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U.S. RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD

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### RRB Customer Service Plan Update

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The RRB's plan states specifically the level of service that customers can expect, and an important part of the plan is a pledge to keep beneficiaries informed of how well the RRB is meeting the plan's standards. The plan is reviewed and updated periodically as the agency gains more experience with it, compares its service with the best in business and considers feedback received from its customers.

The following questions and answers provide information about the RRB's performance in the key areas of railroad retirement, disability and survivor benefit payments, plus railroad unemployment and sickness benefit payments, and the handling of correspondence during fiscal year 2003 (October 2002 – September 2003). Also included are the customer service performance goals the RRB set for fiscal year 2003 in its Annual Performance Plan. These goals are revised annually based on such factors as projected workloads and available resources.

#### **1. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2003 for processing applications for railroad retirement employee or spouse annuities and how well did it meet those standards?**

Under the RRB's standards, if you filed for a railroad retirement employee or spouse annuity in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the beginning date of your annuity. If you have not filed in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2003, 93.6 percent of employee and 96.2 percent of spouse applicants who filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 35 days of their annuity beginning date. Taking these employee and spouse cases together, 95.1 percent of this group met the agency's standard for fiscal year 2003. Average processing times for employee and spouse

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applications were 9.9 and 6.2 days, respectively; the combined average processing time for these cases was 7.8 days.

Also, of the cases processed, 98.3 percent of employee and 94.6 percent of spouse applicants who had not filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 65 days of their filing dates. Taken together, 96.7 percent of these cases met the agency's standard. In these cases, the average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 22.7 and 22.9 days, respectively; the combined average processing time was 22.8 days.

The RRB's goals in fiscal year 2003 were 92.5 percent for those filing in advance and 93.0 percent for those not filing in advance.

## **2. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2003 for processing applications for disability annuities under the Railroad Retirement Act?**

Under the Customer Service Plan, if you filed for a disability annuity, you will receive a decision within 105 days of the date you filed your application. If it is determined that you are entitled to disability benefits, you will receive your first payment within 25 days of the date of the RRB's decision, or the earliest possible payment date, whichever is later.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2003, 56.3 percent of those filing for a disability annuity received a decision within 105 days of the date they filed an application. The average processing time was 108.4 days. Of those entitled to disability benefits, 94.1 percent received their first payment within the Customer Service Plan's time frame. Average processing time was 8.0 days.

The agency's goals were 55.0 percent for disability decisions and 90.0 percent for payments.

## **3. What standards were used in the area of survivor benefits in fiscal year 2003?**

Under the standards, if you filed for a railroad retirement survivor annuity or a lump-sum benefit, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application, or became entitled to benefits, if later. If you are already receiving a spouse annuity, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the date the RRB receives notice of the employee's death.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2003, 86.0 percent of the applicants for an initial survivor annuity received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In addition, 95.2 percent of the applicants for a lump-sum benefit received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In cases where the survivor

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was already receiving a spouse annuity, 91.8 percent of the applicants received a payment or a decision within 35 days of the RRB being notified of the employee's death. Average processing time for all recurring applications was 24 days. The average processing time for lump-sum applications was 12 days.

The goals for fiscal year 2003 were 75.0 percent for payment of a survivor annuity and 90.0 percent for payment of a lump sum. For those already receiving a spouse annuity, the goal was 89.0 percent for payment of the survivor annuity.

#### **4. What were the standards for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well did the RRB meet these standards?**

Under the standards, if you filed an application for unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive a claim form, or a decision, within 15 days of the date you filed your application. If you filed a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive your payment, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the RRB receives your claim form.

During fiscal year 2003, 100.0 percent of unemployment benefit applications sampled for timeliness and 99.3 percent of sickness benefit applications processed met the RRB's standard. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness benefit applications were 1.27 and 2.6 days, respectively.

In addition, 99.7 percent of subsequent claims processed for unemployment and sickness benefits met the RRB's standard for fiscal year 2003. Payments are issued within two business days of processing. The average processing time for claims was 4.78 days.

The goals for processing unemployment and sickness applications in fiscal year 2003 were 95.0 percent for both employment and sickness. The payment or decision goal was also 95.0 percent.

#### **5. What was the standard for replying to correspondence in fiscal year 2003?**

The Customer Service Plan states that when you inquire by letter, you will receive a reply within 15 days of the date the agency receives your inquiry. If for any reason the RRB cannot reply within that time frame, it will acknowledge the letter and tell you how long it will be before your questions can be answered fully.

In fiscal year 2003, 99.3 percent of all correspondence the RRB received was responded to, either with an acknowledgement or with a final reply, within the standard.

The goal for 2003 was set at 96.0 percent.

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**6. How did the RRB's performance in meeting its standards in fiscal year 2003 compare to its performance in fiscal year 2002?**

Fiscal year 2003 performance remained the same or improved when compared to fiscal year 2002 for nine of the 11 customer service workloads tracked by the agency. Even with declines in two areas, the agency still exceeded all of the customer service performance goals it had set for the year in its Annual Performance Plan.

Performance remained the same or improved for retirement applications filed in advance, retirement applications not filed in advance, disability decisions, initial survivor applications, spouse to survivor conversions, unemployment benefit applications, sickness benefit applications, unemployment and sickness benefit claims, and correspondence.

Slight performance declines were noted for the handling of disability payments (0.1 percent) and lump-sum death benefits (0.8 percent).

**7. Can beneficiaries provide feedback to the RRB about the service they receive?**

A Customer Assessment Survey form is available in every field office allowing beneficiaries to evaluate the service they received and suggest how the agency can improve its service. Persons not satisfied with the service they received may contact the manager of the office with which they have been dealing or the regional director who is responsible for that office. Their names and addresses are available in each office.

The addresses and phone numbers of all the RRB's field offices are also available on the agency's Web site at [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov) or by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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