

Comments on the modernisation of Australia Post

I support the continued public ownership of both a letter and a parcel delivery service. As an individual member of the public (living in a metropolitan area), I value both of these services. I send personal correspondence to both friends and family; and, having a disability that makes me largely house-bound, I also greatly appreciate the parcel delivery service for online shopping. Fundamentally, I believe that Australia Post is a valuable public service that should not be driven by the need to make profit, but rather its mission should reflect the values of a modern inclusive Australia, and to be a service for all Australians.

I also have comments regarding particular issues and matters about Australia Post, which are as follows.

Letters

- I value the ability to send personal letters and cards across Australia to my friends and family. This correspondence is rarely time sensitive, thus I do not use the priority service. Being able to post letters in conveniently located red street boxes is important to me.
- In regard to pricing, I believe that letter posting should continue to be affordable for individuals sending personal correspondence. The accompanying document, 'Postal Services Modernisation: Discussion Paper' (hereafter 'Discussion Paper') claims that 97% of all letters are sent by government organisations and businesses (page 17). Although this is predicted to decrease over time, these sectors should surely bear most of the burden of the cost of letter services given that they make up an overwhelming proportion of its users. It is unfair to ask the 3% of private individuals to pay extra for a service that ultimately they make little use of. And while the document claims some people will pay any price to send letters (page 16), given I am unemployed with a disability, I would not be one of these people. I would have to reduce my use of the letter service if the price were to significantly increase.
- Perhaps a more useful pricing system could include a year-round discount for cards that weigh under (for example) 100 g (similar to the service provided at Christmas time), and a very modest increase to letters that weigh more than this.
- A campaign to encourage individuals to write more letters could help renew public interest in letter sending. Just some such ideas could include advertising the mental health benefits of nurturing personal connections through 'pen friends' and writing 'slow' mail; asking for people to volunteer to write letters to lonely or isolated individuals; a postage stamp design competition open to the public, wherein, for example, five winners each year have their designs appear on a limited run of postage stamps.
- The 'Discussion Paper' made no mention of overseas postal services. I found the changes made several years ago to overseas letter policies to be detrimental. Before this time, I was able to send very modest items (e.g. a single tea towel as a gift) on letter rates, because the weight was low, and the size analogous to a document. Now only printed matter and documents count as letters. I note that this standard does not apply in domestic services. My communications with overseas friends have been impacted due to this change, as I cannot afford the significant cost increase.

Parcels

- If Australia Post predicts that the importance of their parcel services will increase, then I believe a parcel delivery standards should be established, as there is for letters.
- Since I have a disability that limits my ability to do shopping in store, I value the parcel delivery service that Australia Post provides in facilitating my online shopping. I use the AusPost app to track deliveries, which is very useful (although further improvements could be made to both the useability of the app and the accuracy of tracking).
- I would appreciate improvements to the ways in which signatures are taken for parcel delivery. I would like the ability to waive the ‘signature required’ on parcels. I do not agree that companies should have the right to demand signatures on delivery, over and above the wishes of the consumer who has paid for the product being delivered. If the Australia Post employee who delivers my parcel deems the drop-off location to be safe, then I would agree to have my parcels left. (In the decades living at my house, I have never once had any mail stolen). At the very least, a digital signature or approval, taken through email or the app would be an improvement - indeed some private couriers now ask for an ‘authority to leave’ digital signature via email before delivery.
- I would like to be able to send parcels without having to visit a Post Office. Since I would only wish to send a few parcels a year, I do not need a dedicated parcel locker nor a business account. However, I would make use of online pre-paid postage through an app or website (with labels printed at home), and/or, for example, dedicated street boxes for small (non-fragile) parcels, or some similar convenient drop-off arrangement.

Technology

- Improvements could be made to Australia Post’s online services. One particular issue is that the My Post account has lax security - e.g. it lacks two-factor authentication when signing in. With the increasing number of digital hackings of Australian organisations, I would encourage Australia Post to do more to ensure that its customers’ personal information is safe.
- I feel that the current arrangements for concession card holders are inequitable, in that it cannot be widely accessed. Concession card holders should be able to apply for concession stamps online. I have a disability that prevents me from being able to attend a Post Office in person, and thus I am missing out on this discount that I am entitled to (and would greatly appreciate).
- See below for my comments on Australia Post’s online shop.

Environment and sustainability

- In regard to page 5 of the ‘Discussion Paper’, I believe that environmental sustainability should be made a principle by which Australia Post operates, alongside the other principles listed.

- I support efforts made by Australia Post to reduce the carbon footprint of its delivery services. I would encourage Australia Post to consider the carbon footprint of its whole operation, including digital services (e.g. electricity used for running the website and apps).
- I encourage Australia Post to develop more recyclable parcel packaging, to phase out plastic where possible, and to encourage businesses who send parcels to adopt more environmentally friendly packaging.

Points of Presence

- All Post Offices should consider public health and safety standards. I encourage Australia Post to introduce HEPA filters and improve ventilation in their post offices to reduce the transmission of viruses between customers and staff. Ensuring healthy air for everyone who makes use of this public service in person should be of utmost importance.
- Australia Post's online shop is very inefficient. Since Australia Post appears to be the only online store where the whole range of postage stamps can be purchased (beyond the standard \$1.20 stamp), the shop service ought to be improved. There are two main issues with the service: firstly, that purchasing stamps (under \$30) carries a hefty \$5 fee. Perhaps purchases that include only postage stamps could have a reduced shipping fee. The second issue concerns the way that purchases from the online store are sent: one of my recent online orders from Australia Post came in three separate packages, and each of them needed a signature on delivery. One of these packages had a single item worth about \$2, for which I feel a signature is both profoundly inefficient and unnecessary.

Community

- I encourage Australia Post to improve the accessibility of their services for individuals with disabilities. For people such as myself, who have access to technology, but have limited ability to use in-person services, I would like to see Australia Post shift more of their services to digital platforms. This particularly includes the application for concession post rates, and the ordering and delivery of concession postage stamps.
- In order to be accessible to as many people as possible, I would like Australia Post to maintain affordable concession rates for letters, as well as consider a modest concession discount for parcel services (e.g. I would be more likely to send my family and friends gifts with even a 10% reduction in cost of postage).