

NALC and USPS jointly explore new uses for technology



Christopher Jackson

The COVID-19 virus certainly has changed the way we do things in our everyday lives. For many people, the pandemic has created significant changes in the way we perform our jobs, purchase groceries and supplies, educate our children, and participate in activities with our friends and family. The ongoing pandemic has substantially limited our ability to have in-person interaction, and people around the world have been relying on technology more than ever to fill the gap. As an organization, NALC is not immune to these changes. The pandemic has forced us to alter the way we conduct business on the local, regional and national level.

From holding virtual branch meetings, training sessions and arbitration hearings to the cancellation of the 72nd national convention in 2020, the pandemic has affected the way we function as a labor union over the past year.

While the Postal Service and NALC often have discussed how we can leverage technology to benefit city carriers, the events of the past year have really brought this issue to the forefront. In recent months, the joint conversations revolving around technology have intensified and expanded to include specific approaches, ideas and goals. With the ratification of the 2019 National Agreement, NALC and USPS renewed a commitment to work together to modernize delivery methods and processes to ensure that the Postal Service remains the provider of choice for customers and to continue our joint objective of creating an improved work environment for all employees. This commitment, memorialized in the Memorandum of Understanding Re: City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force, identifies the parties' intent of jointly developing and testing new work methods and concepts that may include new or alternative uses for existing technology.

One piece of the MOU includes a route evaluation and adjustment task force to jointly explore the use of technology, data, advanced analytics and machine learning to improve operations, route evaluation, adjustment and optimization, delivery capabilities and visibility. As a part of this joint task force, two route evaluation and adjustment teams were selected to facilitate joint evaluation and adjustment of routes in a limited number of delivery units. The two teams will use the jointly agreed upon principles contained in the 2014-2015 City Delivery Route Alternate Adjustment Process to evaluate and adjust routes in the

chosen delivery units. As part of the evaluation and adjustment, they will review USPS data from a variety of computer programs and applications. Additionally, the team will review Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) information to determine if the GPS breadcrumb data obtained from the MDD could be useful in future route evaluations and adjustments. The teams will be tasked with evaluating existing technology, applying current data to route evaluation and adjustment, and providing suggestions and feedback to the software developers to improve technology for the future.

Over the years, city carriers often have expressed concerns about the possibility of inaccuracies in the route inspection and traditional PS Form 3999, Inspection of Letter Carrier Route, process. Reported events of data collection device failures, software data transfer issues and potential inspector bias have prompted the parties to consider whether development of a virtual 3999 process could be possible using the MDD breadcrumb data. To assess this possibility, the joint evaluation and adjustment teams are working closely with USPS engineering and technology departments to evaluate the current programs for necessary changes that could make virtual 3999s viable.

If successful, NALC hopes that using MDD data in conjunction with the joint adjustment process would eliminate the need for an in-person inspector to conduct a traditional PS Form 3999. Keep in mind, the use of MDD technology for this purpose would require a joint agreement of the parties, as well as modification of the contractually negotiated provisions of USPS handbooks and manuals. Use of MDD breadcrumb data is in the preliminary stages of development and might require significant improvements and/or revisions before it can be considered for permanent use as part of the route evaluation and adjustment process. For the foreseeable future, city carriers should expect to receive the traditional PS Form 3999.

At this time, there is no national-level agreement to conduct joint route evaluations and adjustments beyond this limited initiative. USPS may still conduct formal route counts and inspections pursuant to Chapter 9 of the *Handbook M-41*, City Carriers Duties and Responsibilities and Chapter 2 of the *Handbook M-39*, Management of Delivery Services. These include special inspections requested under the terms of Section 271.g of the *M-39*. Management may also implement minor route adjustments in accordance with Chapter 1 of the *M-39* if the route meets the criteria. As always, carriers should continue to perform their routes consistent with the *M-41*.

I encourage you to visit my City Delivery page at nalc.org for more information on the formal route evaluation and inspection process and updates on this initiative.