

**THE
RAILWAY MAIL
STORY**



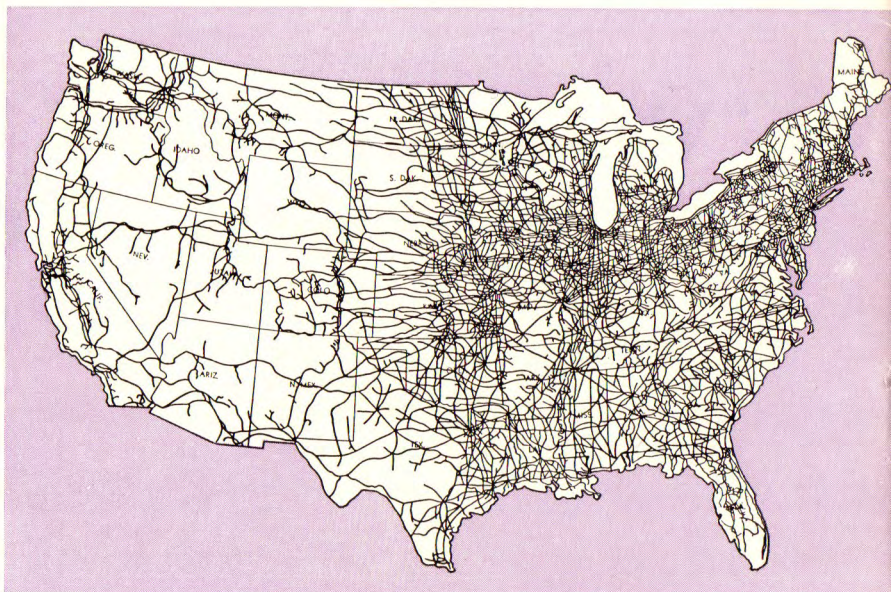
Association of American Railroads
Transportation Building
Washington 6, D. C.
June, 1957

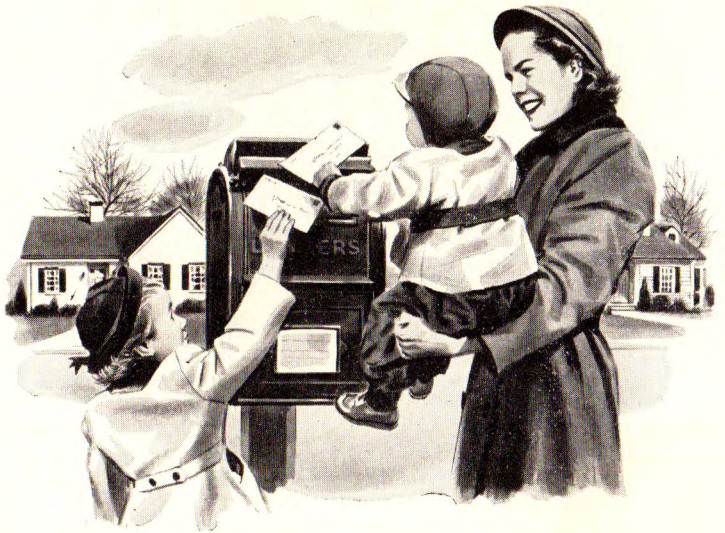


“We carry the mail—
the railroads and I”

EVERY COMMUNITY in the United States—from the smallest hamlet to the City of New York—is served by railway mail service. The vast majority of cities and towns receive their mail by railroads direct—the others are served by railroads in combination with other forms of transportation.

In our 3,070 counties served directly by railroads live over 99 per cent of our entire population; in the few counties without railroads, less than one per cent. The few counties without railroads *use and benefit from* railroad mail service because, excepting local pick-up and delivery, most of their non-local letters and packages also travel by rail. Thus, in reality, *every community and every person in the United States uses and benefits from railway mail service.*





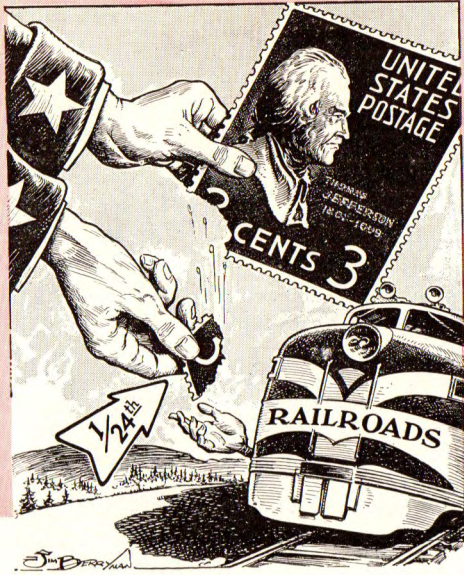
Ever Marvel at the Low Cost of Postal Service?

