

OUR VIEW: Five-day postal service is smart option

By Murf Raquet, for the editorial board

Posted on: Tuesday, August 11, 2009

Rural residents of the Palouse probably breathed a collective sigh of relief recently when they found out their local post offices would remain open.

That's a good thing for those who still relish the visit to the smaller post offices, which serve as social focal points in many communities.

But, keeping those offices open doesn't do much to reduce the billions of dollars of debt the U.S. Postal Service projects for this year alone.

Post offices will be closed or consolidated in metropolitan areas, but that hardly solves the problem. Rural post offices are safe for now. It won't be long before the question of closures comes up again if something isn't done soon.

Postal officials need to revisit the five-day service option. This time, the plan should not be dismissed as easily as it was earlier this year.

The Postal Service is a ponderous bureaucracy. Hundreds of thousands are employed and millions are on the USPS retirement system.

Expenses are going up while the number of pieces of mail handled by the Postal Service is dropping by billions each year.

Electronic mail and e-commerce have taken big bites from the Postal Service, and that trend shows no signs of slowing.

The cost to mail items also continues to rise. At some point, that cost will reach a level many will refuse to support.

Cutting one day of delivery - Saturday and Wednesday are mentioned most often - will probably save the most money while having the least effect on customers once they get used to it.

Postal officials need to address the mounting debt soon, and cutting back deliveries by 17 percent will help.

Postal Service debt is not new. It used to be handled by increasing the cost of a stamp by a few cents, but the problem has been beyond that for several years. Now, it borders on unmanageable, and that's unacceptable.

We hope the debt doesn't get so far out of hand that postal officials get in line for a government handout.