

**Information Resource Sharing:
A Position Paper on the Library Book Rate**

Presented to the Department of Canadian Heritage

**By the Canadian Library Association and
l' Association pour la science et les techniques de la documentation**

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The Library Book Rate:

A Position Paper

With the current agreement between Canada Post and the Department of Canadian Heritage on the Library Book Rate expiring in March 2005, the Department has asked the library community and, in particular, the Canadian Library Association and l' Association des sciences et techniques de la documentation to formulate a position paper that could guide the Department in the negotiations that are now getting under way with a view to extending the agreement.

This position paper, which builds on the 2002 Study of the Library Book Rate that was commissioned by the Department, is structured into three parts:

- First, it sets out the issues of concern to the library community with regard to the program; these issues are of two types: immediate issues that must be addressed during negotiations and longer-term issues that require fresh Government policy consideration and that probably could not get resolved before the end of the current fiscal year.
- Second, it suggests solutions to both types of issues.
- And third, by way of conclusion, it re-affirms those priorities that the library community wishes to see maintained throughout the negotiations and any broader policy review that we believe must be undertaken.

1. Issues

1.1 Immediate and Short-Term

1.1.1 The possibility of a rate increase

According to Canada Post, the revenue foregone by the Corporation, based on regular parcel rates, for 2003 is estimated at \$14.6 million. (The current Library Book Rate average revenue per piece is \$0.96 for the two-way service, which generated revenues of \$1.9 million, while the regular cost for articles of comparable size and weight would be \$4.08 for the one-way service.) In Canada Post's view, it is unfair that this revenue shortfall should continue to be subsidized by the other users of the postal service.

At the same time there has been an increase in the number of volumes mailed, as more libraries are made aware of the program and as more library patrons request interlibrary loans as a result of direct access to automated library catalogues.

As a result of the general downloading of government services to the local level, municipal budgets, and consequently library budgets, have come under great strain. Also contributing to strained budgets is the fact that libraries are now expected to provide a much broader range of services to the public. Canadians have come to rely on their public libraries to carry out new functional roles within their community, such as becoming a business development centre, a career development and job search centre, a conference centre, an Internet access centre, particularly for government information and programs, and a computer training centre (in connection, for example, with Industry Canada's Community Access Program).

1.1.2 Better informed staff

The library community has received numerous complaints that Canada Post personnel are not properly informed about the Library Book Rate. There is a lack of consistency in their implementation of the program. Specific documentary material on the program is buried deep in the Canada Post website (The Canada Postal Guide and Reference Tools; Section E of the Postal Guide Manual, "Other Products and Services"; Chapter 2, Library Books).

For its part, the Corporation claims that there have been improvements in Canada Post's processes and procedures for dealing with Library Book Rates. And indeed some libraries report that there is good cooperation with local Canada Post personnel. However, there is still a need for increased training for the Corporation's retail counter and business sales centre staff, and improved communication with the libraries themselves.

1.2 Medium and Long-term

1.2.1 Materials in other formats

For decades, the library community has argued that the intent of the Library Book Rate must be maintained by adapting to changing technological conditions and new content containers. Canadians' right of equal access to information should be extended to include the right to borrow all sorts of non-book works. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- 'talking books' for print-impaired people;
- audio books that can be used by young children to supplement the development of reading skills and by commuters who want to 'read' while they drive;
- research material on microfilm and disc formats, primarily for its ease of use and portability;
- photocopies; and
- videos on the how-to and lifelong learning areas

1.2.2 Financial accountability

There are no dedicated funds supporting the Library Book Rate. Consequently, the cost of the program is not properly accounted for in the financial statements of either the Department responsible for overseeing the program and providing policy guidance or the Crown Corporation responsible for managing the eligibility criteria and approval process for libraries. Just as, from an accounting perspective, there should not be hidden cross-subsidization between the activities of a same corporation, nor should there be hidden cross-subsidization between the agencies of a same government.

1.2.3 Managerial responsibility

Responsibility for Library Book Rate policy rests with the Periodical Publishing Policy and Programs directorate in the Publishing Policy and Programs Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Yet nowhere is there organizational recognition of this responsibility. The program is managed as an addendum to the Publications Assistance Program negotiated with Canada Post, although the interests of publishers are very different than the interests of libraries. There is no office in the Department dedicated to championing the Book Rate issue or, for that matter, other library issues. Within the present organizational framework, the Book Rate program is dependent in a completely non-transparent manner on the Publications Assistance Program.

