

Submission to the 'Postal Services Modernisation' Consultation On Delivery Services - Letters, by James Tsoukalas

Executive summary

1. Reflection of personal preference for receipt of important documents by post.
2. Observation of common letter deliveries in South West Sydney suburb.
3. Proposition that letter deliveries will for the foreseeable future, remain a significant obligation of Australia Post, for important records and transactional documents, and will not be eroded to zero by digital alternatives.
4. The delay before receiving letters, may increase by more than the time between letter deliveries, on current trend.
5. Challenge to Government to declare intention to ultimately privatise Australia Post, if that is the intention.
6. Challenge to Government to truly 'modernise' letter delivery system, rather than sign off on expedient cost cutting.
7. The true cost of letter delivery may be underestimated, by not crediting transaction fees accruing to Australia Post for the proportion of letter deliveries being invoices, that are paid through Australia Post outlets.
8. Australia Post should be operated as it is valued, as a public utility. Daily letter deliveries, should continue. Always.

Personal experiences - Letter deliveries are for important documents, which must be delivered daily

We insist on receiving all our household bills and commercial or business transaction documentation by post, even when we have to pay a surcharge (which we consider unfair, unnecessary, and to be deliberately punitive, in order to discourage paper invoicing). We prefer this mode of interaction, because it helps us keep track of these important matters, in the manner in which we wish to. For information, of which we must keep a record, we insist on a documentary record. We also sometimes obtain medical information and legal documents by post.

We may use electronic communications for other purposes, that circumvent communication by letter. This submission was transmitted by email. This mode of communication, for this purpose, is more convenient, and an electronic record of the communication is sufficient. We are not technology deniers.

All of the letters we receive by post, we receive by post because they are important. It is essential these documents be received by us, as soon as possible. Invoices have due dates, which may be exceeded without daily deliveries. Letters from hospital, for appointments, often require replies within days, or the appointments are missed and must be rescheduled. A delay of legal documents sent or received by registered or unregistered post, can also have serious ramifications. Daily delivery of letters is essential for all of the letters we receive. And we do not wish to be forced to receive this information electronically, or to be punished with delay, for our preference to receive important documentation by post.

We're in a South West Sydney suburb, and in our street and neighbouring streets, we see the postman frequently stopping along their delivery run. It would be expected that some suburbs would have a higher regular traffic of letter deliveries than others, and cutting the frequency of deliveries would systematically impact those suburbs and their residents.

We also use Australia Post outlets to pay our bills. When counting the cost of delivering letters to us, Australia Post should also count the credit to itself, of the fee it charges when we pay the received invoice at an Australia Post outlet, on 90% of letters we receive.

Personal experience of Australia Post underperforming on daily delivery of letters

In recent years, there have been extensive delays in receiving letters, even with daily delivery of letters. One invoice sent by registered post, took almost three months to arrive from suburban Sydney, to another suburb in Sydney. The re-sent invoice by normal post, took over a week to arrive. We used to receive letters between two to four weekdays after they were sent. Now we receive them about seven or eight weekdays after they were sent. Within the Sydney metropolitan area. Reducing the frequency of delivery, will increase the delay by at least the number of days between deliveries, and if recent trends are any indication, most likely by more than that.

The appearance is given, of Australia Post deliberately allowing its letter delivery service to run down, to then cry wolf to the Government, that letter deliveries are costing too much, because the Australia Post Board would prefer Australia Post to be in the more lucrative end of that business. But to us, it's not a business, it's effectively a public utility.

Commonwealth Government, be honest about your intentions

To the Commonwealth Government, we say, "If you really want to run Australia Post like a business so you or a future Government can privatise it, in order to cancel some of the government debt, then just say so, and let's see if the people support you, after the debacle of privatised electricity supply. Otherwise, run Australia Post as a public utility. Maintain the daily delivery obligation. By all means upgrade the delivery infrastructure (you can call that modernising, if you prefer, but don't call cost/jobs cutting, modernising). And recognise that letter deliveries will for the foreseeable future, remain an essential service, whatever happens in the digital space, just by virtue of the value of the act of the physical transmission of a document from one place to another. Whether that value is attributed by personal preference, convenience or legal requirement."