MAILERS TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MTAC)

Workgroup 164
Informed Visibility (IV)
Data Provisioning Improvements

Final Recommendations Report

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1 Executive Summary

The US Postal Service (USPS) strives to provide its customers with world-class product visibility. In recent years great strides have been made in getting unique barcodes on mail pieces, handling units, and containers. As of the end of FY2014 roughly 97% of commercial mail bore Intelligent Mail barcodes (IMbs) and 80% of Full-Service-eligible mail was Full Service. USPS continues to provide mailers with mail visibility data via IMb Tracing and PostalOne!, however, the mailing industry asked USPS to explore alternatives that might allow for more expeditious provisioning of mail visibility data.

The workgroup was sanctioned with the following desired result:

> "to discover alternative data distribution methodologies to reduce the current data distribution time delays by at least 50%. In addition, the group will present recommendations regarding best practices for data distribution and time lines for development, testing and implementation of all recommended approaches".

The workgroup commenced with a weekly meeting schedule. Due to the broad nature of the charter – applicability to piece level, bundle, handling unit and container level data – at its commencement, the group agreed to prioritize activities and it was decided that the focus should be on container data. The workgroup was comprised of 15+ members from the mailing industry and the US Postal Service. The industry was represented by mail owners, mail service providers, publishers, printers, software providers, and consultants. The US Postal Service was represented primarily by the Mailing Information Systems (MIS) and the Mail Entry and Payment Technology (MEPT) group.

The industry reaffirmed the claim that container data is often delayed by more than 24 hours and can occasionally be delayed by as much as 96 hours. Often this data reaches mailers well after the more-detailed, piece-level IMb scans -- greatly diminishing the value of mail aggregate scans. As an initial step, the group assessed the current mechanism for container data distribution.

