

C&S R P O Car No. 254

The movement of United States Mail was once accomplished by cars called railway post offices. These were attached to passenger trains, generally right behind the locomotive. For over 100 years, RPOs crisscrossed the nation delivering and collecting the mail.

Colorado & Southern Railway ordered five postal cars in the 1920s from the Standard Steel Car Company and AC&F to replace older wooden cars. These included a section for baggage and express as well as a compartment for use of the postal service. Railway Express provided in its time the same service that UPS, FedEx and similar companies do today.

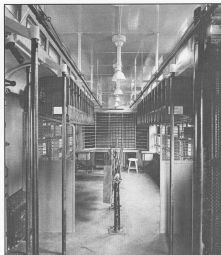
The new cars operated on the Billings & Denver and Denver & Amarillo RPO routes until these were discontinued in 1967. Car 254 was donated by the railroad to the Colorado Railroad Museum in the following year.



An RPO was an operating post office. The crew would dispatch and collect mail at train stations along the route. They also handled such varied shipments as gold bars, live bees, baby chicks and saddles. At major stations, mail was exchanged with the postmaster. The car also was equipped with a hook so that it could pick up bags from mail cranes at smaller stations without having to stop the train.

An RPO crew had to be a walking encyclopedia of postal regulations and schedules. Rigorous testing kept the clerks on their toes. To protect the mail, many were armed with government issued revolvers. They also had to keep 18¢ in change in order to sell stamps, because anyone could mail a letter by handing it to a clerk or by using the mail slot on the side of the car.

The cars were painted "Pullman green" with a black roof. The interiors were originally white, but later painted light green with white ceilings. Some metallic parts were painted black.



Above is a builder's photograph of the interior of the RPO car, with the racks for the mail bags in a folded position. Parcel Post and full bags of mail would be stored in the left and right side spaces in the foreground.



(Lou Schmitz photo)
Shortly before train time, the postmaster in a small town would place a special mail bag on a mail crane (above) next to the track along the station platform. The RPO clerk would raise the catcher arm (above right) as the train passed without stopping, and the arm would grab the bag. At the same time, the clerk would toss out a bag of arriving mail.



Colorado & Southern train 31 is approaching Utah Junction just north of Denver on June 11, 1949. The RPO is the second car.

(left) This schedule, known as a "scheme," was for the Billings & Denver RPO.

The 253 in the photo below was identical to car 254.



•BILLINGS & DENVER R. P. O.
C. S. & G. F. R. Co. (Casper Div.) Billings to Wendover (Route 31/123 p.l.)
48.56 miles and Colorado & Southern R.R. (Casper Div.) Wendover to Denver.
Route 114/113, p.l. 242.80 miles. Wendover to Cody, 42.41 miles. Route 114/112
Windsor to Billings, 713.87 miles. Billings to Casper, 255.33 miles. Casper to Denver,
161.41 miles. Billings to Francis, 71.83 miles. Denver to Cheyenne, 125.14 miles.
Cheyenne to Wendover, 125.33 miles. Denver to Fort Collins, 74.12 miles.
Star Route 61441, Elmer to Billings, 35 miles.
Star Route 61131, Fort Collins to Denver, 86.2 miles.