Probably you have! But it's really not surprising considering that the transportation for three-fourths of all mail moving between cities and towns is efficient, dependable, low-cost railroad transportation.

Before railroads took over the job of moving mail, postal rates were based on the number of sheets in a letter and the distance carried. Postage on a letter of three sheets going from Washington to Boston, for example, was 75 cents. But within only 15 years after the first use of railroads for moving mail, the Post Office was able to reduce the rate on such a letter to 30 cents and by a corresponding percentage on other mail.

Low-cost railroad transportation enabled the Post Office to make one reduction in postage rates after another until, in 1885, letter postage was reduced from 4 cents to 2 cents an ounce—the lowest in history.

Today the first-class postage stamp is an even greater bargain because it buys a vastly superior service. And today, as in 1885, the key to low-cost postage is low-cost railroad transportation—the foundation of the United States Postal Service.



How's this for a Bargain?

For one-eighth of one cent—a tiny fraction of a postage stamp—railroads carry first-class letters an average distance of 487 miles.

And that's not all! For about an eighth of one cent more, railroads provide—

—hundreds of Railway Post Office cars in which mail is sorted and distributed by Post Office employees as the trains speed along.

—the services of thousands of railroad employees in sorting sacked mail, loading it on trains and unloading it at destination.

—the use of station and platform facilities, and at many points, costly conveyor belts and chutes for transporting mail mechanically between stations and post offices.

—switching, terminal, and numerous other services as required by the Post Office Department.

In providing such services at a total average charge of slightly more than a fourth of a cent a letter, railroads stand alone among all forms of transportation. That's one reason—and an important one—why the Postal Service and everybody else benefits when *mail moves by rail.*

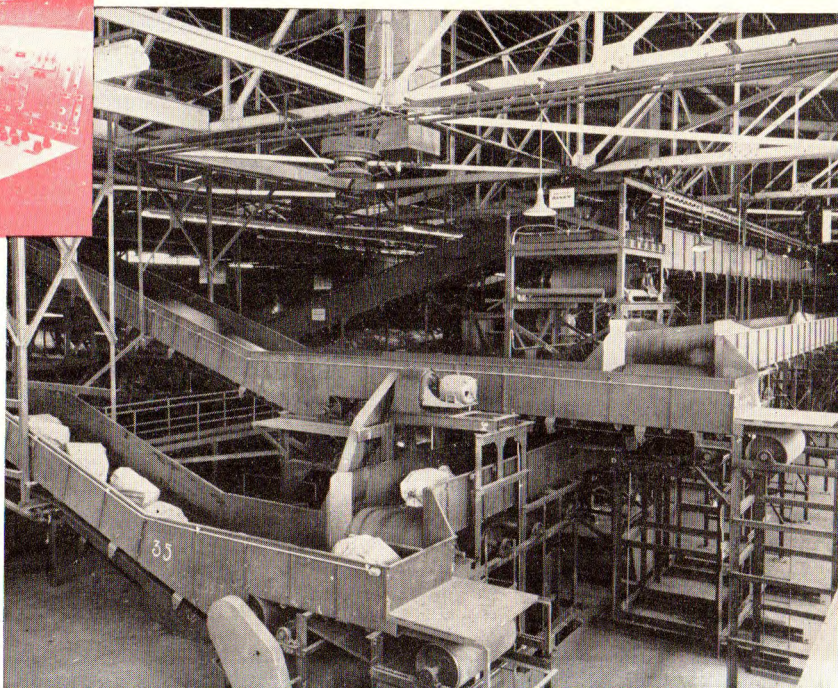
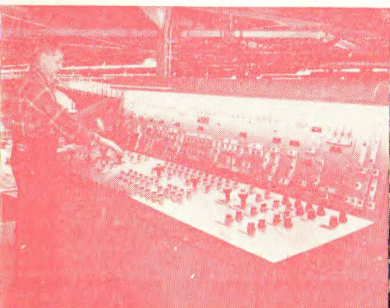
Moving Mail is a Big and Important Job