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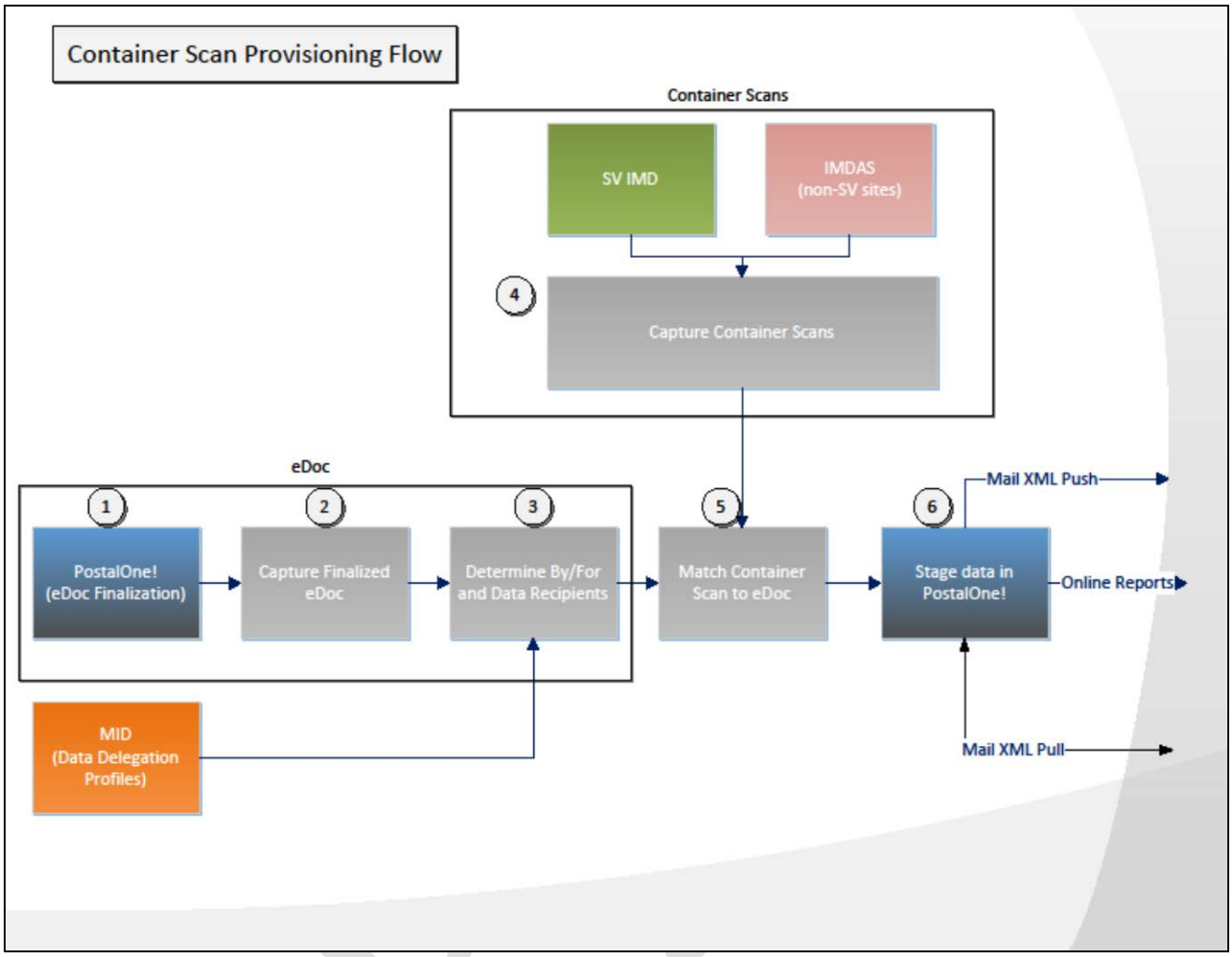
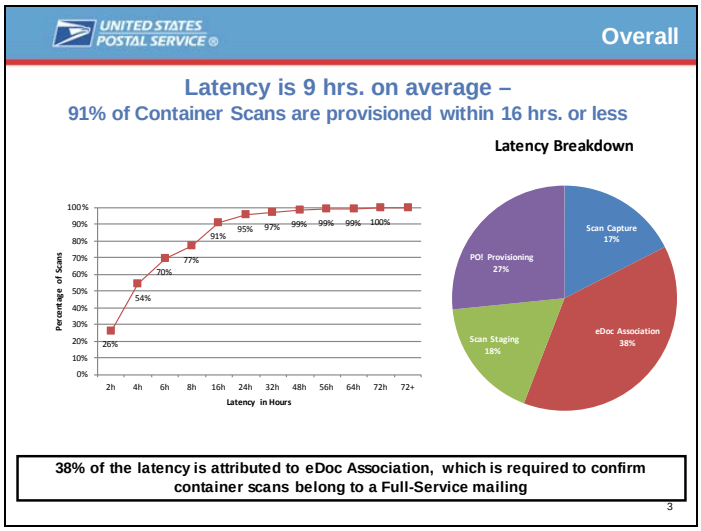
