

eBike testing



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Over the years, the Postal Service has used many different types of vehicles to deliver mail and parcels. City delivery routes can be incredibly different, based on variables such as geography, economics and climate. Therefore, no single type of delivery vehicle will work for all city routes. Beginning with the horse-drawn wagons, motorcycles and Mailsters of yesteryear to the Long Life Vehicle, Flex Fuel Vehicle and Promasters of today, city carriers have used a variety of delivery vehicles. These are just a sampling of some of vehicles that come to mind when you think about city mail delivery. I want to use this month's article to tell you about a test involving a city delivery vehicle you might not think of right away—the bicycle.

The Postal Service has a long history of using bicycles for city delivery. In the 1890s, city carriers across the country began using bicycles to make their deliveries. In the years that followed, in areas where the climate was agreeable, the Postal Service created dedicated bicycle routes. There are currently four locations that maintain bicycle routes: two in Florida—Open Air Station, St. Petersburg and Miami Beach, and two in Arizona—Sierra Adobe and Sun City. In these offices, the carriers use traditional pedal bicycles to deliver their routes. The city carrier assigned to the bicycle route will case and prepare the mail in the morning. The mail is then transported and distributed by a relay driver to a series of relay boxes for the bicycle carrier to retrieve throughout the day.

These bicycle routes are currently delivered by traditional letter carrier pedal power; however, with advances in technology and the shifting mail mix from letter mail to parcels, the Postal Service is exploring the idea of making a change. In a letter dated June 2, the Postal Service informed me of its intent to purchase and test two models of electric bicycles (eBikes) beginning in August. A total of four eBikes (two of each model) will be tested in the two Florida locations with existing bicycle routes.



The Short Model of the USPS eBike, shown outside the Miami Beach, FL, post office

USPS headquarters engineers began preparing the eBikes and training local driver safety instructors (DSIs) on Aug. 3. On Aug. 4, USPS held kickoff events in the local offices with the district managers, local and headquarters NALC representatives, and the bicycle carriers involved. Over the next few days, each carrier involved in the test process was then given familiarization training on the operation of the eBike models by the local DSI.



A carrier takes the eBike for a test drive through the St. Petersburg, FL, station.

The carriers began using the eBikes for delivery on Aug. 7, and USPS anticipates it will continue testing the eBikes for approximately six months in the two locations.

Each eBike test model contains two batteries, one that powers the bike's electric motor and accessories, and one that powers the lights. The eBikes

have a rear-facing camera that is always on when the bike is turned on and displays to the driver on the right-hand side. The eBikes are equipped with rear brake lights, turn signals that display on the mirrors as well as at the rear of the vehicle, flashers, front headlights and an alarm system. The electric motor has five different settings that provide variable amounts of power assistance to the operator. The "walk assist" mode allows the carrier to move the bicycle a few feet without pedaling.

USPS hopes to use the eBikes to improve street efficiencies, reduce fuel usage and reduce the cost of delivery operations. The eBike models being tested are equipped with cargo containers that USPS believes will allow it to reduce the number of relay boxes, which would then reduce costs related to gas consumption and labor needed to transport the mail and parcels to the associated relay boxes. USPS has stated that these eBikes will offer an additional eco-friendly city delivery transportation option.

While there are still many things to consider and evaluate with these new eBikes, I am hopeful that the Postal Service will continue exploring eco-friendly options for city delivery. I enjoy hearing feedback from the carriers who are participating in the tests. Thank you to the Florida bicycle carriers for welcoming NALC representatives and providing valuable insight, as well as for their dedication every day as they pedal many miles through their communities delivering the mail. As always, my heartfelt thanks goes out to all city carriers, as you continue to provide excellent service to the American people despite the many challenges.