*And nobody knows and appreciates
this more than the railroads*

Railroads not only furnish three-fourths of the transportation required by the Postal Service for the movement of mail between cities and towns in the United States, but are the basic transportation service upon which the movement of *all* mail depends.

To do their job, railroads have invested a billion dollars in mail-handling facilities and equipment. These range from the simple trackside crane at small stations, from which single pouches are picked up by trains "on the fly," to elaborate and complete mechanized installations of chutes and conveyor belts at major cities—all *provided, operated and maintained by railroads.*

With such facilities, railroads are fully prepared to meet the nation's postal transport needs, whether for the movement of one sack of mail a day, or 100,000 sacks or more. And when mail goes by rail, it moves with the maximum efficiency, economy, and dependability which only railroads can provide.





Snow doesn't "Stay These Couriers" either—

—which is one reason why railroads and postal people have always worked so well together as a team.

This railroad-owned and railroad-operated snow plow, fighting through drifts to open the way for trains, is a symbol of the all-season, all-weather, self-reliant **DEPENDABILITY** of railroad mail service.

Railroads are not immune to storms, hurricanes, floods, or tornados, but it takes considerably more than just inclement weather to stop them or even slow them down. What's more, railroads are least likely to be put out of service for an extended period because, first, they have trackage arrangements with one another providing alternate routes, and second, they own, operate, and maintain their own equipment for dealing with any emergency, whatever it may be.

Railroads are proud of their record of service to the Post Office in providing the continent-wide transportation which is at the very foundation of the United States Postal Service. And in nothing do they take greater pride than in getting the mail through, no matter what the conditions.

The Car that Hauls the Most Mail for the Least Money

To railroad and postal people, this is a "storage car"—a car for transporting mail, usually other than first-class mail, which is not sorted and distributed en route. Most first-class mail is, of course, transported in specially outfitted Railway Post Office cars in which it is sorted and distributed en route by Post Office employees to provide the finest in expedited service.

Storage cars for other than priority mail and RPO cars for priority mail combine to furnish three-fourths of all transportation for mail moving between cities and towns. For this and all their other varied services in moving mail, railroads receive less than 14¢ of each postal revenue dollar—truly the Most Mail for the Least Money and the key to efficient, dependable, low-cost postal service in the United States.