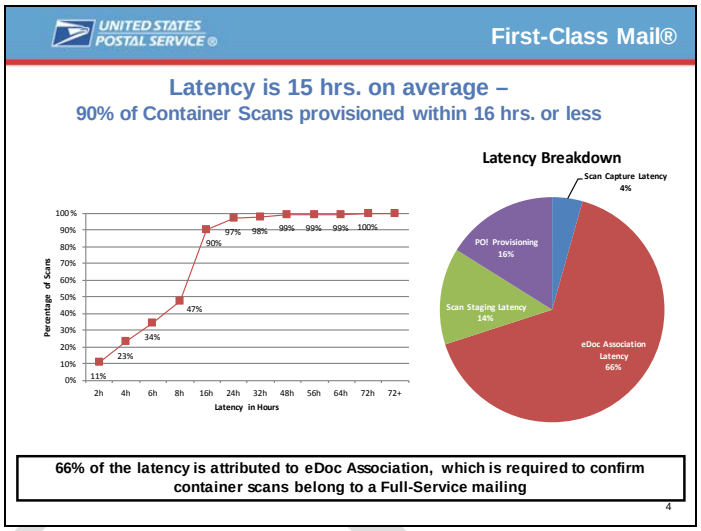
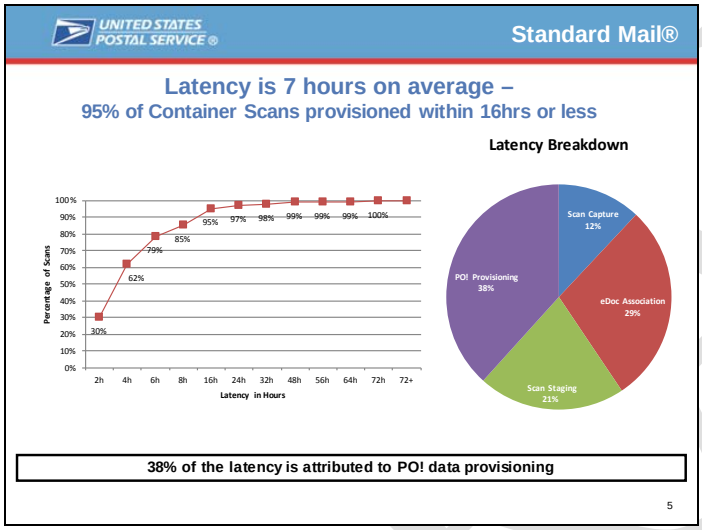
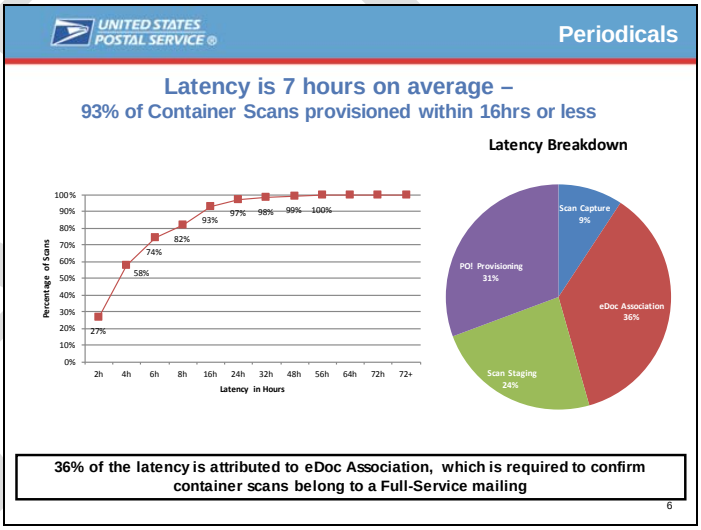


