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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548



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RELEASED

MAR 13 1973

The Honorable Mike Gravel  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Gravel:

By letter of May 10, 1972, you forwarded for our consideration correspondence from Mr. F. D. Remedios, Office Manager, Yutana Barge Lines, Inc., Nenana, Alaska. Mr. Remedios was greatly concerned with the difficulties Yutana was having in getting Government bills of lading (GBLs) accomplished and in receiving payment on vouchers presented to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska for services rendered. We discussed these problems with Mr. Remedios and Bureau officials in Washington, D.C., and reviewed the Bureau's procedures for processing and paying transportation vouchers.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GBLs

The problem of getting GBLs accomplished, particularly difficult and time consuming at the remote villages in Alaska served by Yutana, will be alleviated by the recent enactment of Public Law 92-550, the Transportation Payment Act of 1972, which was designed to facilitate the payment of transportation charges. This legislation exempts transportation payments from the provisions of section 529 of title 31, United States Code, which prohibit the Government from paying for services until they are rendered and which require the accomplishment of the consignee's certificate of delivery on the present GBL.

The enactment of Public Law 92-550 has permitted us to go forward with a revised GBL which, among other things, will substitute a carrier's certificate of delivery for the present consignee's certificate of delivery. The GBL will be placed in the hands of the carrier at origin and will remain in the carrier's system for certification of good-order delivery by the last line-haul carrier authorized to bill for the charges. As Yutana is usually both the originating and the delivering carrier, it would retain possession of the GBL throughout the movement and would be responsible for certifying as to good-order delivery of the cargo. Under the revised procedures, loss, damage, and/or shortage will be handled separately from the GBL.

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X PAYMENT OF VOUCHERS

Yutana's transportation payments are delayed because the Bureau's procedures require the vouchers to move through agency and area offices for certification and liquidation of obligations before reaching the Bureau's payment center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Bureau officials advised us that staffing problems at the agency and area offices in Alaska had added to the procedural delays by slowing the processing of the vouchers through these offices. Bureau officials said that they were aware of Yutana's problem and had requested the offices in Bethel and Juneau, Alaska, to develop improved or alternative procedures for handling vouchers for transportation charges.

Bureau officials said also that the payment center at Albuquerque prepared a machine listing of payments made to carriers and forwarded a copy each week to each area office. We suggested that a procedure be developed to have the carriers forward their transportation vouchers directly to Albuquerque for payment and have the payment center forward the machine listings to the area offices for use in liquidating obligations. Such a procedure would relieve the area offices of the time-consuming processing of the vouchers; would facilitate payment to the carriers; and would provide for the accounting needs of the area offices. The Bureau officials agreed to propose this procedure to the payment center and the area offices for consideration.

CURRENT STATUS

We telephoned Mr. Remedios and discussed our findings and suggestions for alleviating these problems. Mr. Remedios was very pleased that the Government was moving to revise the GBL and agreed that the new procedure for carriers' certification of delivery should resolve the problem of getting GBLs accomplished and should result in early payment for services rendered.

Mr. Remedios said that, in the interim, Bureau regional personnel had visited each remote village to explain the present procedures for handling GBLs, which resulted in his barge captains' having no problems getting GBLs accomplished during the 1972 shipping season. He said that payment had been received on substantially all his bills submitted for Bureau shipments for the 1971 shipping season.

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We realize that the civil disturbance at Bureau headquarters early in November seriously disrupted its operations and delayed action on the development of alternative procedures to expedite payment of transportation vouchers. We will follow up this matter and report to you on actions taken by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James P. Abate". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Comptroller General  
of the United States