



Project Summary

Texas Department of Transportation

0-6076: Coordination and Safety Procedures for Mail Delivery on Roadways without Shoulders

Background

Slow-moving vehicles on rural two-lane roadways with no shoulders, such as letter carrier delivery vehicles, have long been a safety issue which the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has attempted to mitigate. The speed differential between the stop-and-go operation of a letter carrier's job duties and the normal traffic stream, the frequent lack of a shoulder refuge, and the often multi-tasking nature of delivery activities create a potential for conflicts and crashes. Despite the efforts of TxDOT, the United States Postal Service (USPS), and others through engineering, policy, training, and community outreach, these vehicles remain a safety issue that needs addressing.

What the Researchers Did

The researchers' primary objectives were to improve the safety of rural letter carriers and the motoring public on narrow, two-lane roadways and to develop ideas for improved coordination of work activities between TxDOT and USPS during design and construction of roadways. Through this project, researchers evaluated current USPS and TxDOT practices, identified areas of concern and potential improvements for both agencies, and developed recommendations to improve safety and coordination among the agencies.

What They Found

Researchers found that mailboxes should be placed on the right side of the roadway relative to the direction of travel, and not on the opposite side (mailbox placement should be on the same side of the roadway as the given driveway). Additionally, near-side versus far-side installation with respect to the driveway (i.e., before or after the delivery driver crosses the driveway) should be determined by field conditions, primarily sight distance. Rural letter carriers prefer that the mailbox be mounted on the far side of the driveway when possible so that a portion of driveway turn radius can be used as a refuge area in cases where a turnout area does not exist. Figure 1 illustrates many of these features.

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Both TxDOT and USPS indicated that better coordination of activities pertaining to mailbox installation and maintenance is desirable and critical to safer and more efficient operations. This coordination could occur at design concept conference meetings, utility coordination meetings, and/or preconstruction meetings. Early and frequent coordination between these agencies would ensure a safer delivery route for the letter carrier when construction or maintenance activities were occurring and a safer driving environment for the traveling public.

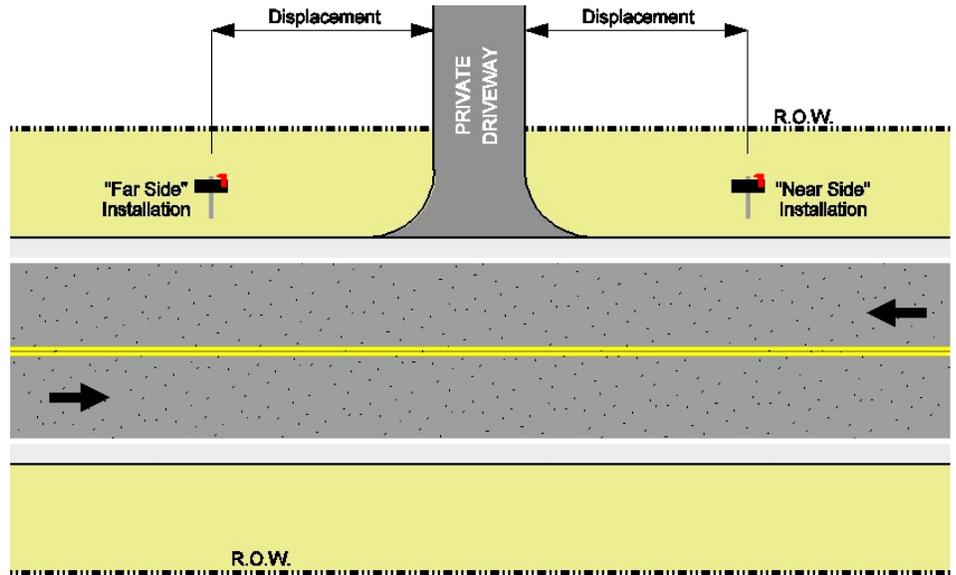


Figure 1. Mailbox Placement on Same Side of Roadway.

With regard to USPS operations, researchers found that postmasters and their letter carriers conduct annual safety inspections of letter carrier routes. The researchers recommend that this documentation of potential safety hazards be shared with local TxDOT officials as a means of rectifying safety concerns that fall within their purview. Finally, substantial inconsistencies exist in vehicle-mounted safety devices on rural letter carrier vehicles (particularly for vehicle strobes and how they are placed on the vehicle, as well as warning sign placards). Researchers believe that this inconsistency could lead to driver confusion and decreased roadway safety. They recommend that USPS establish policy and guidance regarding such devices to better standardize appearance among rural letter carriers statewide.

What This Means

Researchers recommend that TxDOT develop criteria for several mailbox-related items and include them in its *Roadway Design Manual* and/or *Construction Contract Administration Manual*, including:

- where to place mailboxes with respect to driveways,
- when and where to use mailbox turnouts, and
- specific directions as to coordination with USPS.

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