An overview of the current container data flow and distribution that occurs via PostalOne! was discussed to establish a common understanding of the issue statement. The group acknowledged the multiple data hand-offs in the process. Pursuant to the discussion on the data flow, the group indicated that it would be beneficial to have additional analysis on the latencies end-to-end data. An analysis of container data latency was performed by USPS on 224,482 containers during the week of August 30, 2014 through September 6, 2014. The graphics below summarize the findings of this analysis.









After discussing specific workgroup participant issues and observations, the group ideated potential solutions. Several alternatives were identified for further consideration as potential near-term enhancements to help reduce data latency:

- *Address Correction Service (ACS) Electronic Product Fulfillment (EPF)* - Review how the EPF system was redesigned to ascertain whether a similar approach/architecture could be utilized for provisioning handling unit and container data.

- *IMb Tracing* – Determine if it would be possible to modify the IMb Tracing application to provision handling unit and container data in addition to the piece-level data that it sends today.

- *Eliminate Reconciliation Process / Qualification Requirement from PostalOne!* – Eliminate the reconciliation requirement / foregoing any verification of Full-Service qualification within PostalOne! prior to making tray and container data available.

- *Informed Visibility (IV) Interim Solution* - Review the pre-deployment Informed Visibility (IV) dashboard project that Steve Dearing discussed at the National Postal Forum (NPF).

Analysis of Address Correction Service (ACS) Electronic Product Fulfillment (EPF) Option

The Address Correction Service (ACS) Electronic Product Fulfillment (EPF) process is used to provision address correction data to subscribers. The mailing industry praised the USPS on the improvements that were made in recent years and felt that it was important to learn more about the ACS EPF process as a potential best-practice. Lisa West, of USPS Mailing Information Systems (MIS), addressed the group on August 26, 2014 and provided a high-level overview of EPF.

The ACS EPF process is elective and relies on voluntary mailer enrollment in the program. As condition of enrollment the mailer must agree to accept monetary charges for any ACS data that they may receive for which it is later determined that they were not entitled to receive for free (e.g. a non-qualifying Full-Service mailing). From a technical perspective, ACS EPF simply validates mailer's enrollment (based on the mailer identifier, or MID, on the mail piece) in conjunction with the presence of an ACS Service Type Identifier (STID) within the IMb – foregoing any backend reconciliation process and/or application of data delegation rules.

