

“Delivering for America” restructuring program at US Postal Service shifting into high gear in 2024, according to report by Postmaster General

Jane Wise
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Postmaster General Louis DeJoy addressed an open session of the Postal Service Board of Governors on February 8, during which he reviewed postal service in the past year. He also outlined changes coming this year under the Delivering for America restructuring plan.

PMG DeJoy’s remarks focused on the United States Postal Service’s first quarter of 2024, which includes its “peak season” that extended from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Eve 2023. Mail volume increases well over 20 percent during this period, taxing mail handlers and carriers with grueling shifts and overtime. The *World Socialist Web Site* previously reported on the brutal working conditions experienced by postal workers last December.

According to DeJoy, the USPS “took the necessary operating risks” during the peak season to cut costs as mail volume increased during the holidays. One of those risks was to “minimiz[e] peak season staffing” by sharply reducing the number of seasonal hires from 40,000 to 10,000.

DeJoy celebrated that package revenue was up in 2023. The postal service handled 7 percent more packages even as he reduced the total labor power of USPS by 8 million work hours. DeJoy’s work hour reduction came at the expense in particular of rural carriers, who saw their hours brutally cut by the rollout of the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS) last spring, but the cuts have impacted every portion of USPS.

RRECS has slashed wages for 66 percent of rural carriers with some carriers losing as much as \$20,000

from their pay. Many saw their hours increase to 60 or more hours a week under the new system only to find they would not be compensated for more than 48 hours.

The Postmaster General did not directly address the delays that have plagued cities across the country during the peak season last year, which has continued into the new year. According to the USPS, on-time delivery of First-Class Mail dropped to 85.4 percent from 91 percent the previous year. On the other hand, DeJoy bragged that packages enjoyed 95.2 percent on-time delivery in the same period, further confirming that the USPS is being transformed into a package delivery service.

DeJoy blamed the shutdown last October of the USPS St. Louis Network Distribution Center in Hazelwood, Missouri on a mercury spill, leading to the spike of delays experienced throughout the peak season. He avoided addressing massive slowdowns in major centers such as Richmond, Virginia and Houston, Texas.

In reality, these are deeply connected with the overall aims of Delivering for America, one of which is to greatly reduce the size of the USPS network by closing thousands of local post offices and concentrating operations in a handful of large, highly-automated processing centers.

Last fall, Richmond became one of the first mail centers to transition into a Regional Processing and Distribution Center (RPDC), one of a total of 60 hubs that will service regions around the country along a new hub and spoke system patterned after Amazon and UPS. Delays caused by equipment upgrades crippled the package sorting operations due to insufficient training on the new high output sorting (HOPS) machines.

USPS also launched its “Optimized Collections” initiative in Richmond one month before the start of the

peak season. There is a significant shift in the way mail is transported between post offices and processing centers, and was another major contributor to late and missing mail over the holidays. One effect of “optimized collections” is that outgoing mail now sits in local post offices overnight to be picked up the following morning.

Mail routed through Houston, Texas also slowed to a crawl after a new package processing machine that was delivered did not fit into the building. Two existing parcel sorting machines were removed in order to make room for the new sorter, leaving the facility with no way to handle the increased volume of mail and packages over the holidays and causing unprocessed mail to sit for weeks.

The North Houston Processing & Distribution Center (P&DC) is slated to be transitioned to an RPDC. The facility’s transition began almost a year ago in February during the first wave of the implementation of the USPS hub and spoke network.

In his address to the Board of Governors, DeJoy announced that the USPS intends to take nine RPDC regions to “an improved future state” in 2024. These regions include Indianapolis, Jacksonville, and Houston. He also intends to activate more than 40 Sorting and Delivery Centers (S&DC) this year.

What this means is that at least 40 more cities in the US this year will see a significant reduction in service. The WSWS has reported on Knoxville, Tennessee, whose outgoing mail is now being shipped to Louisville, Kentucky, more than three and a half hours away, for processing. Similarly, outgoing mail from Buffalo, New York will be shipped to Rochester, over an hour away, to be processed. West Virginia is slated to lose its only mail processing center in Charleston. The state’s mail will be processed in Sorting and Delivery Centers in Pennsylvania.

In meetings set up by the USPS to take public comment about the changes in these cities, residents and USPS workers have been “assured” that layoffs of full time employees will be minimal. In reality, DeJoy has already made clear he intends to cut the size of the workforce by 50,000 or more, in order for the post office to “break even.”

DeJoy cynically claimed that a benefit of the DFA plan is the reduction of greenhouse gasses as mail processing is centralized into fewer S&DCs and RPDCs, and as optimized collections eliminate afternoon mail pickup from local post offices. In reality, this will be offset by longer commutes by postal workers to get to their jobs, and longer routes for letter carriers, especially in rural

areas.

In his remarks, PMG DeJoy notes that the US is in an election year and promised that “we will continue to deliver the nation’s election mail for the upcoming 2024 elections in the same successful manner we have accomplished in the past.” In reality, DeJoy, a prominent Trump supporter, conducted unexplained reductions to service in the leadup to the 2020 election. This added grist to Trump’s groundless claims that the election was “stolen” through the use of mail-in ballots.

Other critical mail deliveries are already being impacted. For example, more than half of 870 cancer screening tests routed through Richmond were invalidated because they were returned to the testing center months after the two-week return deadline, putting the health of hundreds of people at risk.

Near the end of his address, DeJoy openly exposed the breadth of the disruption experienced by the public throughout the US when he said: “To those in the nation that are affected by our intermittent service impacts, we apologize and are working hard to improve our service to you. For the over 50 percent of Americans who receive their mail and packages early—you are beginning to experience the future performance of the United States Postal Service.”

In other words, almost 50 percent of Americans experienced “intermittent service impacts” last year!

DeJoy’s unwavering focus on cost-cutting and increased revenue is aimed at attracting private investors, as his DFA plan aims to transform the USPS from a public service into an operation driven by shareholder profits and a super-exploited workforce.

In order to prevent the Amazonification of the USPS, the working class must organize to protect public services, job security, safety, and wages. In the words of the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee founding statement: “We must prepare action from below to assert the will of 635,000 career and non-career USPS workers to make sure our needs and interests take absolute priority and not the slash-and-burn policies of corporate-controlled politicians.”



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