

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rummaging around for 1- and 2-cent postage stamps when postal rates go up is heading the way of the Pony Express.

This January, all new stamps good for 1 ounce of first-class mail will be marked as “forever.”

The move is designed to help customers cope with postage increases, a U.S. Postal Service official told The Associated Press recently. The official requested anonymity to discuss a policy that hasn't been announced formally.

Postmaster General Patrick R. Donahoe plans to announce the new policy Jan. 14, the official said.

“I think that's a great idea,” Sean Swilling, a research analyst for commercial property, said inside a downtown Washington post office during a mail run. “For me, a guy who uses snail-mail regularly, it's a hassle to get 1- or 2-cent stamps. Streamline things—that would be perfect.”

When the Postal Service unveiled its first-class commemorative stamps for 2011 on Tuesday (Dec. 27), all were marked “forever” instead of the current rate of 44 cents.

The initial first-class stamp under the new policy will be the Lunar New Year: Year of the Rabbit stamp, to be issued Jan. 22.

It will be followed by stamps commemorating Kansas statehood on Jan. 29 and, in February, the centennial of President Ronald Reagan's birth.

The Forever Stamp, first issued in April 2007 and featuring the Liberty Bell, was designed for use regardless of changes in postal rates. They are sold at the prevailing price of 1 ounce of domestic first-class postage.

The Postal Service says that 28 billion Forever Stamps have been sold since, generating \$12.1 billion in total revenue.

The stamps without denominations already account for 85 percent of its stamp program, the service says.

The Postal Service sought a 2-cent increase in postage rates for 2011, but the independent Postal Rate Commission rejected the request.

The post office is appealing the decision in federal court.

Use of the Internet as well as the economic downturn have been cited for a 3.5 percent decline in mail volume from 2009 to 2010.

The Postal Service lost \$8.5 billion in the year ending Sept. 30, even after trimming more than 100,000 jobs in recent years, and estimates it will lose \$6 billion to \$7 billion in the next year.

One of its proposals for dealing with its financial troubles calls for cutting delivery to five days a week instead of six, a change Congress must approve.