

With two months of reporting in the books, there are now some interesting numbers and trends that are emerging from the ILL Courier Service Pilot Project. Generally speaking, the response from libraries to this service is overwhelmingly positive. After some initial hiccups, the courier company, Green Mountain Messenger (GMM), ramped up to the scale of this project. Routing and timing of pickups have become more consistent, with limited exceptions. Libraries' comments about the drivers for GMM are nearly universally positive.

Volume:

Through March 31, over 24,000 items have been handled through the courier: 12,028 sent and 12,060 received by libraries. That averages out to 76 items sent and 76 items received per library, per month through the courier system. Libraries are still shipping items via USPS, of course, though the volume has decreased from last year. There were 2,246 items sent and 1,715 received through postage through March 31. That averages out to 14 sent and 10 received per library per month through USPS.

Money:

75 libraries reported their postage expenditures for the last fiscal year. These libraries spent a total of \$156,517.44 for postage for ILLs last year, equal to an average of \$2,086.90 per library, or \$173.91 per library per month, average. One library spent \$9,800.00 the last fiscal year on postage for ILLs.

As one would expect, spending for postage of ILLs is significantly down because of the courier service. Average postage per month per library is now down to \$43.40 per library.

Factor in the cost for the courier service, and the average savings per library per month over last year is \$68.05.

Libraries have already saved a total of \$10,221.27! Over the course of a full year, that will be over \$60,000 saved in postage. One library saved over \$1100 in postage through March 31, alone.

Not every library is saving money over last year, though. Of the 74 libraries that reported their fiscal year and monthly postage costs, 13 reported paying more than last year for the service. Factoring current postage costs and courier costs, the average expense is \$32.45 per month more than what they paid per month last year. The amount ranges from -\$7.23 to -\$123.22 per month, with most paying under \$30 per month more.

Part of this pilot project and reporting statistics is to figure out how to get these numbers closer to flat with last year's cost.

The good news is, though, that 61 of the 74 libraries that reported all of their financial data are saving money over last year. Some are saving a lot of money.

Time:

Not only are the majority of libraries reporting that they are saving money, but most are saving time as well. 73 of 81 libraries reported saving time on ILLs during one or both of the reporting periods. Those 73 libraries saved an average of 2.55 hours per week over last year.

That's just over two and a half hours per week *not* stapling, taping, standing in line, or looking for a box or shipping envelope.

Seven libraries reported not saving time with the new service. More than one of these libraries said that the increased volume of ILLs has eaten up the time saved. So, it is kind of a qualified "yes:" each item is easier to send because of the convenience of the system, but there are more items, so libraries spend the same or more time on ILL.

Comments:

What follows is a selection of comments received from libraries. Some are representative of similar comments received from multiple libraries, others exemplify special cases.

Contact with GMM:

Comments are mostly positive.

"They called me on Monday morning and left me a message that we would receive the bin that afternoon. We did and I am very happy with this service."

"Great delivery guy."

"We didn't contact them, but our delivery man has been very nice and efficient, and the delivery schedule has been very reliable: always right around noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. One day when we were out of bags, he offered to wait for us to quickly package some items in incoming bags. It was a simple thing that helped a lot."

"Called to say we would not be here on Town Meeting Day. We rescheduled and there were no problems!"

"Drivers very pleasant and prompt."

"Employee of GMM is terrific, always polite and helpful. He walks up to the second floor of our building to pick up and deliver the bins, which the staff appreciates!"

Some problems in Jan.-Feb. seem to be cleared up, but there are a couple libraries that are having trouble getting bins back:

"On 2 occasions I sent out two bins because there were so many books. I needed to contact GMM to ask them to return the extra bin so I would have it for next time."

"Still having problems getting our extra bin back. I still have to call every time it doesn't come back and it arrives in the next delivery after the call."

Turnaround time comments:

Comments are a little more mixed on this topic. Some libraries are finding the delivery time to be quicker than USPS in most cases, while others are not. It sounds like most libraries are adjusting one way or the other.

"I've extended our loan period to four weeks to accommodate the courier service. We're a one stop per week library, if the patron takes a week to pick up, it doesn't leave much time. We'll reevaluate if needed as the system progresses."

"Partially satisfied should be a choice...it's not a firm yes or a no for us. For the most part, it's a yes, but there are times it is a no. For example, we wanted to request an item for a library this evening (Monday). The lending library has a Monday courier day as do we. Therefore, the item will not go out until next Monday which means we won't receive it for two full weeks. I think these situations are not common, but they are the reason for us to not be able to give a firm yes."

"It is great to have dedicated day of the week to tell our patrons when their ILL book will be in."

"Overall yes, but there have been at least one or two items that have taken two weeks every weekly pickup. I am very careful to check the days that other libraries pick up. There is no "overnight" service as was mentioned - I have never had it happen where I requested something on a Wednesday (getting it in in time for that library's pickup) and had it arrive in our Thursday pickup. I've tried several times. Also, items from Montpelier (both VTLIB and K-H) seem particularly slow in getting here."

"We are a small library with 24 hours of opening time. The courier system works well for us."

"Has been good and occasionally amazing!"

"Generally a 1 week turnaround, occasionally only 2 days if I selectively request from someone with a Wednesday pick-up!"

"Turnaround time is comparable or better than before the courier service."

Ease of use comments:

The comments on ease of use are nearly unanimous: libraries like the courier system.

"Love those bags!"

"Easy to use - haven't had any issues with bags (we bought a ton of extras) or with GMM - our delivery person has been great."

"It is so much easier to package the books. We have had no problems with the delivery either."

"The staff loves it!"

"This process is much easier; we don't have to find padded envelopes, weigh the packages, put stamps on the envelope, and walk over to the post office. We save a lot of time!"

"I love being able to add books to a library's bag, instead of sending via USPS multiple times."

General comments:

"I think this system is going to be a huge hit."

“Using the courier system has made for less guilt when borrowing from the same library often. There are titles that our patrons request and they seem to be only held by the same library so we use them a lot. Knowing they are not paying per item eases my conscience.”

“Hopefully the bag situation will settle itself out. We have more things going out than coming in, so we run low on bags.”

“A big thank you to all the people who worked, and continue to work, so hard to make this service possible. It is a HUGE improvement over the old system. I hope that, going forward, more and more VT libraries are able to join the system.”

“Our request for more bags was filled very generously by other libraries.”

“I would have gone with smaller bins - but it is a pilot and from our point of view is going very well.”

“As a former NH librarian, that was a wonderful system. VT still improving, but have confidence in success.”

Thanks to everyone for sharing your thoughts about the system. Your comments, of all sorts, are very important and are a concrete measure of the successes and shortcomings of this pilot. Please keep them coming! Comments that are positive, negative, or some of each. The more you say the better the system can be.

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