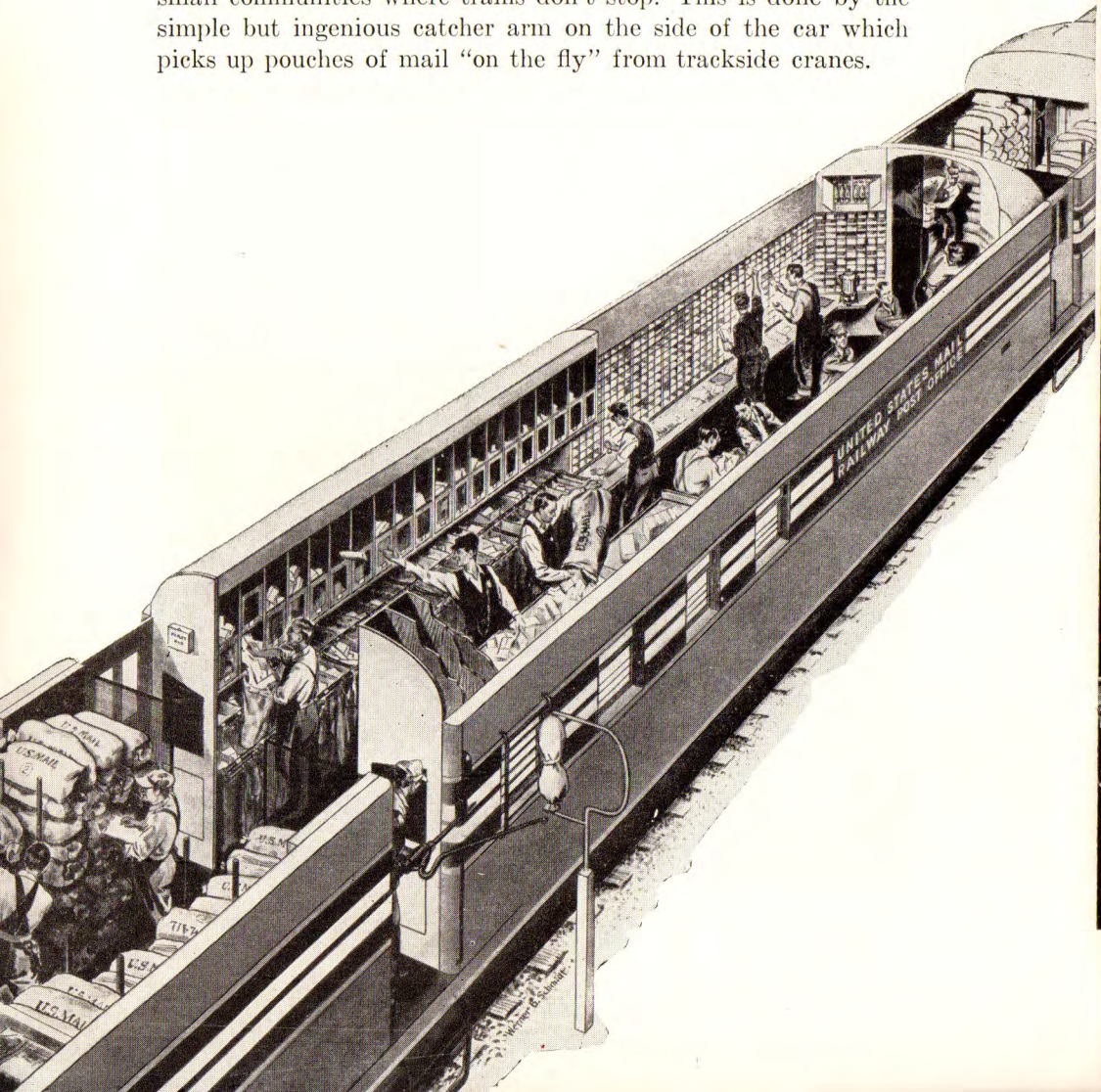


Rolling Post Office

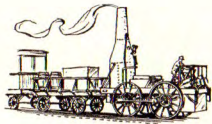
This is one of about 2,500 post offices on wheels which the railroads provide and operate for sorting and distributing mail en route.

Railway Post Offices and the skilled postal workers who man them are the key to rapid, efficient, and economical distribution of mail to thousands of communities of all sizes all over America. For instead of having to be sorted at destination, mail moving in RPO cars is sorted en route, often down to local carrier routes, and in advance stages of readiness for local delivery upon arrival.

These versatile cars afford fast and efficient service even for small communities where trains don't stop. This is done by the simple but ingenious catcher arm on the side of the car which picks up pouches of mail "on the fly" from trackside cranes.



Milestones of United States Railway Mail History



NOVEMBER 1831 United States mail first carried by rail—in South Carolina.

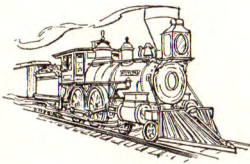
JULY 7 1838 Act of Congress making every railroad a post route signed by President Martin Van Buren.

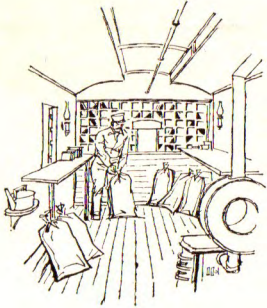
JUNE 1840 Railway mail cars, specially equipped, placed in service between Norwich, Conn., and Worcester, Mass., “for the use of a clerk in the Post Office Department, that he might receive and assort mail on the route.”

