

Iowa State Association of Letter Carriers



President's Report

December 2008

I had a difficult time deciding what to write this month's article about. Management over the past month has served up so many idiotic schemes from later starting times while crying for safer work habits (more carriers out in the dark), to the "all carriers need to be back by 5:30" proclamation (translation - screw the contract). If you read my article last month, you'll understand that I'm still tired of dealing with the idiots and the incompetents. So, I decided to look forward with some hope.

As I write this article, we are in the midst of employing the national memorandum of understanding on route adjustments. It's my hope that this process will adjust the routes to as near an eight hour assignment as possible.

Before anyone gets to upset concerning this new memorandum, we all need to recall the process of route inspections under chapter 2 of the M-39. A week long inspection, normally done at the end of a month (May), with an inspector going with each carrier on the street for 3 days. The outcome of these inspections seldom seemed to be accurate over the long haul. What they were, were a snapshot of the route for one week of the year. Often times management attempted to hold a carrier to a "demonstrated ability" based on an inspection where the carrier may have performed to said ability only one or two days during the inspection. On top of the stress created for most carriers under this process, was the cost. Thousands of dollars per route, to gather a week's worth of data and adjust based on that week. This process was followed by numerous grievances as management seldom was able to do an inspection without violating the national agreement unless the union was involved. This process was often followed by special inspections and perhaps more grievances. In my almost 20 years of being involved with route inspections, from being a co-leader, to steward, to branch president to arbitration advocate, I firmly believe that the M-39 way of inspecting routes is broken and no longer represents the best possible way to adjust routes.

So, what do we have under this process? First, we are adjusting the routes based on two months of data, May and September. Next, from this data we are finding the carriers (regular

Iowa State Association of Letter Carriers



President's Report

carrier only) office and street times. Lastly, the routes are then adjusted (after consultation) to the agreed upon times. Now, I'm not going to say this process is perfect. It's based on the postal service's data. This alone could be a problem based on how well data was recorded, and in some instances manipulated. However, many of the data problems were corrected when the local union representative was able to sit down with management and point out anomalies which were then discarded at the district level. Now, even when the data is dead accurate, it's still a snapshot of the route over two months time. Still an average of those two months of data. What we'll soon see is if local managers can understand what "average" means. It means some days the route will be longer, and some days shorter. This process also does not included carrying mail under conditions such as snow and ice where it will just take longer. The MOU also mentions that the process and adjustments will be reviewed. While not specific, it certainly seems like we may be able to make some corrections as needed once everything is implemented.

So, while not perfect, it's my hope that this process will work. Imagine, being able to adjust routes (perhaps even yearly) without an act of God from above. Imagine many of the useless positions in delivery operations being eliminated. Imagine that management will stop tracking most of the useless data they now track, eliminating even more useless reports and positions. Imagine letter carriers coming to work and just having to case and deliver the mail without a daily argument. Imagine... Jeez, I can see now how John Lennon got carried away with this imagine theme!

Anyway, I, like most of the NALC leadership across the country, from steward to national officer, we are hoping for the best while being prepared for the worst.

In closing, I hope everyone has had a Happy Holiday season and I only wish the best to all for a great and prosperous new year.

Mike Birkett
President,
Iowa State Assoc. of Letter Carriers