Mail delays mount only weeks after the latest post office distribution center opens near Atlanta

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Build a fight in the working class against Delivering for America! Contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form at the bottom of this article.

The United States Postal Service opened a new Regional Distribution and Processing Center (RDPC) on February 24 to the southwest of Atlanta in Palmetto, Georgia. The facility is one of 60 such facilities that will serve as regional hubs under the massive Delivering for America (DFA) restructuring plan. DFA aims to make the postal service profitable by closing thousands of local post offices, consolidating operations into a smaller number of large facilities and eliminating tens of thousands of jobs.

Within weeks of its opening, reports of lost and delayed mail in the Atlanta area began to hit the media. Next, images of hundreds of semi-trucks lining the road to the new facility for a quarter mile or more started popping up in news feeds.

Mitchell Taylor, President of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) told local news station WSB-TV 2 that the trucks are "supposed to stay there for 30 minutes and be gone." Instead, trucks are sitting in line for hours waiting to offload and load mail.

Drivers have reported waiting in line six to eight hours, and in a few cases, have changed shifts while waiting. Drivers getting paid by delivery are losing money as they sit in line.

According to the APWU, the delays are the result of short-staffing directly related to the DFA consolidation plan for the Atlanta region. Taylor told WSB-TV 2 that the shift of operations to the RDPC "left a void" in the network as machinery was moved out of processing and delivery centers (PDC) in the region and workers were transferred to other facilities or laid off.

A newsletter from the company ALG Logistics Worldwide reported that four PDCs in the region are being renovated into Local Processing Centers (LPCs) as the Palmetto facility came online. Mail that would have previously been processed in PDCs in Macon, Augusta, Atlanta, and North Metro, major urban centers in Georgia, are now being funneled into the Palmetto RPDC to be processed.

As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the roll-out of the Delivering for America plan has been a disaster. Much of the country has experienced disruptions and delays of mail service in recent months, including in Richmond, Virginia and Houston, Texas.

Currently, the RPDC in Sandston, Virginia, located roughly 16 miles east of Richmond, is undergoing an investigation by the Inspector General over the monumental disruption of mail processing at the facility during the holiday season. Customers reported receiving their medicines, checks and bills weeks late, and in some cases, not at all. This has caused people to incur late fees and threatened their health and financial stability.

One of the most egregious examples of the delays in Richmond was the unexpected arrival at the VA Medical Center of 870 immunochemical screenings for colon cancer earlier this year. Among them were 450 test samples dating back to midsummer 2023. Half of the screenings submitted by veterans were over six months old and invalid.

The Sandston facility was one of the first RPDCs to go online in August 2023. As reported by the WSWS, the introduction of new package processing machines was a major factor behind the slowdowns.

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Additionally, Richmond was the first region in the US to shift to Optimized Collections, which effectively ends evening pickup of mail at post offices for transportation to a processing center. This system will slow mail for many rural communities, which are not located near a sorting and delivery center.

Georgia shifted to Optimized Collections, a.k.a. Local Transportation Optimization (LTO) starting February 1, 2024. The LTO initiative will discontinue evening pickups of mail from post offices. Instead, mail and packages from these offices, along with mail collected by carriers, will be picked up the following morning, when the truck from the processing center delivers the day's mail for carrier delivery and PO boxes.

According to the blog Save the Post Office, more than half the state's post offices will no longer get an evening collection, meaning mail sent on one day will sit in the post office until the next morning.

What's more, customers affected by LTO are not being notified of the change in their service. A Postal Regulatory Commission inquiry into LTO was shown a sample customer communication which was intended to be used only to field customer complaints, rather than proactively notify all customers of the change.

In the Houston region, the North Houston PDC is being converted to an RPDC while the nearby Missouri City facility will become a local processing center. Similar to the transition to the Palmetto RPDC, the change in Houston left the RPDC short-staffed during the holiday peak season.

Additionally, as reported by the WSWS, machinery upgrades at the RPDC left the facility without enough machines to process packages.

In an indication of the massive impact of the restructuring on service, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy recently admitted to service impacts indirectly in a recent speech when he "bragged" that less than half of Americans "are beginning to experience the future performance of the United States Postal Service."

The working class must unite to safeguard public services such as the USPS from the attempts by the ruling elite to sell it off to the highest bidder. The fight is being led by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded last year by postal workers independently of the union functionaries.

In its founding statement, the committee decreed, "The only way forward is to organize ourselves, put forward our own program of demands, and place rank-and-file workers in every position critical to our job security, safety, wages, bargaining and so on. 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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