

Pilot test observations



Christopher Jackson

Recently, the City Delivery Department visited two delivery units to observe ongoing pilot tests initiated by the Postal Service. In this month's article, I will talk about these visits and what NALC observed.

Fredericksburg, VA— eBike testing

In August 2021, the Postal Service began pilot testing electric bicycles (eBikes) for mail delivery on existing bicycle routes in two Florida locations, Miami Beach and St. Petersburg. In my most recent article on eBike testing, I

discussed the Postal Service's decision to expand this pilot test to the Fredericksburg, VA, Post Office. The test at the Fredericksburg Post Office involved two walkout routes, since the unit did not have existing bicycle assignments.

USPS had anticipated that eBike testing at the Fredericksburg Post Office would last for a period of three months, however, in February 2023, I received notification that the pilot program had been extended. In May, City Delivery staff members visited the Fredericksburg Post Office to monitor the ongoing test. During the visit, NALC observed that a housing shed had been constructed in the parking lot of the unit for storage of the

eBikes. The two carriers assigned to the eBikes loaded the bikes in the parking lot along with the other letter carriers. Previously, the eBikes had been stored and loaded on the workroom floor inside of the delivery unit.

Carriers who regularly use the eBikes in the Fredericksburg pilot reported that completing their assignments takes about the same amount of time whether or not they are using the eBikes. While a city carrier assistant (CCA) recently assigned to one of the routes in the pilot reported that he did not mind using the eBike, both carriers preferred to instead use their push carts on the assignments. The two carriers also agreed on many of the negatives related to use of the eBikes, such as difficulty biking uphill, vehicles passing too close, and parking issues. For more information on the eBike pilots, read my September 2021 and December 2022 *Postal Record* columns.

Athens, GA—S&DC

In my April article for *The Postal Record*, I shared information regarding three separate pilot tests the Postal Service initiated at the first Sorting and Delivery Center (S&DC) in Athens, GA. The Postal Service is establishing S&DCs across the country as part of its long-term strategic plan, called the Delivering for America Plan. Members of my staff visited this S&DC in June to observe the three pilot tests being conducted by USPS.

Electronic accountable lockers

The Postal Service introduced this pilot program in early October 2022 hoping to improve record-keeping and increase security of the accountable process. USPS installed a total of five



The electronic accountable lockers



The housing shed for the eBikes

(continued on next page)

Pilot test observations (continued)

(continued from previous page)

locker banks with 156 available slots at the S&DC, to replace the registry cages.

City Delivery staff members were given a demonstration of the accountable locker, which requires the carrier to enter their Employee Identification Number (EIN) into the touchscreen controls of the kiosk. Carriers reported that management often does not use the lockers and when it does, the lockers are frequently malfunctioning. During the visit, it was observed that three of the four lockers did not appear to be operable.

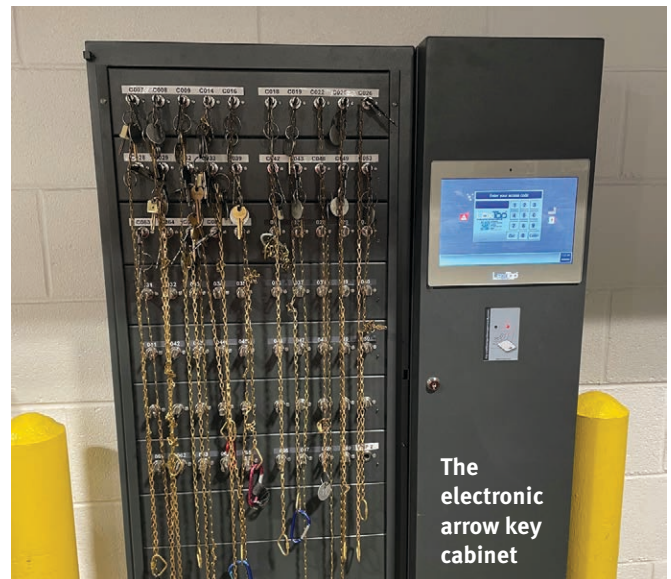
Electronic employee lockers

The Postal Service explained, when the program started in late October 2022, that the lockers were intended to update employee lockers with a permanent and more secure place to store their personal items. The lockers replaced all existing personal item storage locations at the S&DC. Carriers reported that the new employee lockers were not functioning properly and that they often had difficulty retrieving personal items from the lockers. City Delivery staff members observed that five of the six employee locker banks were not functioning.



Electronic arrow key cabinets

Another pilot test started in late December 2022. USPS hopes that electronic cabinets will automate and improve security of the arrow key process. Two cabinets were installed at the S&DC, replacing the existing arrow key system. To obtain arrow keys from the cabinet, carriers typed their EIN into the touchscreen controls and the key assigned to them was released from its slot. City Delivery staff members observed many carriers using the devices, and carriers reported that these cabinets worked well.



More information regarding the S&DCs can be found in the staff report written by Special Assistant to the President Doug Lape that appeared in the April issue of *The Postal Record*.

There is much to consider and evaluate with these tests. Any concerns identified during the site visits will be included in my ongoing discussions with the Postal Service. I will continue to monitor these initiatives and provide the membership with updates.

I want to thank the carriers of the Fredericksburg, VA, Post Office and the Athens, GA, S&DC for welcoming my staff and providing valuable insight, as well as for their commitment to these pilot tests.

As always, my utmost gratitude goes out to all city carriers, as you continue to provide excellent service to every customer every day.