Time	Stop	Time	Stop	Time	Stop
7:15	Billings, Mont.	8:30	Elmer, Mont.	9:45	Billings, Mont.
8:15	Elmer, Mont.	9:30	Elmer, Mont.	10:45	Elmer, Mont.
9:15	Elmer, Mont.	10:30	Elmer, Mont.	11:45	Elmer, Mont.
10:15	Elmer, Mont.	11:30	Elmer, Mont.	12:45	Elmer, Mont.
11:15	Elmer, Mont.	12:30	Elmer, Mont.	1:45	Elmer, Mont.
12:15	Elmer, Mont.	1:30	Elmer, Mont.	2:45	Elmer, Mont.
13:15	Elmer, Mont.	2:30	Elmer, Mont.	3:45	Elmer, Mont.
14:15	Elmer, Mont.	3:30	Elmer, Mont.	4:45	Elmer, Mont.
15:15	Elmer, Mont.	4:30	Elmer, Mont.	5:45	Elmer, Mont.
16:15	Elmer, Mont.	5:30	Elmer, Mont.	6:45	Elmer, Mont.
17:15	Elmer, Mont.	6:30	Elmer, Mont.	7:45	Elmer, Mont.
18:15	Elmer, Mont.	7:30	Elmer, Mont.	8:45	Elmer, Mont.
19:15	Elmer, Mont.	8:30	Elmer, Mont.	9:45	Elmer, Mont.
20:15	Elmer, Mont.	9:30	Elmer, Mont.	10:45	Elmer, Mont.
21:15	Elmer, Mont.	10:30	Elmer, Mont.	11:45	Elmer, Mont.
22:15	Elmer, Mont.	11:30	Elmer, Mont.	12:45	Elmer, Mont.
23:15	Elmer, Mont.	12:30	Elmer, Mont.	1:45	Elmer, Mont.
24:15	Elmer, Mont.	1:30	Elmer, Mont.	2:45	Elmer, Mont.
25:15	Elmer, Mont.	2:30	Elmer, Mont.	3:45	Elmer, Mont.
26:15	Elmer, Mont.	3:30	Elmer, Mont.	4:45	Elmer, Mont.
27:15	Elmer, Mont.	4:30	Elmer, Mont.	5:45	Elmer, Mont.
28:15	Elmer, Mont.	5:30	Elmer, Mont.	6:45	Elmer, Mont.
29:15	Elmer, Mont.	6:30	Elmer, Mont.	7:45	Elmer, Mont.
30:15	Elmer, Mont.	7:30	Elmer, Mont.	8:45	Elmer, Mont.
31:15	Elmer, Mont.	8:30	Elmer, Mont.	9:45	Elmer, Mont.
32:15	Elmer, Mont.	9:30	Elmer, Mont.	10:45	Elmer, Mont.
33:15	Elmer, Mont.	10:30	Elmer, Mont.	11:45	Elmer, Mont.
34:15	Elmer, Mont.	11:30	Elmer, Mont.	12:45	Elmer, Mont.
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46:15	Elmer, Mont.	11:30	Elmer, Mont.	12:45	Elmer, Mont.
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48:15	Elmer, Mont.	1:30	Elmer, Mont.	2:45	Elmer, Mont.
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71:15	Elmer, Mont.	12:30	Elmer, Mont.	1:45	Elmer, Mont.
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80:15	Elmer, Mont.	9:30	Elmer, Mont.	10:45	Elmer, Mont.
81:15	Elmer, Mont.	10:30	Elmer, Mont.	11:45	Elmer, Mont.
82:15	Elmer, Mont.	11:30	Elmer, Mont.	12:45	Elmer, Mont.
83:15	Elmer, Mont.	12:30	Elmer, Mont.	1:45	Elmer, Mont.
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86:15	Elmer, Mont.	3:30	Elmer, Mont.	4:45	Elmer, Mont.
87:15	Elmer, Mont.	4:30	Elmer, Mont.	5:45	Elmer, Mont.
88:15	Elmer, Mont.	5:30	Elmer, Mont.	6:45	Elmer, Mont.
89:15	Elmer, Mont.	6:30	Elmer, Mont.	7:45	Elmer, Mont.
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98:15	Elmer, Mont.	3:30	Elmer, Mont.	4:45	Elmer, Mont.
99:15	Elmer, Mont.	4:30	Elmer, Mont.	5:45	Elmer, Mont.
100:15	Elmer, Mont.	5:30	Elmer, Mont.	6:45	Elmer, Mont.

CLASSIFICATION—B. 1. Cheyenne divide route at Casper.
—Alliance & Casper R. P. O. 1. Cheyenne 30, 31—Star Route 61441.
Trails 26 divide route 30 at Route and Folsom, Wyo.
—Missouri River. Letters and newspapers only.
Tr. 29 will hold 10 minutes for Denver & Ft. W., 25.



This clerk is sorting the mail into bins or bags. Behind him are the pigeon holes for letters, and the bins on the upper left and right are for newspapers.

