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Mailboxes no more as

- By Bronwen Gora
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POSTAL deliveries could be scrapped and residents would have to collect mail from automated community post boxes.

Australia Post has earmarked the system for outer metropolitan areas, outlining the changes in a 12-page brochure presented to councils.

Door-to-door services would cease and residents would travel to "community hubs" where as many as 1200 post boxes would be located.

But Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils acting president Bart Bassett rejected the plan, saying it would make life harder for residents who were already time-poor.

"There would be considerable concern from residents, who would see this as a downgrading of services," he said.

"The last thing residents need is to have Australia Post take away their delivery service and make them travel to a central point."

The move would also force people to use their cars more at a time when the community was being urged to become more carbon-neutral, Mr Bassett said.

He said the lack of a home-delivery mail service could also make homes in new areas harder to sell.

"We just see it as another service the community will feel has been taken away from them," he said.

Swipe cards and pin codes would be used to open the boxes, which would be large enough to fit an A4 envelope.

Residents would be notified by SMS text messages to their mobile phones that they had new mail to collect.

Larger packages would be delivered to separate parcel boxes and notifications placed in regular post-office boxes.

Similar systems are already used in Britain, the US and parts of Europe.

The brochure states that "Australia Post is keen to identify trial locations for the new system". It also says the system is "only for new developments, at this time" and that home mailboxes would not be required.

Last September, Australia Post officials met to discuss trials of the system with the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA), a lobby group for developers, as well as at least one Queensland council.

Residents would probably be reluctant to move away from the convenience of their own mailboxes, according to the UDIA.

"We wouldn't want home owners being denied the opportunity to have a letter box on their property just because Australia Post is looking to save on distribution costs," UDIA NSW chief executive Stephen Albin said.

An Australia Post spokesman confirmed that the idea of community mailboxes had been discussed recently with several Queensland councils "as a conceptual option for future housing developments".

"There are no plans to change the current delivery arrangements or to stop door-to-door delivery to existing communities," the spokesman said.

He said there were no plans as yet to move towards the introduction of community mail boxes in NSW, but Queensland councillors who spoke to Australia Post officials said they had been told the organisation was looking for suitable sites around Australia.

"They need to get local councils and developers on side," Ipswich city councillor Paul Tully said.

He confirmed that the Ipswich City Council was co-operating with Australia Post to set up a trial.

"We've said that we're prepared to work with them to find a site," Mr Tully said.

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