



FROM THE DESK OF

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RRB Reports Performance Under Customer Service Plan

The Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the following principles of quality public service: openness, accessibility, accountability, feedback, and timeliness standards. An important part of the Customer Service Plan is its pledge to inform beneficiaries about how well the RRB meets those timeliness standards, which detail the number of calendar days within which the agency must decide to pay or deny an application for benefits.

The following questions and answers provide information about the RRB's performance in meeting its standards in the key areas of retirement applications, survivor applications, disability applications and payments, and railroad unemployment and sickness benefit applications and claims during fiscal year 2020 (October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020). Information on the agency's overall performance, as measured by the timeliness index developed by the agency, and the RRB's customer service timeliness goals for fiscal year 2020 are also provided. These goals may be revised annually based on such factors as projected workloads and available resources.

1. How does the RRB measure overall timeliness for customer service?

The RRB developed an index to measure the overall timeliness of its customer service in the following benefit areas: retirement applications, survivor applications, disability applications and payments, and railroad unemployment and sickness benefit applications and claims. This composite indicator, based on a weighted average, allows for a more concise and meaningful presentation of the RRB's customer service efforts in these benefit areas.

2. What was the overall timeliness of the RRB's customer service in fiscal year 2020?

During fiscal year 2020, the overall benefit timeliness index was 99 percent. This means that the RRB provided benefit services within the Customer Service Plan's standards 99 percent of the time. The timeliness index for retirement applications, survivor applications, and disability applications and payments, the processing of which includes considerable manual intervention, was 90.9 percent. The timeliness index for railroad unemployment and sickness benefit applications and claims, a highly automated process, was 99.7 percent.

3. What standards did the RRB use in fiscal year 2020 for processing applications for railroad retirement annuities, and how well did it meet those standards?

In fiscal year 2020, the RRB had two timeliness standards for processing railroad retirement annuities. For railroad retirement annuity applications filed in advance of an applicant's eligibility date, the RRB's standard was that it would make a decision to pay or deny the application within 35 days of the requested annuity beginning date. For applications filed after the eligibility date, the RRB's standard was that it would make a decision within 60 days of the filing date. The RRB's timeliness goals in fiscal year 2020 were 94 percent for both advance filing and non-advance filing applications.

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Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2020, the RRB made a decision within 35 days of the annuity beginning dates on 96.4 percent of applicants who filed in advance, with an average processing time for these cases of 13.4 days. Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2020, the RRB made a decision within 60 days of the filing dates on 97.5 percent of applicants who had not filed in advance, with an average processing time of 17 days.

4. What standards did the RRB use for processing applications for survivor benefits in fiscal year 2020, and how well did it meet those standards?

The timeliness standard in fiscal year 2020 within which the RRB would make a decision to pay, deny, or transfer the application to the Social Security Administration for a railroad retirement survivor annuity applicant not already receiving benefits as a spouse, was within 60 days of the applicant's annuity beginning date, or the date the application was filed, whichever was later. For an applicant that was already receiving a spouse annuity, the RRB's standard in fiscal year 2020 was within 30 days of the first notice of the employee's death. For an applicant who filed for a lump-sum death benefit, the RRB's standard in fiscal year 2020 was to make a decision to pay or deny the application within 60 days of the date the application was filed. The timeliness goal for fiscal year 2020 was 94 percent for processing both initial survivor applications and spouse-to-survivor conversions. For processing applications for lump-sum death benefits, the goal was 97 percent.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2020, the RRB made a decision within 60 days of the later of the annuity beginning date or the date the application was filed in 95 percent of the applications for an initial survivor annuity. In cases where the survivor was already receiving a spouse annuity, a decision was made within 30 days of the first notice of the employee's death in 95.2 percent of the cases. In addition, a decision was made within 60 days of the date the application was filed in 97.3 percent of the applications for a lump-sum death benefit. The combined average processing time for all initial survivor applications and spouse-to-survivor conversions was 15.95 days. The average processing time for lump-sum death benefit applications was 11.1 days.

5. What standards did the RRB use for processing applications for disability annuities in fiscal year 2020, and how well did it meet those standards?

For applications filed for a disability annuity in fiscal year 2020, the RRB's standard was to make a decision to pay or deny a benefit within 100 days of the date the application was filed. If it was determined that the applicant was entitled to disability benefits, the applicant would receive his or her first payment within 25 days of the date of the RRB's decision, or the earliest payment date, whichever was later. The agency's timeliness goals were 70 percent and 94 percent, respectively, for disability decisions and disability payments.

During fiscal year 2020, the RRB made a decision on 13.5 percent of those filing for a disability annuity within 100 days of the date the application was filed. The average processing time was 330.8 days. Of those whose applications for a disability annuity were approved, 88.5 percent received their first payment within the Customer Service Plan's time standard. The average processing time was 15.3 days.

6. What were the standards in fiscal year 2020 for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits, and how well did the RRB meet these standards?

For fiscal year 2020, the RRB's standard for processing an application for unemployment or sickness benefits was that the RRB would release a claim form or a denial letter within 10 days of receiving an application. If an applicant filed a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness benefits, the RRB's standard was to certify a payment or release a denial letter within 10 days of the date the RRB received the claim form. The

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agency's goals for processing unemployment and sickness applications in fiscal year 2020 were, respectively, 99.5 and 99.3 percent. The payment or decision goal for subsequent claims was 98.5 percent.

During fiscal year 2020, 99.3 percent of unemployment benefit applications and 97.4 percent of sickness benefit applications processed met the RRB's standard. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness benefit applications were 1.2 and 3.1 days, respectively. In addition, in fiscal year 2020, 99.9 percent of subsequent claims processed for unemployment and sickness benefits met the RRB's standard. The average processing time for claims was 4.5 days.

7. How well did the RRB meet its standards in fiscal year 2020 compared to fiscal year 2019?

Fiscal year 2020 performance met or exceeded fiscal year 2019 performance in the areas of retirement benefits, whether filed in advance or not, disability decisions and payments, lump-sum death benefits, and unemployment and sickness benefit claims.

Average processing times in fiscal year 2020 equaled or improved fiscal year 2019 processing times in the areas of railroad retirement applications, whether filed in advance or not, disability decisions and payments, and sickness applications. For fiscal year 2020, the agency met or exceeded all of the customer service performance goals it had set for the year, except in the areas of unemployment and sickness applications and disability decisions and payments.

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