

Plan B



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I hope this holiday season finds you well and in good spirits as Christmas approaches. With another peak season upon us, city carriers are working diligently to deliver the multitude of parcels containing holiday cheer. This year, with parcel volumes expected to exceed previous years, the Postal Service is exploring new ways to handle the anticipated surge in packages.

One new initiative that USPS has implemented to provide additional support and resources for peak operations is a process called Plan B. According to the Postal Service, Plan B was developed using several data sources, including both his-

torical data and current information. The goal was to identify top opportunity offices and ensure service-responsive workload solutions. Using Plan B, USPS hopes to alleviate some of the challenges experienced during previous peak seasons and provide world-class service to our customers. I will use this month's article to describe the Plan B initiative.

In late October, USPS notified me that during this year's peak season, several offices would begin utilizing Package Delivery Centers, or annexes, to process and deliver parcels that are drop-shipped from USPS retail and shipping partners. Parcels that are introduced into the USPS network, either at the retail counter or picked up by letter carriers, are not included in Plan B. Under the Plan B process, drop-shipped parcels designated for city routes in a delivery unit serviced by one of the annexes will be sent directly to the annex for distribution and delivery. The delivery units participating in Plan B will still deliver letters, flats and network parcels. Plan B includes 54 delivery units, which will be serviced by 38 annex facilities nationwide.

Under the Plan B process, the annex will establish local geographical routes using the dynamic routing process normally used for Sunday delivery. Based on our communication, the Postal Service intends to use primarily city carrier assistants, part-time flexible, and unassigned regular letter carriers to deliver these parcel routes. City carriers assigned to the Package Delivery Centers will handle and deliver these parcels in accordance with current handbook methods. If delivery is attempted but cannot be made, a PS Form 3849, We Redeliver for You, will be provided to the customer that identifies the

Package Delivery Center annex address as the location for the customer to pick up the parcel. Each center should be provided sufficient PS Forms 3849 with the street address of the annex stamped on the form. Customers will then be able to pick up their package at the annex instead of at the delivery unit.

Each day, the involved delivery units will provide the associated Package Delivery Center with a list of addresses that have vacation holds so those parcels can be retained at the annex. As of the writing of this article, USPS is uncertain whether these parcels will then be returned to the delivery unit or redelivered from the annex. The Postal Service has not communicated to me whether parcels that have a change of address on file or are otherwise undeliverable will be handled at the delivery unit or at the annex.

During the last week of October, I traveled to visit a package annex in Philadelphia. This center is different than the sites included in the Plan B initiative in that this annex services existing parcel post routes. In the annex I visited, the city carriers assigned to these parcel routes begin tour at their assigned delivery unit, retrieve their delivery vehicle and travel to the annex to load their parcels for delivery. Upon completion of their designated parcel route, they return to the assigned unit to return their delivery vehicle and end tour. While the Philadelphia annex differs from Plan B package centers, the visit provided me the opportunity to see firsthand how these facilities operate. Additionally, this visit gave me a chance to speak to the carriers involved and get feedback that I could provide to the Postal Service.

Whether the peak season Plan B will be successful in improving the overall customer experience this year remains to be seen. With increased complications in retail supply chains and transportation outside the Postal Service, I think this will be a holiday shopping season for the record books. I am positive that city carriers will continue to provide excellent service, despite the challenges. I wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and blessings for a happy New Year for 2022.

