

high-quality service at retail outlets, the Corporation should devote greater attention and resources to the training of the private-sector workers and to the security of the mail. RPO operators must also assign a high priority to the postal service. With these concerns addressed, we are confident that the benefits of the retail conversion and expansion programs will greatly outweigh the costs.

A. Rural Conversion Program

Since March 1987, Canada Post has been implementing a program to convert post offices in small rural communities into private retail postal outlets. Rather than allowing a community post office to close with no alternative service to replace it, Canada Post continues to provide mail service. Since customers no longer need to travel to neighbouring communities to pick up their mail, and retail services are also maintained in the community in almost 80% of cases, the Corporation argues, and the PSRC concurred, that the new policy provides for "equal or better service."

A review of postal service in a given community is triggered when a "natural opportunity" arises. This may be the resignation, retirement, transfer or promotion of a postmaster, the submission of a request by the community, or changes in the status of the Post Office building. The job security of existing postmasters and assistants is generally guaranteed.

Canada Post reviews each community on a case-by-case basis and makes a decision about conversion based on the following factors: size of community, business base, revenue, distance to nearest town, demographic trends and current service. Once it is decided to change the type of service, the Corporation informs the Member of Parliament and local municipal officials and a 90-day period of consultation with the community begins when a first letter is mailed to the customers affected. A contact name is provided for those with inquiries about the conversion process, and the Corporation promises to hold at least one local meeting to allow customers to present their concerns.

Criticisms have been expressed, however, that Canada Post representatives do not meet with the community leaders, but rather with individuals. We view the involvement of community leaders in this consultative process as being of paramount importance. The Committee therefore recommends that:

Canada Post hold at least one meeting to discuss upcoming proposed service changes with interested elected officials, prior to and apart from a general meeting with the community residents affected.