE	88.25%	88.98%	89.48%	89.14%