

# New USPS initiatives



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**T**he Postal Service routinely conducts studies and explores new uses for existing technology. I want to use this month's article to provide a brief look at several new initiatives about which USPS has communicated with me.

## FSS machine repurposing test

In a letter dated Sept. 9, the Postal Service notified NALC of its intent to test the feasibility of repurposing the Flats Sequencing System (FSS) machines to sort flat mail into carrier-routed mail, instead of sorting the flats in delivery sequence order. Currently, mail that is carrier-routed is processed on the Automated Flats Sorting Machine (AFSM) and distributed to the delivery unit in tubs for distribution to the carrier. In this test, USPS is studying the use of FSS machines in lieu of using the AFSM to sort flat mail. According to USPS engineering personnel, the FSS machine is capable of separating mail for approximately three times as many routes at a time as the AFSM. USPS says that use of the FSS to complete sortation normally performed by the AFSM will allow the Postal Service to better utilize the FSS machine.

The FSS repurposing test was conducted through the Dulles, VA Processing and Distribution Center and includes all ZIP codes for the USPS Northern Virginia District, which currently receives FSS automated flat mail. Testing began Sept. 21, and concluded the first week of October. I will update the membership if USPS communicates any new developments related to potential repurposing of the FSS machine.

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## Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) vehicle comparison study

NALC was notified in a letter dated Sept. 9 that the Postal Service plans to conduct a study to compare COTS Mercedes Metris right-hand drive vehicles with Long Life Vehicles (LLV). USPS is attempting to compare the efficiency of each of the two vehicles to determine the number of curbside deliveries best suited to the Metris. Performance data will be collected from the LLV on the selected routes for a two-week period. Participating carriers will have a one-week familiarization period with the Metris vehicle. Following the two-week LLV data collection and the one-week Metris familiarization, delivery data using the Metris vehicles will be collected on the same routes.

USPS indicates that breadcrumb data from the Mobile Delivery Devices (MDD) will also be analyzed to compare the amount of time it takes to deliver a mounted delivery with the LLV versus the Metris. In addition, video cameras will be installed in the Capital Metro District to verify the MDD breadcrumb data if there are anomalies in the amount of time it took the carrier to perform a delivery with the LLV versus the time in the Metris. USPS plans to evaluate the vehicles on different types of routes with varying curbside deliveries and mileage. The study is scheduled from Sept. 21 through Oct. 30 in six postal districts. Carriers using these vehicles will be asked for feedback via surveys to assist the Postal Service in evaluating the vehicles.

## Radio sensor technology test

In June, NALC was informed by the Postal Service that it would be partnering with Aurora Insight Inc. to test radio frequency sensor technology on postal delivery vehicles to measure the radio spectrum frequencies available in an area. USPS states that the purpose of this test is to determine whether radio frequency sensors and global positioning system (GPS) devices installed in Postal Service vehicles can be used to detect and collect the radio frequency spectrum activity while traveling over established routes. The devices will be installed in delivery vehicles, and participating carriers will drive the test vehicles during the normal delivery of their routes. USPS states that no carrier information will be collected during the test. The test was tentatively scheduled to begin Aug. 1 in the Fort Collins, CO, post office and run through Dec. 31; however, USPS recently has learned that Aurora Insight is currently developing and testing a new device to measure radio spectrum to be used during the test. This device is not scheduled to be available until November, and testing is being placed on hold until after the peak holiday season.

These are a few of the recent initiatives that the Postal Service has communicated to me. I will keep the membership updated on these and other initiatives as necessary. Typically, USPS will suspend most test initiatives involving city carriers during peak season. In the current COVID-19 environment, I anticipate that this peak season will be especially challenging for city carriers. Carriers are incredibly dedicated to providing extraordinary customer service, not just during peak season, but throughout the year. As this holiday season progresses, I encourage letter carriers to take advantage of every opportunity to care for themselves and their families.