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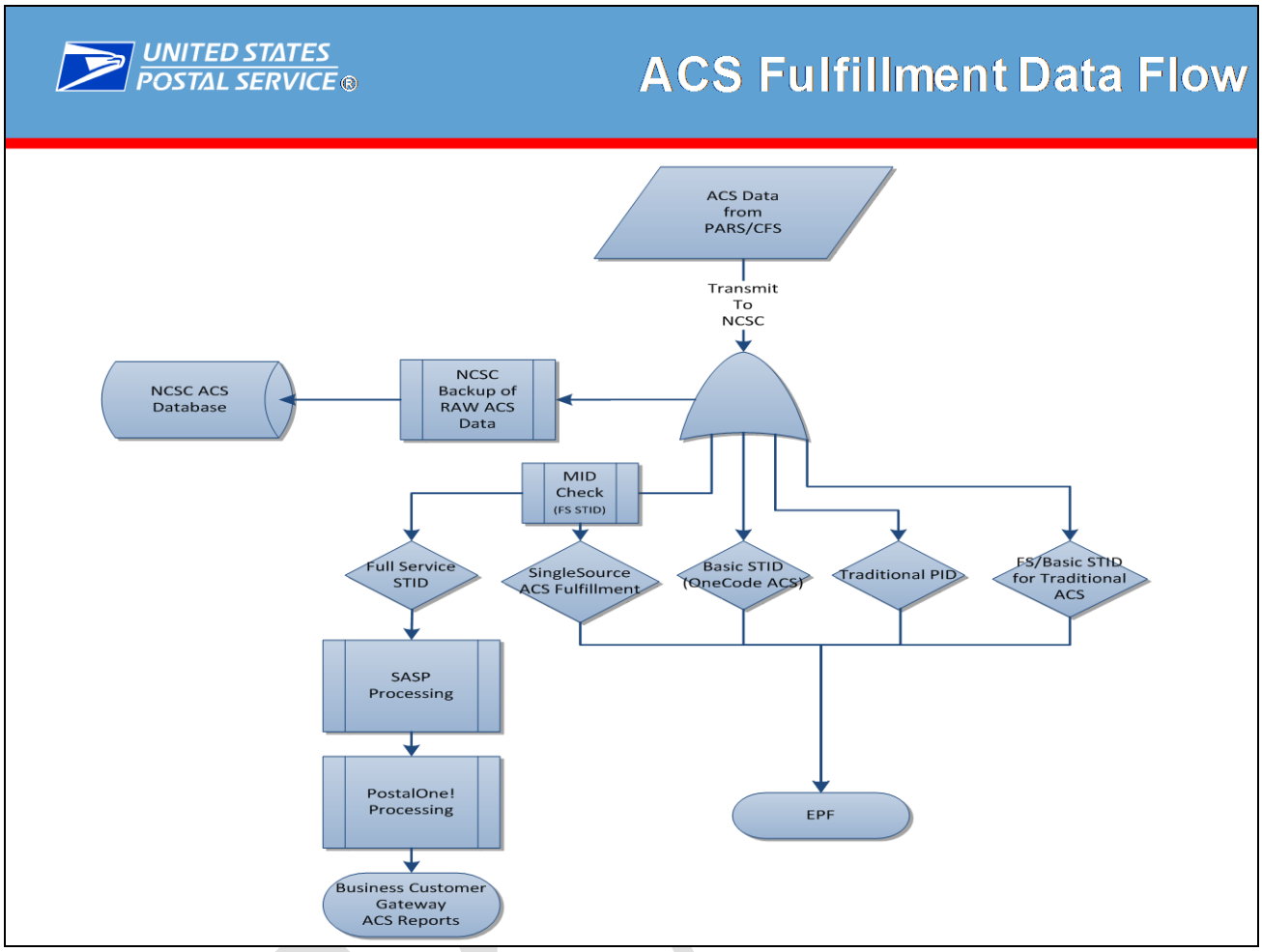
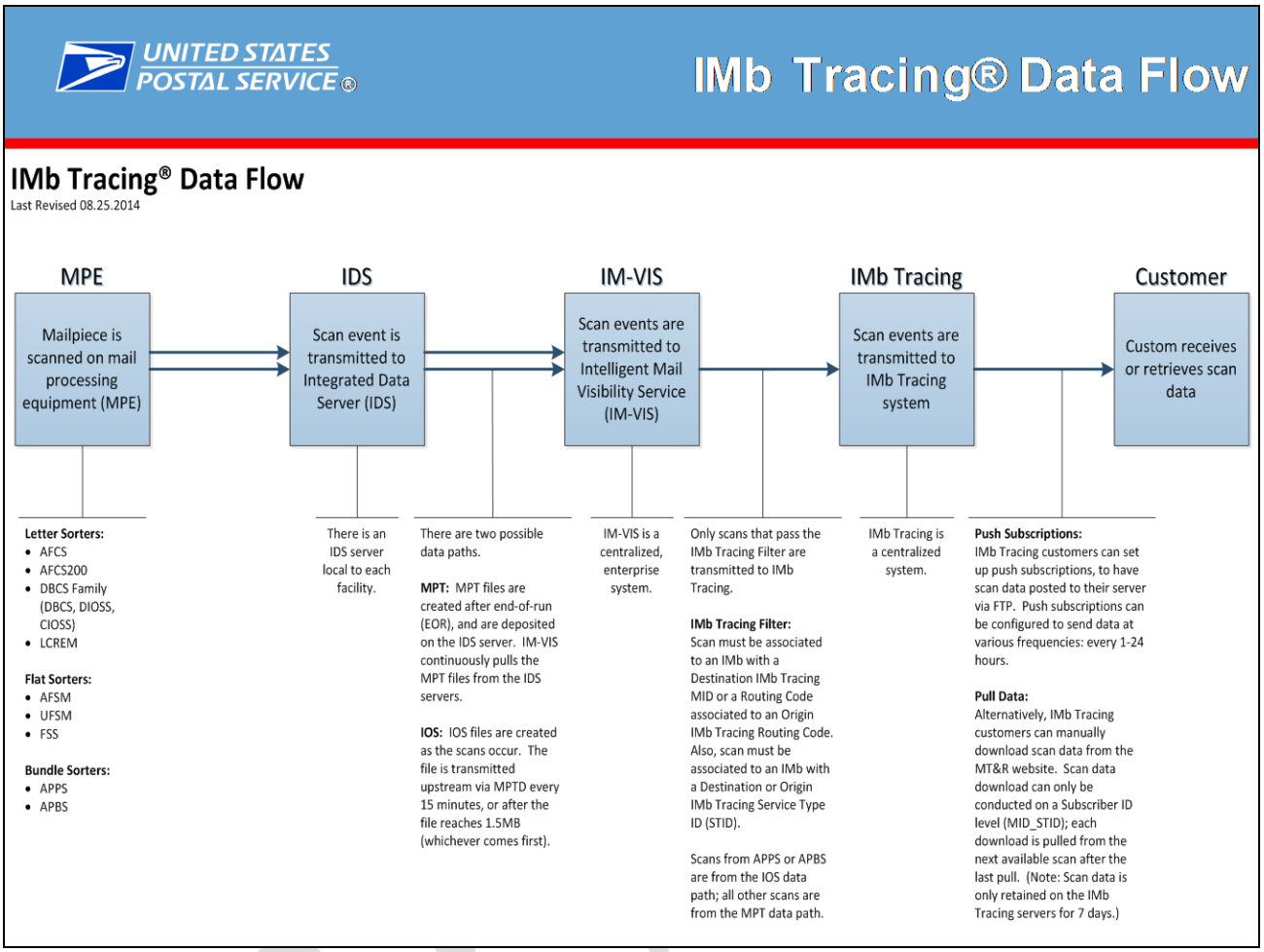


