
LETTER
OF THE
POSTMASTER GENERAL,
COMMUNICATING.

In answer to a resolution of the Senate of the 23d of December
last, information in relation to the

FAILURE OF THE MAILS
BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK CITIES.

Gideon & Pearson, printers, 511 9th street, Washington.

LETTER
OF
THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,
COMMUNICATING,

IN ANSWER TO A RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE OF THE 22D OF DECEMBER LAST,
INFORMATION IN RELATION TO THE FAILURE OF THE MAILS BETWEEN
WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK CITIES.

FEBRUARY 3, 1864.—Referred to the Committee on Post Offices and Post
Roads, and ordered to be printed.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
February 3, 1864.

SIR: Upon receipt of the resolution of the Senate passed on the 22d December, requesting the Postmaster General to communicate "the reason of the frequent failure of the mails between New York and Washington, and also what legislation is necessary in order to remedy the existing evil, and especially if a new railroad be not required for the necessities of the postal service," communications were addressed to the presidents of the several roads forming the line between New York and Washington, and also to the postmasters at New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, requesting them to furnish the department with such information in regard to the causes of the failures and irregularities of the mails on that line as would enable it to answer fully the resolu-

tion of the Senate. The answers to these letters are communicated herewith in full; but, as they are of considerable length, it is deemed proper to embody the substance of them in this letter as briefly as the importance of the subject will allow.

The principal reason for the failures of the mails between this city and New York is, that the companies composing the line do not possess sufficient equipment in cars, engines, &c., to enable them to meet the increased demand upon their resources caused by the increase of travel and transportation of all kinds created by the war. There is but a single track between New York and Washington, and, in consequence of that, the number of trains on the track had to be reduced in order to lessen the chances of collision, and this made it necessary to increase the size of the trains, and consequently the speed had to be lessened, as the power of the engines was not sufficient to perform the task imposed on them. The derangement caused by the delay of one train causes delay in all others, as must unavoidably be the case on a single-track road. The usual speed of through mail trains should be thirty miles an hour, but to attain that speed, and preserve it with regularity, the train should not consist of more than six cars, including the mail and baggage, attached to one locomotive. This appears to be the average size of the through trains when they leave New York, but at Philadelphia they are sometimes increased to an extent entirely disproportionate to the capacity of the engine, and consequently fail to reach Washington on time. The schedule between Washington and New York was changed by the railroad companies on the 23d November last, (without, as usual, any consultation with the department,) by which it was contemplated to make the trip each way in ten hours; but it will be seen by the statements furnished by the postmasters at each end of the line that the

mails have in few instances reached either terminus of the route in the prescribed time, and, instead of being more regular, have been subjected to greater delays than ever.

At the time when a new schedule was made an arrangement was effected for a better connexion at Philadelphia, by which mails and passengers were to be conveyed from New York to Washington without change of cars, and by which it was believed that the companies would be enabled to make the through trip in the time prescribed in their schedule; but owing to the large increase in the number of passengers, civil and military, and the delays incident to the taking up and letting down of passengers and baggage at important local points, they were unable to accomplish this.

Other explanations of the delays and failures on this line may doubtless be found in the fact that the line is made up of five separate and independent corporations, viz: the New Jersey railroad, the Camden and Amboy branch, the Philadelphia and Trenton, the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore, and Baltimore and Ohio branch roads. The division of a great route like this between the principal city and the capital of the nation into so many separate parts, controlled by separate management, at least, if not by separate interests, is of itself sufficient to account for much of the irregularity and inefficiency of the service. Another cause of the irregularities in the mail service on this route, as on other railroads, is, that the companies and the subordinates in their service seem to regard the transportation of the mails as a matter of secondary importance, altogether inferior to the interests of passengers and their baggage, and sometimes even of ordinary freight. This seems to be proved by the fact that changes in the running of trains carrying the mail are made without the sanction, and often without the

knowledge, of the department, which is never furnished with a copy of a new time table, except upon special application. The want of proper regard for the mails is also shown in the fact that when circumstances require a choice to be made between the mails and the passengers, when there is danger of one or the other losing connexion, the practical decision is always against the mails.