1.2.4 Governance

As the Government continues to elaborate policies and programs to build a knowledge-based economy, it will have to recognize the role that libraries are already playing, and the further role that they could play, in attaining the public policy goals of lifelong learning, vibrant communities, inclusion, literacy and connectivity. At the moment there is no office in Government that can serve to coordinate library-related activities in the Departments of Canadian Heritage, Industry, Skills Development, or Social Development and that can serve to interact with the many stakeholders of the library community.

2. Solutions

2.1 Immediate and Short-Term

2.1.1 Rate Increase

To prepare for the negotiations, Canada Post is conducting a survey of library book mailings in September to see how much the program costs the Corporation.

Whatever it amounts to, the subsidy must stand on its own. It can no longer be treated as operational costs incidental to the Publications Assistance Program. But nor can the subsidy be passed on directly to the Crown Corporation, which must abide by trade rules in competing with private sector delivery services.

The solution appears to be that, just as the publications part of the subsidy now goes to the publishers' accounts (and not to the Corporation), so would the library material part of the subsidy have to go to the libraries' accounts.

While the one month survey may provide some ball-park figure for the amount of the subsidy, the Department should request that a tracking mechanism that it had a hand in designing be put in place for a longer period of time. This would become the basis for a reasonable calculation of the explicit subsidy amount.

Until there is some agreement on cost and a commitment to an explicit subsidy, any increase to the Library Book Rate would be arbitrary and would not solve either side's problems. Individual librarians have testified recently on the negative impact that any increase in the rate would have on their operations.

The library community recommends therefore that the Department explore options for creating an explicit subsidy to support the Book rate and that it be negotiated separately. This would become the basis for extending the present Memorandum of Agreement with Canada Post for one more year without any changes to the terms.

2.1.2 Improved training and information material for libraries and CP staff.

Among the suggestions put forward by librarians for addressing this issue are the following:

- Canada Post could mount a template on their website that libraries could download and use to print their labels;
- regular advance updates on rate changes;
- a hard-copy version of the Library Books material on the Canada Post web-site to be distributed to all libraries;
- better communication to Postal outlets about the program;
- a Library Book Rate e-mail mailing list.

2.2 Medium and Long-Term

2.2.1 Materials in other formats

The program should be made insensitive to the type or format of material. It is time the Library Book Rate became the Library Mail Rate. Without the inclusion of all materials in its list of eligible materials, the program is not meeting its policy objective of providing equal access to information for all Canadians.

Canada Post has indicated that it is prepared to support a library mail rate that could include a broader range of library materials.

2.2.2. 2.2.3 and 2.2.4

The three issues of financial accountability, managerial responsibility and governance should be dealt with together, at least in the initial stages.

Senior officials in the Department of Canadian Heritage should strike an ad-hoc inter-departmental committee with appropriate officials from the following Departments: Canadian Heritage, Industry, Skills Development, Social Development, and Treasury Board. The Committee would be tasked with (a) identifying an office responsible for coordinating (and possibly enacting certain) policies pertaining to libraries at the federal government level; (b) establishing a budget for that office, from existing allocations but topped up to cover the costs now borne by Canada Post; and (c) and designing, in consultation with CLA and ASTED, channels of communication with stakeholders.

3. Priorities

Throughout the current round of negotiations and any interdepartmental discussions that may take place to tackle the fundamental issues underlying the Library Book Rate, it is important for government officials to keep in mind that the program supports and encourages information resource sharing in Canada. At relatively little cost, it acts as a bridge between all Canadians, including the disabled, the shut-ins, and residents in remote locations. It is also a way of creating a more literate and knowing population, by helping out, for example, students enrolled in distance education programs or Canadians pursuing lifelong learning goals.

The numerous testimonies received from librarians on the Library Book Rate indicate that if the program were discontinued or libraries were obliged to bear a significantly greater share of the cost of the program, then the following results would ensue :

- It would severely discriminate against small, rural and northern libraries, thereby reducing equal access to library and information services to people living in these areas;
- It would ‘disable’ the level of service libraries provide, possibly forcing the program onto a cost recovery basis, with patrons and distance learners having to bear the costs (such user fees may discourage some patrons from making mail-based loans);
- It would increase dependence on the collections of large public libraries since most rural systems would shift their interlibrary loans to the large systems;
- Smaller libraries would have to drop out of providing lending services and would only borrow materials;
- It would deprive the rest of the country from being able to access the unique information resources often preserved in local libraries;
- It would deny access to the homebound;
- Since there are no bookstores in small town Canada, it would reduce access to reading materials across small town and rural Canada;
- It would result, in brief, in a two-tier library service that would invalidate the concept of a common literary heritage that all Canadians have equal access to.

By way of conclusion, CLA and ASTED thank the Department of Canadian Heritage for the opportunity to provide input into your negotiations with Canada Post. We would be pleased to meet with you directly to discuss any of the points raised in this Paper.