After discussion it was determined that the latency associated with finalization of postage statements, the subsequent payment reconciliation process, and the complex logic / business rules related to data delegation ruled out modification /adaptation of the EPF mechanism as a viable near-term solution.

<u>Analysis of the IMb Tracing Option</u>

Next the group considered potential modification to the existing IMb Tracing application. Amy Cradic, of USPS Mailing Information Systems (MIS), presented the group with an overview of the IMb Tracing data flow.



IMb Tracing provisions all piece-level scans based on the MID embedded within the IMb on the mail piece. Hereto the efficiency of IMb Tracing is as a result of the simplicity of utilizing the MID on the mail piece as the basis for provisioning the data. Because handling units and containers may bear IMtb and IMcb, respectively, containing MIDs from mail owners, mail preparers, or presort bureaus data delegation rules can be quite complicated. Adding a layer of intelligence to address data delegation to IMb Tracing would be unduly costly and time-consuming considering USPS plans to absorb IMb Tracing functionality in the near future with the new Informed Visibility (IV) system that is currently under development.

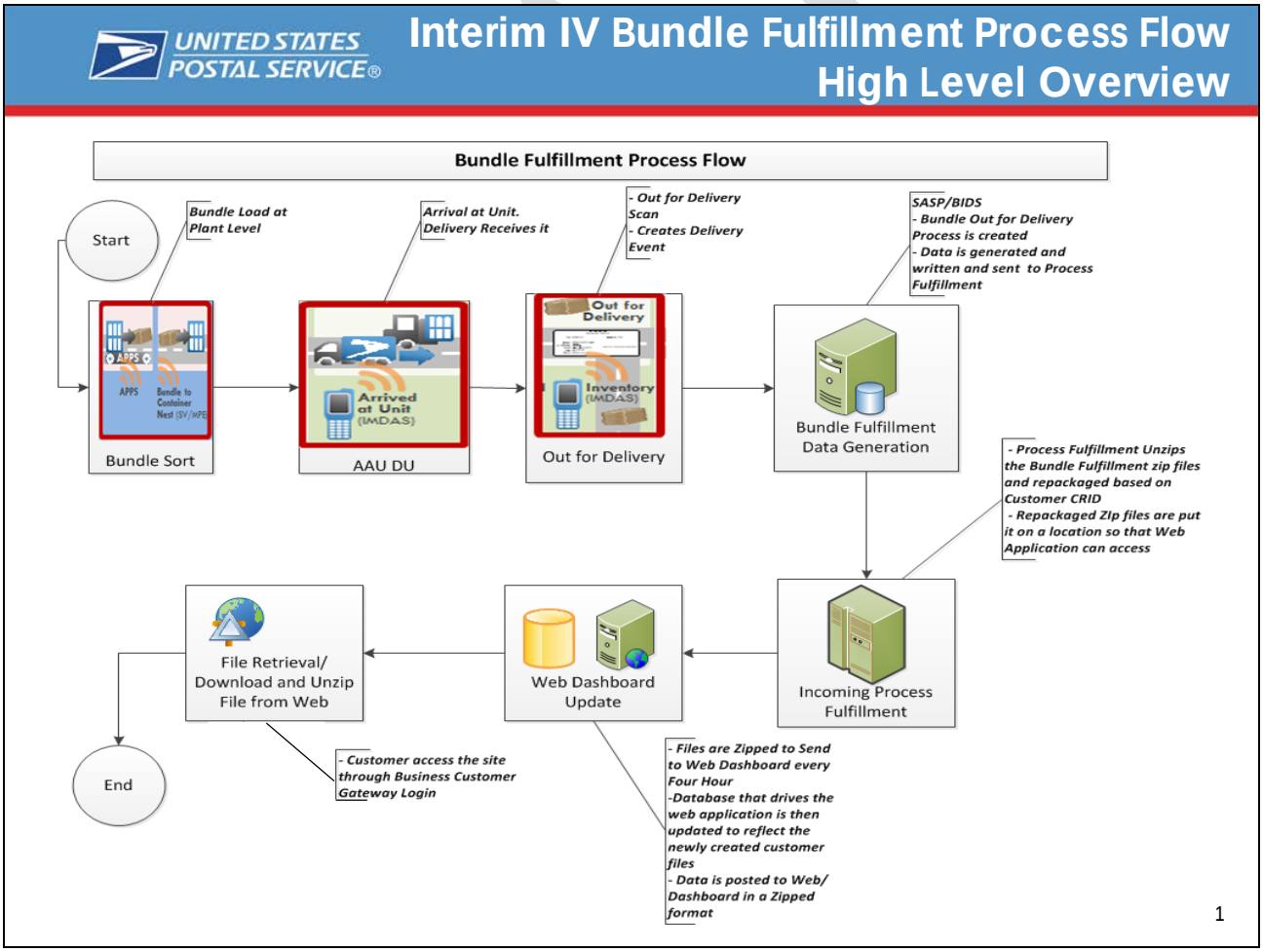
<u>Analysis of Elimination of the Reconciliation Process / Qualification Requirement from PostalOne!</u>

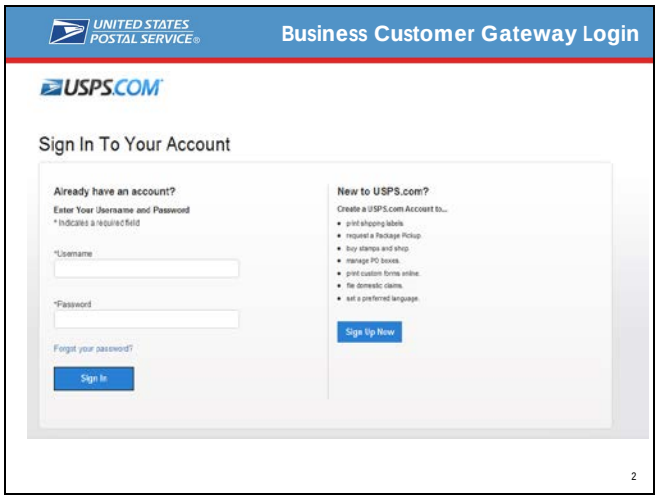
Some workgroup participants challenged the current reconciliation process used by PostalOne! to determine if a mailing qualifies for Full-Service prior to making the associated mailing data available.

