

Mercedes Benz eSprinter pilot test



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Throughout the years, City Delivery has observed and provided feedback on several pilot tests conducted by the Postal Service. One common pilot test is of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) vehicles. These COTS vehicles are routinely tested to determine if they are a suitable option for the delivery fleet.

Mercedes Benz USA (MBUSA) eSprinter Vans

In January, USPS provided notice of its intent to pilot test two MBUSA 144" eSprinter vans, a standard roof (SR) and a high roof (HR) option, at the Vienna, VA, post office. With this notice, USPS invited NALC to attend a kickoff meeting for the demonstration of both vehicles. This kickoff was led by the Mercedes Benz manufacturer and officials from USPS. My staff and I attended this demonstration, reviewed both test vehicles and provided feedback to USPS.

Both eSprinter vans are left-hand drive battery electric vehicles. They are rear-wheel drive with the SR option having 330 cubic feet of cargo space, while the HR option provides 386 cubic feet of cargo space. Both vehicles measure 239.7 inches in length, just shy of 20 feet long. The interior height of the cargo space for the SR option is 5½ feet, while the HR option is 6½ feet tall. Based on the presentation, both vehicles have the same maximum electric range of 150 miles, taking up to 10 hours for a full charge. The charging socket is located in the front through the Mercedes Benz emblem, while the battery has been mounted on the underbody of both vehicles. A key fob is required to access and operate the vehicles as they rely on a push button ignition to start the engine.

The cabin area has both a driver's and passenger seat with manual controls to adjust comfort. Both vehicles are equipped with a digital rearview mirror that will display the feed of a camera mounted above the rear cargo doors. They each come with touchscreen monitors located in the center of the eSprinter dashboard, which displays a bird's-eye view of the vehicle using 360-degree camera.

Both vehicles have a sliding bulkhead door that separates the cabin and cargo area. It was noted by NALC, to both the



manufacturer and USPS officials, that when the bulkhead door is opened the width may be too narrow for letter carriers to go through on the HR option. The manufacturer informed the attendees that most things in the interior of both vehicles could be changed/altered upon request. The cargo area contains two levels of foldable shelving with four shelves along the roadside and two shelves along the curbside of the vehicles. Each vehicle is equipped with two rear hinged doors that open outward up to 180 degrees. There is also a sliding curbside cargo door with two steps and a third step that is stationary that extends outward toward the curb. NALC noted to USPS that this may be an issue with how long and how far out the step is.

The vehicles are equipped with active brake assist that supports braking process in cross-traffic, turning and other vehicles traveling in opposite directions. They each have sideguard assist, which warns the driver when another vehicle or road user is detected, through the exterior side mirror of the vehicle. This mirror will flash either blue, if another road user is detected around the vehicle, or red, if the road user enters the warning zone, or blind spot, of the vehicles. A sound will play for the driver if a road user is in the blind spot of the vehicle and the driver has their turn signal on. Both vehicles also come with a moving off information system, which monitors the area directly in front and next to the vehicles. This system activates when the vehicles are moving up to 6 mph and will inform the driver, through the dashboard, if another road user is detected and a sound will play if a collision is imminent.

I want to thank the letter carriers of the Vienna, VA, post office who will be involved in the pilot testing of these vehicles. My staff and I look forward to collecting their feedback and input, as their opinion and cooperation on both vehicles will bring valuable impact to the craft and assist USPS in its continued efforts to find suitable options for the delivery fleet. Be sure to read my article each month and visit nalc.org for the latest information.