1845 Postage rates reduced to five cents per half-ounce within 300 miles and ten cents per half-ounce within 1,000 miles—the direct result of rapidly expanding railway mileage, making possible the transportation of mail at a small fraction of the cost by other means. (See page 3)

APRIL 30 1859 Order of the Postmaster General discontinuing 13 of the 50 distributing post offices then in operation in the United States and transferring the sorting and distribution of mail to Railway Post Office cars—an action which one historian said “marked an epoch in the history of the postal service.”

1860 Continuous mail service established for the first time over connecting railroads. The service was between Boston and New York, and provided overnight service between the two cities of nine hours—a record for that day. It marked the beginning of a highly integrated system of interchange which today enables continuous movement of mail by rail to cities all over the United States.





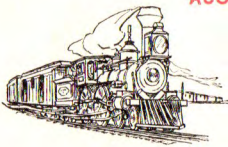
JULY
1862

Experimental post office car, fitted with sorting racks, shelves, and pigeon holes for sorting and distributing "brass lock" or through mail en route, to expedite the movement of mails destined to the Far West. The car was placed in service between Hannibal and St. Joseph, Mo.

1863

Act of Congress sets first uniform letter postage rate, regardless of distance, the rate being three cents per half-ounce. With the carriage of letters by rail, the transportation charge became so small a part of the total cost of handling a letter from sender to addressee that the differences in cost between a letter sent a short distance and another sent clear across the country could be measured in tiny fractions of a cent.

AUGUST 28
1864



First permanent Railway Post Office car for picking up, sorting and distributing mail en route was placed in operation on a run from Chicago to Clinton, Iowa — widely regarded as the real beginning of the Railway Post Office.

1865

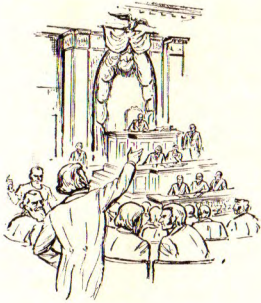
Mail first picked up "on the fly" — by non-stop trains between New York and Washington.

1870

The U.S. railway network first exceeded 50,000 miles.

SEPTEMBER
1875

First all-mail train in America—the "Fast Mail" — placed in service between New York and Chicago. The train was described by contemporary writers as "the most spectacular event of the century," and "a quarter of a century ahead of any other nation in the world."



1880 First official estimate places total annual mail volume at 2,658 million pieces.

1881 The railway network first exceeded 100,000 miles.

1885 Act of Congress reduces letter postage rate from two cents per half-ounce to two cents per ounce—reflecting still greater savings in transportation costs and bringing postage rates to the lowest level in U.S. history.

1885 Annual mail volume rises to 4,520 million pieces, an increase of 70 per cent in five years. Commenting on this remarkable increase, the official history of the Post Office Department said: "Undoubtedly the facilities of the Railway Mail Service have, more than any other single thing, contributed to this great increase in the volume of mail transported."

1888 First all-steel mail cars placed in service.

1891 Railroads required to construct postal cars conforming to Post Office Department specifications.

1900 Annual mail volume rises to 7,130 million pieces, an increase of 170 per cent over 1880.

1902 The U.S. railroad network first exceeded 200,000 miles.



**JANUARY 1
1913**

Post Office establishes parcel post system, resulting in a large increase in mail volume—virtually all moving by rail.

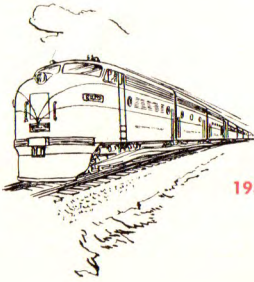
**JULY 28
1916**

Act of Congress substitutes *space* for *weight* as basis for computing payments to railroads for transporting mail.

1916-1918 Acts of Congress empower and direct the Interstate Commerce Commission to determine and fix fair and reasonable rates and compensation for the transportation of United States mails by railroad. Before this, railroads transported mail under contract with the Postmaster General, the maximum rates being prescribed by Congress.

1925 Annual mail volume rises to 25,835 million pieces, an increase of 262 per cent over 1900.

FEBRUARY 1934 Advent of light-weight streamlined trains brings matching streamlined Railway Post Office cars, equipped with the most modern facilities and appliances for the convenience and comfort of postal clerks.



