

Foreword

This OTA Technical Memorandum on postal automation responds to an October 5, 1983, letter of request from Congressman William D. Ford, Chairman of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Congressman Robert Garcia, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services, and Congressman Mickey Leland, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Postal Personnel and Modernization.

The Committee asked OTA to review the United States Postal Service (USPS) decision to utilize single-line optical character readers (OCRs) instead of multi-line OCRs, and to conduct a comparative technical and economic analysis of the two technologies in the context of the overall postal automation program. OTA did not assess the impacts of postal automation in other areas such as labor force requirements, mail processing organization, and privacy and security of the mail.

The Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Civil Service, Post Office, and General Services, has also expressed an interest in this subject.

In preparing this memorandum, OTA has drawn on information and analyses from a variety of sources, including the October 1982 OTA report on Implications of Electronic Mail and Message Systems for the U.S. Postal Service. USPS has provided extensive materials on prior USPS automation studies as well as current operational data. The General Accounting Office has provided useful perspectives and analyses based on prior work and on a directly related study conducted in parallel with OTA's. On March 5, 1984, OTA held a postal automation workshop attended by mailers, manufacturers, and researchers who, along with USPS and GAO, participated in a vigorous discussion of key issues. Finally, OTA has benefited greatly from the excellent work of two OTA contractors -- Friendship Engineering Company for technical analysis and Decision Science Consortium, Inc. for decision and economic analysis.

OTA appreciates the participation of those who helped bring this study to fruition. The memorandum is, however, solely the responsibility of OTA, not of those who so ably advised and assisted in its preparation. Also, the purpose of this memorandum is to provide analysis and evaluation of options available to Congress and USPS, not to make recommendations as to which option(s) should be implemented.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John H. Gibbons". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".