eBike pilot testing

Christopher Jackson

In 2021, the Postal Service began testing electric bicycles (eBikes) in two Florida locations, Miami Beach and St. Petersburg, on existing bicycle routes. An in-depth explanation of the test can be found in my September 2021 *Postal Record* column.

Each Freighter eBike has an alarm, two key locks, headlight, rearview camera, speedometer, cupholder, two USB ports and a holder for a handheld device. The eBike has a maximum gross weight of 950 lbs. The bike has one front wheel and two rear wheels, requiring the rider to make wide turns to prevent tipping over. The bike's speedometer is located below the handlebars. Carriers

can increase the amount of battery-powered assistance by using the device located on the left handlebar. They can select from the lowest setting to the highest setting by using the plus or minus keys.

The eBike requires two batteries to operate—a 500 Wh battery located behind the seat on the cargo unit, and a 12-volt battery lower and to the right on the cargo unit. The Postal Service provides each carrier with two of each battery per day. It is the carrier's responsibility to charge the eBike's batteries daily by placing the batteries on the charging station located in a designated area on the workroom floor.

On Aug. 13, the Postal Service expanded its testing of the eBikes to two walkout routes in Fredericksburg, VA. The test in Fredericksburg is anticipated to last for three months.

Because the two routes involved in the current test are walkout routes, the line of travel had to be changed before the test began. A carrier on a walkout route is not assigned a vehicle, so the carrier does not transport the mail to the street for delivery. After carriers case their mail and pull the route down, they place the relays in containers, which then are taken to the street by a relay driver who deposits the mail into the relay boxes. The carrier will move to the street and either walk or use public transportation to reach the first delivery point. Each walkout route was assigned a Freighter eBike, and the line of travel was changed to park-and-loop delivery method during this pilot program.

For the duration of the test, the delivery method on the routes involved was changed to park-and-loop delivery. To deliver a park-and-loop route, a carrier parks at a park point and delivers the mail down one side of the street, then crosses over to deliver the mail in the opposite direction, returning to the park point. This change allows the carrier to deliver the route using the eBike.

Carriers participating in the test received training from a driver safety instructor (DSI) and had to pass a test prior to operating the eBike. In Fredericksburg, the two regular carriers assigned to the former walkout routes and five CCAs were trained to operate the eBike. Each eBike has a quick-start guide affixed to the inside rear door of the cargo area. The guide outlines the operation of the bike and includes a QR code that carriers can use to access the guide electronically.

Just as they should do when operating a motorized delivery vehicle, carriers should complete a daily safety inspection check before operating the eBike. This ensures that the bike can be operated safely. Any issues that affect the operation of the bike should be reported immediately. The

Postal Service has contracted with an outside company to perform routine maintenance and repairs. The rider must wear a safety vest while operating the bicycle and, upon request, will be provided a bike helmet. See the national-level grievance settlement in case number Q06N-4Q-C 81135613, dated March 16, 2016 (M-01872). This settlement is available in the Materials Reference System at nalc.org/workplace-issues/resources/materials-reference-system.

The eBikes are stored and loaded on the workroom floor in a designated area. Carriers load the vehicle from the rear and side. For safety reasons, carriers should unload only from the side of the bike while on the street to avoid being hit from behind. This model of the eBike can hold about 12 775 tubs (plastic tubs that usually hold flat-sized mail) or 12 Flat Sequencing System (FSS) trays when loading from the side. There also is a rear compartment divided by two shelves that can fit half letter trays on the bottom level and approximately six FSS and/or six 775 tubs. It can accommodate only medium-sized or smaller packages. The Freighter eBikes are about 9¾ feet long and almost 4 feet wide and hold the majority of the daily route volume, allowing the carrier to deliver the mail. Larger parcels might have to be delivered by a carrier in a traditional delivery vehicle, if they do not fit in the cargo container on the eBike. The eBikes eliminated the use of relay boxes and the delay associated with carriers waiting for the mail drop-off at the relay box.

Due to the width of the eBikes, they may be restricted from being driven on the sidewalk. In addition, they are wider than most bike lanes, forcing the carrier to operate them on the city streets with automotive traffic. To park on the street, carriers must pull directly into a spot, as the bike's pedals will not allow the carrier to move in reverse. To parallel park, or if they need to go in reverse, carriers must dismount the bike and physically push the bike in reverse.

Unlike the delivery area in Florida, which is mostly flat, the Fredericksburg terrain consists of hills and valleys. Carriers in Fredericksburg reported that the eBikes worked well on flat ground but encountered problems when going up or down hills. The eBikes were difficult to get moving when stopped at a stop sign or a stoplight on an incline. Carriers also reported the bike shaking when going downhill and when braking at certain speeds.

My staff and I visited the Fredericksburg Main Post Office recently to review the eBike pilot program. One benefit that carriers reported was the reduction of the amount of time they spent waiting for the relay drivers to deliver the relays. Negatives they reported included the problems starting and stopping on hills, ponchos flying up in front of their face on windy days, difficulty finding parking, and vehicles passing at too close a distance when operating the eBike at a slow speed. NALC will continue to monitor the test in Fredericksburg and gather feedback from the carriers involved about the pros and cons of the eBike. Once testing is complete, we will meet with the Postal Service to discuss the results of the test and management's future plans for the eBike.

"One benefit that carriers reported was the reduction of the amount of time they spent waiting for the relay drivers to deliver the relays. Negatives they reported included the problems starting and stopping on hills, ponchos flying up in front of their face on windy days, difficulty finding parking, and vehicles passing at too close a distance when operating the eBike at a slow speed."