

New initiatives for City Delivery



Christopher Jackson

The holiday season is in full swing, and I hope the season is bright for all letter carriers and their families. With holiday parcel volume increasing every year, I wanted to use this month's article to provide information regarding two USPS initiatives that could have a significant impact on parcel delivery.

Next generation Mobile Delivery Device (MDD)

In previous *Postal Record* articles, I have communicated information related to prototype testing for the next generation of Mobile Delivery Device (MDD). The testing concluded in June of 2019, and I am happy to report that USPS has awarded a

contract to supply the new MDD. USPS states that the current MDD was not going to be compatible with evolving 4G network data transmission, and therefore a technology upgrade was required. This technology upgrade will allow USPS customers to obtain better, faster information related to parcel delivery.

USPS has selected the Zebra Technologies TC77 device (shown at left) to replace the current MDD, and will be rolling out the new device nationwide in the coming months. Zebra Technologies was the manufacturer for the previous Intelligent Mail Device (IMD). USPS began deploying the new devices in Northern Virginia in November, and will continue with a phased deployment nationwide beginning in 2020. As new devices are deployed, remaining first-generation MDDs will be retained to replace IMDs being used for distribution, and to serve as backup for the new upgraded MDDs.

On several occasions, my staff and I have had the opportunity to observe the prototype chosen for the new MDD and obtain feedback from the city carriers testing this model.

The Zebra device resembles an over-sized cell phone, and is similar in weight and functionality. The new model is smaller than the current MDD and has replaced the traditional alphanumeric keyboard with a touchscreen for manual entry of information. Side button triggers enable the optical scanning field that quickly registers barcode information. USPS states that the current MDD software package has been installed on the new devices, and initially the

scanning menu options will remain unchanged. NALC expects the new devices will receive periodic software updates similar to the current MDD.

MDD prototype cold-weather testing occurred in 10 test sites located in various cities in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota in February of 2019. Additional field testing was conducted in May 2019 in five sites—one each in Virginia, Indiana, Nebraska, Florida and California. During the test process, carriers were asked to complete surveys on each of the prototypes and then compare and rank the models at the end of the test. Carriers reported that the Zebra TC 77 had improved barcode scanning capabilities relating to speed and accuracy. The Zebra also demonstrated enhanced dynamic routing turn-by-turn directions and reduced overall battery consumption, an improvement over the current MDD. Based on what NALC has observed, most of the feedback for this model has been positive, and letter carriers provided USPS with many suggestions on improving features. I am hopeful that USPS has considered and incorporated some of the ideas that our carriers have provided.



The new Zebra TC77 model (l) next to a first-generation MDD.

Expansion of service

By the time you are reading this article, you already may be aware of a new initiative that will increase Sunday parcel delivery. In addition to current Sunday Amazon parcels, city letter carriers will begin delivering last-mile United Parcel Service (UPS) parcels at current Sunday hub locations. UPS will drop these parcels at the destination delivery units on Saturday afternoons for Sunday delivery. Letter carriers have traditionally delivered UPS last-mile parcels for many years; however, this will be the first opportunity for Sunday delivery. The initiative began Oct. 26, in the eastern and southern regions, and USPS anticipates expansion to all Sunday hub locations.

I am hopeful that both of these initiatives will have a positive effect on Postal Service customer satisfaction and also will increase letter carrier jobs. I know that peak season can be a stressful time for postal employees, and so I want to take a moment to say thank you for all your hard work and dedication, not only during peak season but throughout the year. I would like to wish everyone a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.