MAY 1934 First diesel-electric streamlined passenger trains — leading to virtually all-diesel or electric operation of trains carrying mails.

1939-1945 Mail volume during World War II rises from 26 billion pieces to 36 billion pieces, creating unprecedented demands on the Railway Mail Service.

JANUARY 1 1951 Railroads granted their first permanent increase in rates for transporting mail since 1928. In the same period railroad wage rates had gone up almost threefold and cost of materials and supplies had considerably more than doubled.

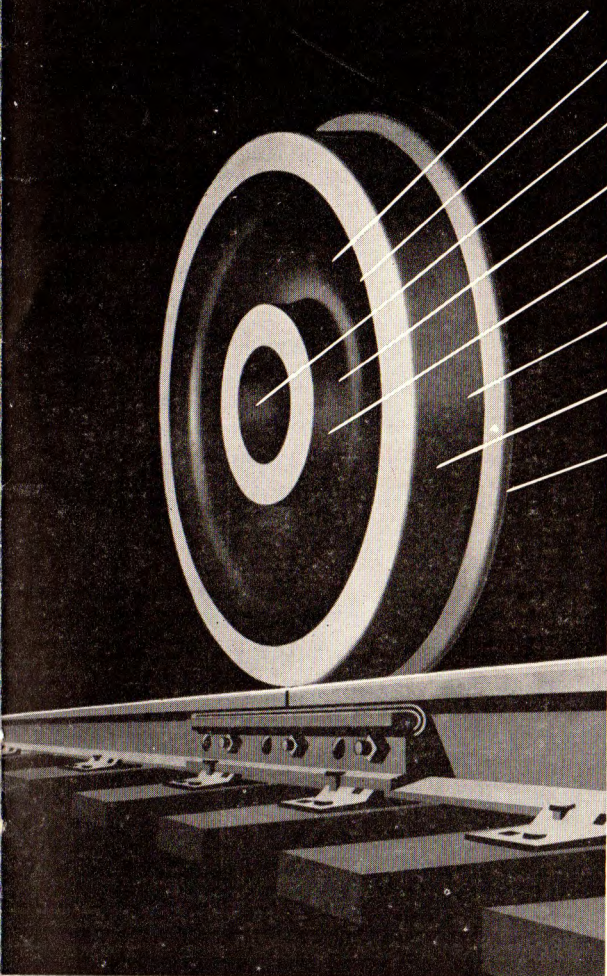
1956 Pieces of mail handled in postal service total more than 56 billion—highest in history.



SPEED

ECONOMY

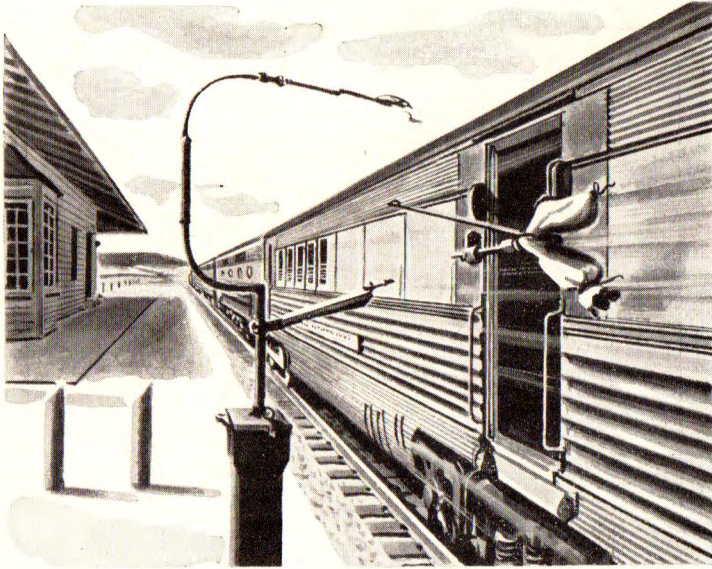
DEPENDABILITY



Railroads offer the most desirable combination of speed, economy and dependability—the *three essentials of good mail service*—for moving the overwhelming bulk of all U. S. mail between cities.

