Recent USPS technology testing

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As letter carriers know better than anyone, the Postal Service is constantly evolving and adapting. Most of the recent changes involve development and eventual deployment of new technology to adapt to our ever-changing business and to better serve our customers. These types of changes almost always begin as tests. Testing generally starts on a small scale, maybe in only a few offices, then grows to include a larger number of offices, and at times grows to a national test.

Some tests succeed and some fail. The evaluation of the results and feedback from those involved is used to find ways to improve the concept being tested. Letter carriers play an important role in many of these tests.

We constantly communicate with officials at USPS headquarters on the development, progress and results of such testing. Some letter carriers never hear about a concept being tested, because the test is small and their work location may not be included. A few of the more interesting concepts currently being tested are described below.

Turn-by-turn voice navigation for the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD)—This feature is being tested on the MDD for Sunday parcel deliveries. Currently, hard-copy, turn-by-turn navigation directions are provided for letter carriers to use when making Sunday parcel deliveries. Following completion of the MDD test, USPS anticipates this application will be used by carriers at all sites participating in Sunday parcel delivery.

Two-tier tray test in the LLV—Last year and earlier this year, the Postal Service tested a three-tier tray for the LLV. This tray was designed to work in place of the existing tray in the vehicles where it was being tested. I visited a few of the three-tier tray test sites with USPS headquarters officials. The letter carriers gave excellent feedback on the three-tier tray. The current two-tier tray being tested was developed using the feedback of the letter carriers involved in the previous test.

Driver simulator—Recently, the Postal Service tested a driver simulator in which several city carrier assistant and rural carrier associate employees scheduled for driver training were randomly selected to operate the simulator. The driver simulator features include right-hand drive and a large monitor that gives the appearance of viewing the road through an LLV front window.

E-mail notification to customers of images of letter mail to be received—The Postal Service is currently testing e-mail notification to customers of images of letter mail the customer will receive that day. Customers in certain locations are notified of their eligibility and the process to subscribe for this service. Subscribers then receive a daily e-mail with a preview of their mail that has been processed through the automated mail stream.

Standard Performance Measurement (SPM)—This test began in September 2014, when the Postal Service conducted a demonstration for Postal Regulatory Commission representatives of an alternate approach to service measurement using carrier mobile scanning devices. The demonstration involved carriers using mobile scanning devices to scan mail at collection and delivery points. From there, the test advanced to letter carriers actually using their MDD to scan mail pieces at specified locations during the collection and delivery of mail.

During this test, letter carriers are given voice and text prompts on the MDD at or before reaching a particular collection or delivery point regarding the location, type of mail, and the number of mail pieces to be scanned. Upon reaching the designated location, employees are given instructions on the device to complete the required scanning. Test results will be used by the Postal Service to determine the feasibility of replacing the External First-Class Mail (EXFC) measurement system through the use of the scanning functionality of MDDs. Nationwide expansion of testing for the SPM program occurred last month.

To be clear, this is a test of a program to measure performance of mail through the system. It is not a test to measure performance of individual letter carriers.

One issue that letter carriers have realized is the voice prompt that happens while driving. This can startle someone not expecting it. After discussion with the Postal Service, they recognized it was an issue that needed to be addressed. As of this writing, software updates are being deployed to all MDDs that will disable this audio prompt while the device is moving faster than 5 mph. This should remedy the issue.

I thank every letter carrier for your hard work during this holiday season to serve our customers. I wish you all a safe and happy holiday season.