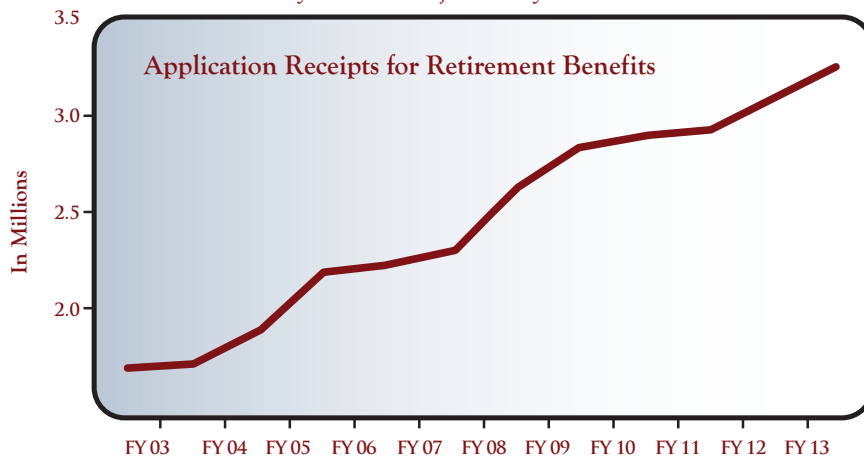# STRATEGIC GOAL 3

IMPROVE OUR RETIREE AND OTHER CORE SERVICES

Long-Term Outcomes:

- Achieve an online filing rate of 50 percent for retirement applications by 2012;

- Improve the clarity of our correspondence;

- Improve telephone service on our National 800 Number and in our field offices; and

- Further automate our Social Security card application process.

Issues:

The Number of Retirement Applications is Projected to Increase Dramatically as a Result of the Baby Boom Retirement Wave

Application Receipts for Retirement Benefits

In Millions — FY 03, FY 04, FY 05, FY 06, FY 07, FY 08, FY 09, FY 10, FY 11, FY 12, FY 13

Over the last few years, as staffing levels decreased and our workload volumes increased, our service to the public has suffered It has taken us longer to issue decisions and process applications. The public has faced longer lines in our field offices and increased telephone busy rates. With millions of baby boomers becoming eligible for Social Security benefits, we must transform the way we deliver service by developing a wide-range of online and automated services.

As individuals accept and use the Internet to conduct more complex and sensitive transactions, quality online service options are essential to providing world-class service. The public expects and increasingly demands the convenience of online services. We intend to meet that expectation because wider acceptance of online services will help us handle our dramatically increasing workloads. To achieve this goal of complementing our traditional services, we will focus on the following objectives:

Objective 1: Dramatically increase baby boomers' use of our online retirement services

Nearly 80 million baby boomers will file for retirement benefits over the next 20 years — an average of 10,000 per day. To address this workload growth, we will introduce a new Internet application, *Ready Retirement*, which will simplify the filing process and shorten the time it takes to file online from 45 to 15 minutes, while also eliminating the need for most individuals to visit their local field office. *Ready Retirement* will simplify or eliminate many questions on the current application and include prompts, links, streaming videos, and other techniques to give the user a friendlier, faster, and easier experience. *Ready Retirement* is a transformational initiative that will establish the foundation for all future Internet applications including Disability, Survivors, and Supplemental Security Income applications.   This package of Internet applications will be known as *iClaim*.

Ultimately, *Ready Retirement* will streamline the processing of our less complex applications. For some applications, if the information contained in our records matches the information provided in the application, we will be able to minimize the amount of manual review necessary to process the application to completion. To promote use of *Ready Retirement* and other future online applications, we will:

- **Expand the use of automated data exchanges:** Increasing electronic data exchanges will eliminate the need for individuals who file online to visit their local field office to submit evidentiary documents, such as birth certificates,   marriage   certificates, death certificates, and W-2 forms. Eliminating the need to submit paper copies of required documentation will make filing an online application a fully electronic process for the user.

- **Simplify policies and procedures:** To maximize the benefits from our electronic service initiatives, we must update, simplify, and streamline policies and procedures. We will

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A New Generation Embraces Applying for Retirement Online

"Filing for Social Security benefits online is easy and convenient. I urge my fellow baby boomers to give Social Security's online services a try. Save a trip and do business with Social Security from the comfort of your home or office."