The average first-class letter spends in actual travel time on trains only about 12 hours—fast enough (considering also that mail by rail is speeded by sorting en route) to meet the requirement for speed of all but the most urgent messages. Moreover, the far greater economy and dependability of railroad service, coupled with the far larger number of communities served, often more than compensates for any time advantage by air.

To send all first-class mail by air, as some have proposed, would deny the mail user a choice between two services—one high in cost, and the other, low-cost and dependable. It is a proposal this nation can ill afford to put in practice.



This Railroad Mail Crane . . .

. . . is the key to fast and efficient priority mail service for thousands of small communities all over the United States. You see, pouches of mail placed in the crane at communities where trains do not stop are gathered into the Railway Post Office cars of passing trains by means of a simple catcher arm on the car. Such communities also receive their incoming priority mail "on the fly."

In all, there are some 39,000 points receiving and dispatching mail throughout the United States—many of them using this simple crane. In the major mail-handling centers, all of which are served by railroad, mail-handling equipment and facilities of railroads often include elaborate and complete mechanized installations of conveyor belts and chutes costing millions of dollars.

It takes all these facilities to provide the continent-wide transportation which is at the very foundation of the United States Postal Service.

This is Railway Mail Service, too!



Conveyor belts have been installed by railroads in many major mail-handling centers all over the United States to facilitate the transfer of mail between trains and post offices. They are operated by railroads and are manned and maintained by railroad personnel. One belt carries mail from incoming trains direct to the adjoining post office for local delivery. The other belt leads to a railroad-owned sorting platform where railroad employees sort the sacks of mail according to destination and dispatch them to the proper trains.



Efficient Mail Service and National Preparedness—All in One!

Has it ever occurred to you that this nation's preparedness to resist aggression or wage war rests in no small part upon large-scale movement of mail by rail?

You see, revenue from mail is essential to continued operation of hundreds of passenger trains—and passenger trains are absolutely vital to national strength and preparedness. This was proved in World War II, when railroads were called upon to carry more than 97% of all military personnel moving in organized groups.

Increasing the use of efficient, dependable and economical railroad service for moving mail is, thus, both sensible and sound. For it means Efficient Mail Service and National Preparedness—All in One!



Better Railroads are Better Mail Roads

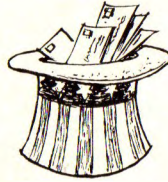
Railroads today move more than double the volume of all non-local mail of 30 years ago—and move it *faster* and *more dependably* in *fewer cars* on *fewer trains*.

This striking achievement, with all that it means in terms of *efficient* and *economical* mail service, is the outgrowth of a vast and steady program of improvement in railroad plant, equipment and operating methods—improvements of such magnitude as the almost complete dieselization of motive power, the widespread growth of Centralized Traffic Control and electronic yards, not to mention improvements in facilities provided especially for handling mail.

Railroads have made these improvements *entirely at their own expense*—without benefit of costly subsidies from the taxpayers.

Increasing the use of railroads for moving mail is one means of making sure that this great self-improvement effort—so essential to the nation's commerce and defense—will not be stymied or slowed for lack of funds. At the same time, it is the best means of insuring ever-better mail service at the lowest possible cost.

"PREFERRED" CUSTOMER



As a railroad customer, the United States Post Office is in a class by itself—a class established and protected by law.

For example:

Only the Post Office may assert priority as to the type, quantity, and quality of transportation service it receives,

Only for the Post Office must the railroads provide specially outfitted cars for the customer's use in sorting and distributing his product to thousands of communities all over the United States,

Only for the Post Office are the railroads required to carry free of charge the customer's personnel while traveling to and from, and in performance of, their duties,

Only for the Post Office are the railroads required to perform additional services such as spotting cars in passenger stations hours in advance of train movement so that the customer may use those cars as office space for his employees,

Only for the Post Office are the railroads required to place the customer's requirements above those of all other customers, or be subject to fines.

The railroad rates for these and other mail services, as for all commodities and persons, are set by the Government, through the Interstate Commerce Commission, on the basis of evidence received at public hearings.

**IT
ALL
ADDS
UP**

to one essential and inescapable fact. The railroads provide a transportation service that is tailored to meet postal transport needs—a service whose greater use for moving mail is in the best interest of the Postal Service and of all America.

