

Considered Non-Priority Point—

Mail Service Frustrates Ft. Yukon

There are no roads to Fort Yukon. Although there is daily air service, the villagers of Fort Yukon find they receive supplies, communications and other necessities days and even weeks after they are mailed.

Last week, frustrated by the decline in mail service since the Post Office inaugurated its "two track air transport system" in September, 1970, the villagers of Fort Yukon submitted a pe-

tition to the U.S. Post Office to "restore mail service to at least its previous level of adequacy."

One hundred and forty-five village residents signed the petition, which charged the Post Office with causing damage to local business, transportation, and morale.

The "two track air transport system," according to Mr. Everett Wilde of the U.S. Post Office in Fairbanks, divides Alas-

kan points into priority and non-priority areas.

"Certain main line offices are considered non-priority points. Bush offices, with less frequent service are considered priority points," he explained.

Fort Yukon, along with Tanana, Galena, Nome, Kotzebue, and Barrow is a non-priority point. Its non-priority mail—everything except first class—is

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Ft. Yukon Mail...

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carried by air carriers on a space available basis.

This policy, which the Civil Aeronautics Board inaugurated after its Alaska Rate Hearings last summer in Washington, is an attempt by the Post Office to lower the cost of bush mail service. Before the policy change, air carriers were required to carry all mail before they loaded freight. Now, they can use mail as "filler cargo" after passengers and cargo, Mr. Wilde explained. The cost to the Post Office, as a result is substantially less.

Although all first class mail is carried within one day, during periods of heavy travel and freight, (such as the Christmas holidays), other mail may be delayed up to a week or more.

The villagers of Fort Yukon are some of those who lose out under the new system—through delayed supplies, newspapers, and other mail.

According to their petition, the United States Postal Department fails to provide the following necessities:

"Dependable Communications—Fairbanks daily newspapers arrive at least two weeks late. Educational materials lose significance by arrival time.

"Medical—Prescriptions and other supplies arrive after the need no longer exists.

"Credit—Since statements arrive long after the bill is due, credit ratings are jeopardized.

"Business—Business is affected by delayed deadlines in communications. Available scholarships, grants, and other needed programs for the low-income areas are closed before the information is obtained.

"Transportation—Transportation is jeopardized by failure of parts to arrive in time for necessary maintenance to work on trap lines, city roads, planes, snowmobiles, etc.

"Recreation—Recreation is affected by failure of the movies to arrive on time.

"People—Morale is affected by constant disappointment and frustration over these failures in communication as well as those affecting their personal lives in not having closer ties with families and friends by mail."

Although Mr. Wilde does not agree with some of their specific complaints, he does believe the villagers of Fort Yukon lose out under the new system.

Bills, he says, as first class mail, should be carried immediately. Newspapers should, as the first non-priority item loaded, be delayed not more than a few days. Except during bad weather, these things should go to Fort Yukon almost immediately.

However, at times of heavy travel and freight, supplies and non first class items may be delayed noticeably.

"Senator Stevens," he explained, "is aware of the problem. However, so far no progress has been made."

The Fort Yukon petition, he said, is far from the first complaint about the two track air transport system various officials have received.

Bush mail service, is an expensive money loser to the Post Office and one that they are trying to make cheaper while retaining necessary service.