~ Kathy Casey-Kirschling,
America's First Baby Boomer

Kathy Casey-Kirschling was born one second after midnight on January 1, 1946 and is thus America's first baby boomer.   Kathy is leading what is referred to as America's "silver tsunami." Over the next two decades, nearly 80 million Americans will become eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, an average of 10,000 per day. Late in 2007, Kathy filed for her Social Security retirement benefits online at **www.socialsecurity.gov** and we issued her first benefit payment by direct deposit in February 2008.

For most of this decade, less than 10 percent of the public chose to apply for retirement online. Although this percentage is rising, it must increase dramatically or we will be overwhelmed by the millions of baby boomers following Kathy into retirement.

ask only those essential questions for which we do not already have the answers in one of our systems or databases.

- **Provide online tools to plan for retirement:** We have greatly improved the information available to an individual who is trying to decide the optimum date for retirement. Using our enhanced *Retirement Estimator*, individuals can now obtain highly accurate and secure monthly retirement benefit estimates based upon their actual earnings record. We will include links to our *Retirement Estimator* in the *Ready Retirement* application, allowing the user to immediately obtain a benefit estimate prior to or during the application process. We will also continue to refine and enhance our *Retirement Estimator* based on feedback from users.

- **Expand marketing efforts:** We are marketing our current online applications at both the national and local levels. To achieve dramatic increases in the use of our electronic service options, we will intensify our efforts to develop creative outreach strategies.

Our ultimate goal is to provide individuals and their representatives with the ability to apply for all types of benefits and to update their records online.

"It's so easy ... Go Online"
www.socialsecurity.gov

Academy Award winning actress, Patty Duke, has generously agreed to be Social Security's spokeswoman to help encourage members of the baby boomer generation to file online for their retirement benefits. She will be featured in public service announcements later this year to promote our new, improved online *Ready Retirement* application.

Objective 2: Provide individuals with accurate, clear, up-to-date information

We issue 350 million notices annually, which makes notice correspondence our most common form of service delivery. Our notices communicate decisions, payment, and other important information, and inform individuals of their rights and responsibilities under our programs, including appeal rights. It is critical that our notices be clear, concise, and easily understood; too often they fall short of that standard. Notices that do not meet this standard result in individuals calling or visiting us for clarification — an unnecessary drain on their time, as well as on our resources. To address this service shortcoming, we are establishing a notice improvement office to assess and improve our notices.

We will also develop and test a new Internet-based feature to allow individuals to follow the progress of their application for benefits. Each year, we receive two million calls requesting case status. This feature will provide individuals the status information they want when they want it, which will free us to do other critical work.

Additionally, we will explore the possibility of providing individuals with secure online access to their personal Social Security information using a feature similar to an online banking statement. This feature could include such things as earnings history, Social Security benefit payment history, Medicare entitlement information, and direct deposit data. We will work closely with our privacy and authentication experts as we explore the feasibility of this online feature.

Objective 3: Improve our telephone service

Although we are focusing on improving our online services, our telephone service remains a primary service option for providing effective and efficient service to the public. Each year, we handle over 57 million calls on our National 800 Number and a comparable number in our field offices. We will improve our telephone service through a variety of technologies, such as speech recognition, and other initiatives designed to enhance the caller experience. We will replace our aging field office telephone equipment with what will be the Nation's largest Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) network. A single system that carries voice and data will save administrative costs and support other technological improvements, particularly in our field offices. For example, local offices will be able to re-route calls during disasters and other emergencies and provide the public with the option to access their office of choice from any location within the continental United States. We will also replace our National 800 Number infrastructure with a VoIP network.

These new networks will enable us to improve our telephone service and support our website visitors. We will implement technologies such as "click-to-talk" and web page collaboration to enable our website visitors to interact, as needed, with a telephone agent to help them conduct their business while online. These initiatives will provide the public with more choice and convenience.

