



Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians

L'Alliance pour l'Égalité des Personnes Aveugles du

Sunday, August 31, 2008

Canada Post Corporation Strategic Review

330 Sparks St. (HCCR)

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N5

The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians / L'Alliance pour l'Égalité des Personnes Aveugles du Canada (AEBC) welcomes the opportunity to submit our comments to the Canada Post Corporation's Strategic Review (CPCSR).

BACKGROUND:

The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians / L'Alliance pour l'Égalité des Personnes Aveugles du Canada (AEBC) is a national, not for profit organization of rights holders who are blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted. Founded in 1992, our work focuses primarily on increasing public awareness and providing input on public policy issues that affect our community. Much of this work involves promoting the removal of old barriers in such areas as access to d services, transportation, employment, and fighting the continuing high level of poverty in which far too many members of our community subsist.

Today, we are also involved in fighting to prevent the development of new barriers, such as the development of the quiet hybrid automobile and the increasing use of visual menus to operate regular household products. For further background on the AEBC and our work, please visit our website: www.blindcanadians.ca.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSALLY AVAILABLE POSTAL SERVICE:

We are writing because we are concerned about the future of universal, public postal service in Canada. As users of the mail, we are concerned by the kind of changes we hear are being considered by the CPCS, such as deregulation of our public post office.

The AEBC relies on the mail to keep in contact with our members and to distribute our national magazine, the Canadian Blind Monitor.

"As a service provider Canada Post must review its current method of mail delivery to all areas of the country, and develop a Postal Service designed to meet the needs of the population as a whole. The current service functions on the assumption that all Canadians are physically fit, young and able to reach mailboxes, regardless of height or what type of terrain the boxes are placed on."

- ***Our post office is not broken. It does not need to be fixed, only improved.***

FREE POSTAL SERVICE FOR BLIND CANADIANS (from website)

"Literature for the Blind is a special, no charge service available only to blind persons and recognized institutions for the blind. Materials for the use of the blind may be sent free of postage by Regular Parcel, Xpresspost, Lettermail or Letter-post. Registered Mail is also available free of postage, where available.

"The following items, subject to the conditions and restrictions as set out in the Material for the Use of the Blind Regulations, can be mailed free of postage as Literature for the Blind:

- matter impressed in Braille or similar raised type
- plates for manufacturing matter impressed in Braille or similar raised type
- tapes, records, CDs and other sound recordings posted by the blind in Canada to

anyone

- tapes, records, CDs and other sound recordings and special paper intended solely for the use of the blind if mailed to anyone by, or addressed to, a recognized institution for the blind."

The blind community appreciates the Free Postal service that has facilitated the mailing and delivery of materials in Braille and other formats, particularly audio. From time to time, it is reported that consideration is being given to canceling this provision.

"As a person who is blind, Canada Post mails Braille and audio materials to us using "free matter access." It is important that the corporation does not become so market driven that it drops its policy of delivering free matter delivery to those of us with disabilities. This would put a financial burden on us as consumers and place severe burden on those organizations that produce free matter materials."

- Winnipeg

- ***Reading material for the blind is often cumbersome and without free postal service would be prohibitively expensive to circulate.***

COMMUNITY MAILBOXES:

In our discussions across the country, the subject of Canada Post's community mailboxes were, by far, the issue that received most attention and concern.

"In regard to super mail boxes, blind and partially sighted customers need to have large raised numbers and Braille numbers on the boxes themselves as well as on the key tags that are used to pick up large parcels in the parcel boxes. The terrain around the boxes should be marked differently so that one can find the boxes using a white cane and yet barrier free so a wheelchair can have easy access."

"Mail delivery is vitally important and nobody is really pleased with the local delivery cluster boxes. Physically they are hard to access, for people with mental illness it is hard to get out of bed sometimes let alone out the door. Changes to the mail service create stress and

anxiety for anyone with any disability. However for people with paranoid issues or anxiety it is even worse and can lead to them having lots of complications with respect to providing an address or doing paperwork. Going to these boxes as a person with a disability or a person fleeing abuse is a risk in and of itself.

“Security of the mails is a definite issue. One issue concerning mental health consumers and even their therapists is the requirement of mailing and physical addresses being required on addresses nowadays. This requirement also places women fleeing abuse at risk. Security of the mails is also an issue for seniors.”

"In NL we have both cluster boxes and post office buildings with the mailboxes usually located in the front porch area. I have used both. The cluster boxes were impossible to get to during the winter months due to the snow. The lighting around the cluster was very dim. The numbers on the boxes were very difficult to see and certainly not color contrasted or Braille. To set up the mail box in the cluster, I had to go to a non-accessible 3 steps to get into a local store. I did manage to get a mail in the cluster that was a good height.”

- Newfoundland

THE BOOK RATE:

The Book Rate is a negotiated, reduced Canada Post rate used by libraries for mailing library books that includes return postage. It allows libraries to economically mail books between libraries and to library patrons in rural and remote communities. Through this network of libraries a citizen in Yellowknife can obtain material from a library in Toronto to support their small business development, learning pursuits or leisure activities. A senior citizen living in Nelson B.C. can obtain the large-print materials that are essential to their continued well-being and good health. A family living in a community in Newfoundland,

accessible only by ferry, can order Books By Mail to help pass the time or improve literacy skills. Without the concessionary postal rates, libraries would not have been able to support the delivery of material directly to people's homes in rural or remote areas or to afford to send the volume of material that is sent between libraries on interlibrary loan. Loss of the Library Book Rate would be devastating to libraries across Canada.

- ***The AEBC supports continuation of the Book Rate.***
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ACCESS TO POSTAL OUTLETS:

"Efforts have been made in NL to ensure accessibility at post office buildings. Now most post office buildings have RAMPS! I am not aware of any buildings having automatic door openers. The post offices in many parts of NL still have very high counters. When I asked why access has not been increased in Brigus post office, the answer was that they needed to preserve the heritage of the building."

- Newfoundland

"My only issue with them is the unwillingness of my local postal outlet to give me information over the phone, even when it has been approved, so that I need not take a trip over there for nothing, and their unwillingness to change my local postal outlet to one which is accessible for me."

- Toronto

- ***While steps have been taken to make postal stations more accessible for customers, it is also necessary to ensure that the work area in all postal stations is also fully accessible for staff. Canada Post should also use its considerable purchasing power and only buy equipment that is fully usable by all, including persons with various disabilities.***

PROMOTING EQUITY:

The AEBC is aware of and wishes to public ally commend the impressive work in the area of promoting equity, both within Canada Post and nationally, by _____ and.

CONCLUSION:

- ***Members of the AEBC are members of the public with a real stake in our public post office.***

- ***If the government is considering making any substantive changes to our public postal service, these should not take place until a Discussion Paper has been released, and a national consultation conducted that includes public hearings throughout the country.***



Robin East, President



John Rae, First Vice-President