



## Backward thinking

**I'm sure most of you know by now that we have our answer.** There will be no joint route adjustment process agreement this year. Some will celebrate this outcome, but my money says most won't. I think that's true for both sides of our recently departed joint process.

So what happened? Well, since last August we've been talking at headquarters about what a joint route adjustment process should look like. I can report that we had quite a cast of characters on both sides of the negotiating table. We talked about everything you can think of. I'll give you an example of a volley:

We proposed to USPS representatives using a year's worth of data. They said anomalies would take too long. We said OK, let's use a full year of data and not do anomalies. That wouldn't take any time at all. They said not doing anomalies would inflate the final averages. We said the final averages wouldn't change much at all.

Instead of just arguing about it, we agreed to look around the country for some routes that had at least a full year's worth of data since their last adjustment. We found several hundred routes that both parties agreed met the criteria. We randomly selected routes/zones to test questions like this as we bargained.

It turned out that our joint sampling of routes showed that using a year's worth of data made almost no difference in the final averages whether or not anomalies were used. With these results in hand, they said they just couldn't live without doing anomalies. We said OK, how about if we set some time parameters we could agree weren't anomalies? This would eliminate a lot of days from even being looked at for potential anomalies. We ended up figuring out a way that we could use a year's worth of data and have teams look only at about the same number of days as in JARAP for potential anomalies. I thought we were pretty close to agreement on this piece. That wasn't the case in the end.

The point of the example is to give you the flavor of how negotiations went on the subject of a joint route adjustment process. We came to the table with the goal of improving our joint process. We offered forward-thinking proposals and accommodated any concern or problem they raised. That wasn't good enough for them.

**Here's the real problem:** The very few in delivery operations at USPS headquarters who make all the decisions for the entire country can't handle the idea of adjusting routes to what individual letter carriers actually do over an extended period of time. In other words, they can't handle fairness.

These same folks believe they can do better for themselves using the traditional route count and inspection process. What they really want is nine-hour routes they can make their managers try to tell you are eight hours every day (more backward thinking). So be it.

I say, no JARAP? OK, let's rock 'n' roll! It's not like we've never been down the road of dealing with the adversarial situation created by the traditional route inspection process before. One thing is for certain: Delivery operations should completely own what I predict is the mess it's going to create this year in lots of places. When they come to you, just say no.

Don't be surprised if someone from operations comes knocking on your door locally looking to get you to agree to just eliminate a route or two quietly instead of going through a full-blown route inspection. There will also be some of you who have served in our joint route adjustment processes who will be approached and asked to assist management with route adjustments. My advice to all y'all is to say, "No deal!"

The traditional route count and inspection process is unilateral. If the Postal Service wanted a joint process, then it shouldn't have walked away from the negotiating table like it did.

I can tell you that, many times during negotiations, USPS expressed its desire to have the right to do unilateral traditional route count and inspections whenever and wherever it wished, while doing our joint process at the same time. One of the principles we were crystal clear about throughout negotiations with the USPS was that we couldn't live with that kind of arrangement.

**I promise you that we are going to take action to respond** by doing everything we can to assist local branches to police any route inspections/adjustments that take place and file grievances where appropriate. I'll report next month on the specific actions we've taken to assist you. ☒