Objective 4: Improve service for individuals who visit our field offices

Our field offices are our front door for the American public. To better serve the public, we will upgrade our field office reception areas and use new technologies to offer services not easily available in rural areas. We will pilot the use of kiosks in field office reception areas to provide a modern, fast, and user-friendly way for the public to register the reason for their visit, so we can direct them to the appropriate service representative while protecting their privacy. These kiosks will incorporate touch screen technology and are similar to, but easier to use, than airport kiosks many airline travelers use. We will also pilot the use of personal computers in field office reception areas to provide the public with connectivity to our online services. Reception area personal computers will provide an option for individuals who may not have access to a personal computer at home. For individuals using these computers, we will provide a wide-range of support services as they complete their transactions online. These services will range from instructional videos to employees offering technical assistance. We will also improve reception area seating, layout, privacy, signage, and other small, but important, enhancements to make visiting a field office a better experience.

Additionally, we will continue to expand the use of video conferencing to serve individuals residing in rural areas of the country. We are testing its use in a number of locations across the country, including Belcourt, ND, the home of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Their reservation is 112 miles from the nearest field office in Minot, ND; transportation is limited and often costly for individuals. Video conferencing offers this community a convenient and low-cost option for obtaining a full-range of our services, which are equivalent to face-to-face services. Where possible, we will use the same equipment for video hearings.

Objective 5: Process our Social Security Number workload more effectively and efficiently

Each year we issue almost 6 million original and 12 million replacement Social Security cards. We also verify more than one billion Social Security Numbers (SSN) through a variety of electronic exchanges with public and private organizations. The process of assigning and issuing SSNs is referred to as enumeration. One of our core functions, this workload is highly sensitive and often complex. As Congress continues to debate immigration reform, we expect additional work and complexity in this area. If we do not develop efficient ways to handle this workload electronically, we could easily overwhelm our field offices with dramatic increases in requests for replacement cards and SSN verifications. To handle our SSN workload, we will:

- **Strengthen the enumeration systems process:** We are in the midst of a major overhaul of the processes and systems that support our enumeration workload. We are developing a fully integrated electronic process that will serve as the foundation for changes in technology and additional requirements driven by legislation and policy changes. This effort will protect the SSN and improve service to the public

- **Build an online application for individuals to request the replacement of their Social Security cards:** We will assess the feasibility of building an online application for requesting the replacement of a Social Security card. As part of this effort, we will work closely with subject matter experts to ensure this online application provides the highest level of security, privacy, and identity assurance.

- **Expand use of SSN Verification Service:** The Social Security Number Verification Service (SSNVS) allows employers to determine, almost instantaneously, if the reported name and SSN of an employee matches our records. SSNVS, however, does not verify work eligibility. We will work with the business community to encourage additional employers and private sector companies to use SSNVS. Use of this service will reduce the role of SSN misuse in identity theft, minimize fraud, and ensure the accuracy of individuals' earnings records. We will also continue to add death and fraud indicators to SSNVS to minimize opportunities for fraudulent use of the SSN.

- **Support E-Verify:** Because our SSN Verification Service does not verify work eligibility, we also support E-Verify, a voluntary Department of Homeland Security (DHS) program that allows employers to electronically verify the employment eligibility status of newly hired employees. DHS sends us information submitted by employers to verify that the employee's SSN, name, and date of birth match information in our records. For individuals alleging U.S. citizenship, we confirm citizenship status, thereby confirming work authorization status. For non-citizens, if the identifying information matches our records, DHS determines the employee's current work authorization status and notifies the employer of the results. E-Verify confirms 93 percent of these initial verifications within seconds.

  We will continue to work with DHS to improve the current system to make it more efficient for employers and employees. We have also begun to lay the groundwork to increase E-Verify's capacity to handle substantially heavier volumes of verification transactions.

- **Expand Enumeration-at-Entry:** Enumeration-at-Entry allows certain non-citizens to apply for an SSN with the Department of State once they arrive at their U.S. port of entry. We will collaborate with the Department of State to expand this process to additional non-citizens. Not only will this initiative reduce traffic in our field offices, it will also reduce opportunities for fraud.

- **Implement use of Auto Cards:** Certain changes in alien and citizenship status, such as changes in work authorization, require a replacement Social Security card with a different legend or name. When DHS notifies us of these changes, we will automatically and securely update our records and generate a replacement card directly to the individual.

We will continue to assess our policies and technical controls to protect the valuable and important personal information the public entrusts to us to prevent SSN misuse and fraud.