

Delivery vehicles of the future



**Brian
Renfroe**

and convenient as possible for letter carriers, and accommodates the work we do now and will do in the future.

“Our main objective is to ensure that any new vehicle is as safe, ergonomic and convenient as possible for letter carriers, and accommodates the work we do now and will do in the future.”

Over the last several years, the mix of the mail we deliver has changed. We now deliver fewer letters and flats per address than we have in years past. However, the parcel volume has exploded over the last few years.

This parcel volume will only continue to grow. Some project the parcel volume to double by 2020. If the parcel volume continues to grow as expected, the capacity of the LLVs simply will not be able to handle the volume. Now is the time for new vehicles.

We have spent a considerable amount of time talking to letter carriers in different parts of the country about what they would like to see in a new vehicle. While some of the input is specific to certain climates or geographic areas, there are quite a few common suggestions. The Postal Service has incorporated our suggestions into a lengthy document that includes specifications for the next-generation delivery vehicles.

Additionally, we selected three letter carriers to come to Washington, DC, to provide detailed, thorough input on

the design ideas. Amanda Greer of St. Paul, MN Branch 28; Reed Ordoyne of Houma, LA Branch 2464; and Derrick Williams of St. Louis Branch 343 spent the better part of two days with me and my counterparts at the Postal Service. The three of them represented various climates and types of delivery. These three experienced letter carriers provided invaluable feedback.

The first real step toward actually producing new vehicles occurred a few weeks ago when the Postal Service released a request for information (RFI). This RFI included the specifications for the new vehicles. Manufacturers will submit proposals for a vehicle meeting the specifications and price range. After these proposals are submitted, USPS will select manufacturers to produce prototype vehicles for testing next year. Once the vehicle and manufacturer is ultimately selected, the new fleet will be produced. These new vehicles should all be deployed by 2018.

USPS plans to purchase 180,000 delivery vehicles at a cost of \$25,000 to \$35,000 each. This is a large investment. I believe this is the component of the Postal Service's infrastructure that most needs such an investment. It is absolutely necessary to improve safety, ergonomics and capacity to put us in the best position to compete for the business we need to thrive well into the future.

For the most part, the cab area of the LLV has served us well, particularly when delivering curbside boxes. Key elements of the cab area, such as height from the street, will likely remain largely unchanged. However, the specifications call for a much larger cargo area that will allow a carrier to walk into the cargo area from the cab of the vehicle to retrieve mail.

Another design idea included in the specifications is an additional curbside sliding door. A door where letter carriers could exit the vehicles curbside from the cargo area could nearly eliminate working from the back of the vehicle. Over the last few years, we have had a number of devastating accidents where letter carriers were standing behind the vehicle retrieving mail and were pinned between an oncoming vehicle and their delivery vehicle. These accidents have resulted in severe injury or death in nearly every case. A vehicle design that minimizes the risk of these types of accidents is a must.

Other specifications of interest include better air flow for a more comfortable vehicle. Safety and security improvements such as automatic locking doors and automatic parking brakes are also included, as well as some interior details such as cup holders, phone charging ports and places to keep rubber bands, pens and forms.

The new vehicle will be designed for letter carriers and the work we do. We will continue to work with the Postal Service to develop the best possible delivery vehicle for the present and the future.