The statements here made, namely, the want, principally, of a double track over the entire route, and of a sufficient number of cars, and other equipments and material, to meet the demands of the increased business of the roads, with the overloading of the express trains, seem to account satisfactorily for the delays complained of, considered in connexion with other accidental causes of detention common to all railroad routes. The question is now in reference to the remedies for these irregularities. The accompanying statement, signed by the executive officers of the several roads, shows what has been done, and what is in progress, to enable them to overcome the difficulties in the way of a prompt and efficient performance of the postal and other business of the routes. A double track has been completed from Jersey City to a point three miles short of the southern terminus of the New Jersey railroad, near New Brunswick, and is now in course of construction, and will soon be completed the whole length of that road. The next road is the Camden and Amboy branch, extending to Trenton. Four miles of this road has a double track; it then makes a curve by which it approaches the Delaware and Raritan canal, on the banks of which it runs to Trenton. An entirely new road has been made, some twenty miles in length, for the purpose of straightening this curve, and it is now used by the down trains. This new line is mostly graded and ballasted for a double track, and will soon be completed; but, as the new and the old lines are both used,

it is now equivalent to a double track from the Hudson to the Delaware. The next road is the Philadelphia and Trenton railroad, on which part of a second track is laid; and it would have been entirely completed but for the difficulty in getting the requisite labor and materials. At Philadelphia arrangements were made for the construction of a junction road through the suburbs of the city, which is partly completed, and used by the through lines; and until it is entirely completed the most important trains will be transported around the city by a temporary arrangement made with the Reading and other connecting roads. The Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore road has a double track completed and in use from Philadelphia to Newport, 31 miles; and in the coming season the bridge across the Susquehanna will be completed, the most difficult pier being already built, and large progress made in other parts. The double track will be completed to this point first, as it is the portion on which the trains most frequently pass each other. The rest of the road will be furnished with a double track as early as it can be accomplished. The last portion of the route is the Washington branch road. The Baltimore and Ohio company are now completing, for immediate use, the second track from Baltimore to the Annapolis junction; and the remainder of the work is being pressed with all the rapidity possible, the grading and most of the masonry being completed throughout.

It thus appears that the chief difficulty in the way of an expeditious and certain mail service between the two cities—the want of a double track—will soon be removed. This can be accomplished by the united efforts of the existing roads in a much shorter space of time than it would require to construct a new line; and, if such a concert and harmony of action can be brought about as will bring the several roads practically under one management, it

is believed that all the demands of the public for postal and other accommodations can be as effectually secured as they could be if an entirely new line was put in operation between the two cities. Since the passage of the resolution of the Senate the companies have endeavored to effect this by the appointment of a general agent for the through line, whose duties will be exclusively to superintend the running and management of the through trains, and the conduct of conductors and others employed on them, with proper authority to correct mismanagement and irregularities. With a suitable person in this responsible position many of the evils now existing will, it is hoped, be removed, and all the advantages secured which would result from a consolidation of the several independent lines composing the route.

The scarcity of labor and materials which has prevented the completion of the double track, and constituted the chief obstacle to improved service on the existing roads, is, of itself, sufficient to prevent me from recommending the undertaking to make a new road at present. The demand for labor and materials has not only rendered it impossible to obtain adequate supplies of labor and materials for existing roads, but has resulted in presenting articles and labor of very inferior quality. The attempt to construct the proposed new road would, of course, aggravate these difficulties. It must operate to postpone the finishing of the double track, and therefore hinder, in a very great degree, the object so much desired by the department and the public, of a more rapid and regular communication between the capital and the great commercial emporium of the nation. Great inconvenience has been, undoubtedly, felt from the want of better railroad communications on this route. But instead of removing this inconvenience by attempting now to build a new road, the efforts of the managers of the existing roads

to improve the service would be greatly hindered, nor are the inconveniences to which we have been subjected such, as that it can be said to be necessary to have an additional road, and it would not be judicious, in the present circumstances of the country, to withdraw from its resources so many men; so much mechanical power, and so much capital, as would be required for the purpose of building a new road, unless a greater necessity existed for such a diversion of labor and capital than is created by the inconvenience of which we have to complain in the existing road.

It is not considered that any legislation is necessary to secure more satisfactory mail service on this line, or that any such action could effect the object, unless it should be such as would give the department power to control, to some extent, the action of the railroad companies carrying the mail, in the matter of changes of the time of running the mail trains. This is now done by nearly all the companies without previous consultation with the department, and, in some cases, without even subsequently advising it of the changes that have been made, breaking connexions and throwing the mails into confusion until the changes have become known to the postmasters concerned. If the time of departures and arrivals of mail trains could be controlled by the department, and not be subject to summary change without reason, it is believed the mail service on all railroads would be more satisfactory, and would promote the general business of the companies. It would, perhaps, also tend to secure more certainty and expedition if the department had the power to prescribe the rate of speed, and the number of cars to be attached to express through mail trains, and to impose fines for violation of the regulations that might be made upon those points. It is a matter of regret that the department does not possess as complete control over rail-

road service as it does over that of other routes. Most of the companies refuse to execute contracts, and regard the mails as of little importance compared with other business; fix their time-tables, and change them at their own pleasure, without any reference to mail connexions; and as there is no competition in such service, the department is without the power to remedy irregularities that would be promptly checked on other routes.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

M. BLAIR,

Postmaster General.

HON. HANNIBAL HAMLIN,

Vice-President of the United States,

and President of the Senate.