The origins for a horse-and-rider-mail-delivery system between east and west were due to slow mail. Prior to the Coach and Pony Express mail delivery, time from the east to the west—by ship down the Gulf of Mexico, across Panama by mule, then by ship again up to San Francisco—might take six weeks, and if the winds were off, eight weeks.

During its prime, the Pony Express provided the fastest means of communication between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. At a cost of $1.00 per ounce of mail and averaging no more than 20 pounds per trip, Pony Express riders could relay a mail pouch from St. Joseph to Sacramento in ten days. After only 18 months, the Pony Express became obsolete due to the completion of the first transcontinental telegraph system.