

# Mercedes Benz eSprinter pilot test



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**I want to start by thanking every** letter carrier for your hard work and commitment in delivering the mail and parcels to your customers. For this month's column, I will discuss a pilot test recently initiated by the Postal Service using a commercial off-the-shelf vehicle.

## Mercedes Benz USA (MBUSA) eSprinter van

In December, the Postal Service detailed its intent to conduct a test using the Mercedes Benz eSprinter van at the Vienna Post Office in Vienna, VA. NALC was invited to attend a demonstration that provided an overview of the van on Dec.

18. NALC City Delivery attended this briefing, reviewed the test model and provided feedback to the Postal Service. Two eSprinter vans were presented for observation by a representative from the Mercedes Benz manufacturer and several officials from USPS.

The eSprinter van is a left-hand drive battery electric vehicle with 488 cubic feet of cargo space. The rear-wheel drive eSprinter is slightly shorter than the Next Generation Delivery Vehicle (NGDV) at 8 feet and 9 inches tall, however, the eSprinter is much longer than the NGDV at 23 feet long. A key fob is required to access and operate the van; it relies on a push button ignition to start the engine. The eSprinter has three driving modes: Comfort, Eco and Max Range. Comfort mode provides full heating and air conditioning output for the driver while maximizing torque and the van's power availability. Eco mode limits some power to the van's comfort options and shifts them to improving its efficiency and increasing battery life. Max Range mode heavily reduces torque and comfort feature output so that its focus is on maximizing the driving range. Additionally, there are four regenerative braking options equipped on the eSprinter that help extend the charge of the battery throughout the day. The eSprinter is expected to travel 233 miles on full charge.

The cabin has both a driver and passenger seat with manual controls to adjust for comfort. Controls for power locks and windows are located on each cabin door. The driver's-side door has additional controls for heated seating and powered side mirrors. The touchscreen monitor located in the center of the eSprinter's dashboard displays a rear camera view when in reverse, like most newer



passenger vehicles on the road today. The cabin monitor also features a digital clock, navigational tools, audio display and the current battery charge. Below the monitor are cup holders and a control panel for features such as audio volume, climate control and hazard lights.

A sliding bulkhead door separates the cabin from the cargo area like other models in the USPS fleet. The cargo area is 6.5 feet tall, so it should accommodate most carriers. There are seven lights installed throughout the cargo area to aid visibility. The area contains two levels of adjustable shelving with four shelves along the roadside of the vehicle and two along the curbside. Two hinged doors, which open outward up to 180 degrees, are at the rear of the vehicle. There is a sliding curbside cargo door with two steps and a handle inside the vehicle for dismount, while a third retractable step extends to the curb from underneath the vehicle when the sliding door opens. If the vehicle is parked too close to the curb, the third step will not extend and the curbside door will not open. The retractable step was identified as an issue to the Postal Service during the observation.



Letter carriers shared early feedback on their experience with the test model. The carriers have had to adjust to the eSprinter's length and its retractable third step. While each carrier spoke favorably about the van's handling, they explained that it is more difficult to clear the rear of the van when turning and harder to find suitable parking on the street. The retractable step causes the carriers to park farther away from the curb so that they can use the curbside cargo door. The carriers haven't experienced any battery issues and charge the van only once a week. Any carriers assigned to drive the eSprinter Van will be asked to complete a survey each time the vehicle is driven during the pilot test.

**I want to give thanks to our carriers for sharing their** experiences. The pilot test is expected to continue through June of this year. My staff and I will monitor the test and provide updates to the membership. Be sure to read my article each month and visit [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) for more information.