

Letter carrier delivery vehicles



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In January, I reported that the Postal Service had made a decision to purchase 8,000 more ProMaster Extended Capacity Delivery Vehicles to add to its current 12,000-vehicle fleet. Later that month, USPS notified NALC that some changes would be incorporated into the new ProMasters, and we were invited to participate in an abbreviated first article review and inspection of the vehicle on Feb. 1. NALC Director of Safety and Health Manny Peralta, Assistant to the President for City Delivery Doug Lape and I attended that review and inspection to take part in the process and to see these changes firsthand. Some of the notable changes are as follows:

- Instead of the passenger-side jump seat being mounted to the partition that separates the cargo area from the driver/passenger area, it now is mounted to the floor. This change allows for a newly designed and thinner partition wall, which in turn increases the floor space in the cargo area.
- The grab handle that letter carriers use to assist themselves in entering and exiting the right-side cargo door now is longer, which should make it easier for shorter letter carriers to reach.
- The cargo area floor is made from StabiliGrip, a product engineered to be extremely durable, impact resilient, moisture resistant, rot proof and anti-slip. As a result, the cargo floor is now thicker and will not expand and contract with changes in the weather.
- A new display screen, approximately the size of an iPad, replaces the factory screen in the current ProMasters. The screen is designed to pair with the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) via Bluetooth, and when the scanner is cradled, it will display what is being displayed on the MDD screen. This should be helpful for letter carriers when they are using newer features of the MDD, such as turn-by-turn directions or package look ahead.

The vehicle contractor is still expected to supply the Postal Service with 250 to 300 of these new vehicles each week until all 8,000 are fully deployed. My hope is that these new vehicles will be received as well as the previous 12,000 ProMasters were, and these changes will be beneficial to the letter carriers who use them every day serving our customers.

On Feb. 7, Assistant to the President for City Delivery Tim McKay and I visited the Transportation Research Center (TRC) in East Liberty, OH, to view and inspect the prototypes of the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle (NGDV), the new right-hand drive delivery vehicle that eventually will replace the current aging fleet of LLVs. After field testing of these prototypes initially began in October in six delivery units located in Arizona, Michigan and Virginia, the Postal Service moved the vehicles to TRC to conduct durability testing and to give the five manufacturers an opportunity to complete some modifications and upgrades to the test vehicles.

As part of our visit to TRC, we were given a tour of the massive test facility and were shown the various course conditions that each of the prototype vehicles are being subjected to in order to test their durability. We also inspected each of the vehicles and provided the Postal Service with our feedback and some suggestions.

While I am not able, at this time for proprietary reasons, to report exactly what the specific manufacturers have included in their individual prototypes I can say that, after looking at all of the vehicles, the various manufacturers were able to address the specifications called for by USPS. Each of the vehicles contains larger cargo areas that will allow letter carriers to walk into the rear of the vehicle from the cab to retrieve mail. Each also includes the important feature of a curbside sliding door in the cargo area where letter carriers can exit and work from the vehicles on the curbside, instead of from the back. These doors should minimize the risk of devastating accidents, which in the past have resulted in serious injury or death to carriers who were pinned between an oncoming vehicle and the rear of their vehicle.

I also saw some vehicles that met the requirements of providing better air flow for letter carriers, both in the cab and in the cargo area. The vehicles also included such improvements as automatic locking doors; automatic parking brakes; cup holders; phone-charging ports; and places to keep rubber bands, pens and forms. Even more importantly, they contain improved safety features that one would expect from vehicles being driven in the 21st century, including cameras, which provide views of the outside of the vehicle from every angle.

Once the durability testing has been completed, the vehicles will be returned to the delivery units so that letter carriers can finish the field testing. While the current testing at TRC is extremely important, this is when the Postal Service will receive the best feedback in regard to which of the prototypes best serve letter carriers' needs.