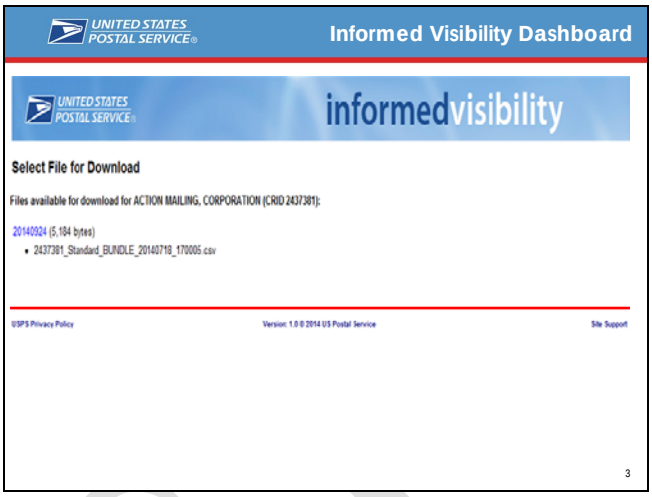
USPS leadership maintained that handling unit and container visibility are benefits that are reserved for participants in the USPS Full-Service program. Provisioning this data without PostalOne! reconciliation (qualification) would undermine the USPS's strategic direction and it would not be fair to share this data with all mailers considering that Full-Service mailers have in many cases made modifications to their systems and incurred financial costs in converting to Full-Service.

Analysis of the Informed Visibility (IV) Interim Solution Option

The final alternative that was discussed was the Informed Visibility (IV) pre-deployment customer dashboard concept. This option was briefly discussed by Steve Dearing, USPS Manager of Mailing Information Systems, at NPF and consists of customizable, mailer-specific dashboards. Martha Forrest, of Mailing Information Systems (MIS), presented some preliminary details to the workgroup on October 14, 2014.







While the interim IV solution currently only supports provisioning of bundle scan data, container and tray data are expected to be added in early 2015. The longer-term IV system will provide mailers with dashboards that can be configured to present at-a-glance metrics about mailings and promises to provide flexible data provisioning at various levels (including raw data) at user-defined frequencies. USPS plans to pilot-test the interim IV solution with select mailers in early 2015.

<u>Conclusion</u>

After much discussion and consultation between USPS and industry, the workgroup concluded with the following recommendations:

- Explore the interim IV (pre-deployment) solution as it becomes available for testing and evaluation. Mailers interested in participating in the pilot should contact Steve Dearing, Himesh Patel, or Martha Forrest for more information.
- USPS will continue to pursue Informed Visibility (IV) as the long-term solution. IV is anticipated to provide mail owners and preparers with unparalleled access to mail visibility data.
- This workgroup will be sunset; however, IV and other mail visibility topics including data provisioning and latency issues will continue to be discussed in MTAC User Group 4 (UG4).

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2 Issue Statement

The mailing industry has become more reliant upon timely availability of Informed Visibility data. When combined with Intelligent Mail barcode tracing data, it provides a more effective way to manage mailing campaigns which in turn, improves the overall value of mail. Unfortunately, the current distribution path for Informed Visibility data has inherent delays of 24 to 96 hours, thus rendering the information not (or at least less) "actionable".

3 Impact on Other Issues/Procedures

Seamless Acceptance and Service Performance (SASP), PostalOne!

4 Desired Results

Industry representatives (Mail Owners and Mailing Service Providers) and the USPS will work together to discover alternative data distribution methodologies to reduce the current data distribution time delays by at least 50%. In addition, the group will present recommendations regarding best practices for data distribution and time lines for development, testing and implementation of all recommended approaches.

5 Workgroup Output

Recommendations

After much discussion and consultation between USPS and industry, the workgroup concluded with the following recommendations:

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Appendix 1: MTAC WG164 Workgroup Roster

Name	Organization	Office Phone	Email	Comment
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Conrad, Ed	Complete Management Solutions	212-741-7641	edc@cmsnetwork.com	Member
Dayton, Jody	MidSouth Technologies (NPI Company)	918-352-8300	jody.dayton@midsouthtek.com	Member
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