

Alternate Facts? USPS “Upgrades” to Fossil Fuel Fleet

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Reality Check!! “Our fleet modernization also reflects the Postal Service’s commitment to a more environmentally sustainable mix of vehicles,” DeJoy said. “Because we operate one of the largest civilian government fleets in the world, we are committed to pursuing near-term and long-term opportunities to reduce our impact on the environment.” (<https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2021/0223-multi-billion-dollar-modernization-of-postal-delivery-vehicle-fleet.htm>)

Reality check!! According to the numerous articles published about the United States Postal Service (USPS) barging forward with their “antediluvian” plan to make 90% of their “upgraded” fleet fossil fuel combustion engine vehicles, USPS ignored legal, mandatory, EPA Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) requirements before awarding and funding \$482 million dollars to produce gas powered replacements for up to 165,000 vehicles. The snarky statement by the USPS representative sums up the arrogance of the decision: “While we can understand why some who are not responsible for the financial sustainability of the Postal Service might prefer that we acquire more electric vehicles, the law requires us to be self-sufficient...For that reason, given our current financial condition, the total cost of ownership of our delivery vehicle fleet must be a part of our analysis.”

Reality Check!! The current Gasbuddy.com charts for gas prices tell us that gas prices in the past 3 months, during which time USPS awarded this contract, between 12/25/2021 at \$3.25 per gallon and 03/25/2022 at \$4.24 per gallon is a more than 25% increase due to volatility and world supply issues. (<https://www.gasbuddy.com/charts>) This will certainly affect the “financial sustainability” of choosing fossil fuels over EVs.

Alternate Facts!! “As the Postal Service has backtracked on its initial plans for the fleet, it has retooled its public relations campaign. In the fall it ran ads in outlets such as Time magazine, showing a lush forest with the line, “New routes to a sustainable world.”

“We’re committed to building a new fleet for a better environment, with more fuel-efficient vehicles driving by cutting-edge technologies,” the ad said, directing readers to a website for more information on the trucks.

But the site barely discusses the new fleet. “American business is changing,” reads the top of the page, “and USPS is changing with it.”

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/02/02/usps-trucks-epa-climate-change/>)

The EPA sent a letter to the USPS that “said that the whole reason to buy new mail trucks was to make them cleaner, better, and safer. The EPA said last fall that it had a problem with how the USPS conducted an earlier EIS about the truck purchase and that “the final EIS remains seriously deficient. Specifically,” it went on, “the final EIS does not disclose essential information underlying the key analysis of Total Cost of Ownership, underestimates greenhouse-gas emissions, fails to consider more environmentally protective feasible alternatives, and inadequately considers impacts on communities with environmental justice concerns,” the EPA letter said. “

(<https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a38975569/us-postal-service-mail-trucks-epa-electric/>)

The New York Times published a full pdf version of the February 2, 2022, EPA letter. (<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/epa-letter-usps/c3d0d76b005345e5/full.pdf>) “Key deficiencies include the fact that contrary to requirements, a contract for this proposal was awarded prior to the NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] process, critical features of the contract are not disclosed in the EIS, important data and economic assumptions are missing in the EIS, and the EIS failed to consider a single feasible alternative to the proposed action...As noted, the Postal Service has already awarded a vehicle acquisition contract and funded as much as \$482 million to the vendor prior to initiating the NEPA process exactly what CEQ regulations prohibit. Contrary to NEPA regulatory

requirement to identify methodologies used and make explicit reference to sources relied upon for conclusions in an EIS, the Postal Service also chose to inappropriately limit disclosure of such information, effectively preventing the public, federal agencies, and decisionmakers from understanding and evaluating the Postal Service's ability and flexibility to purchase additional clean vehicles."

According to multiple resources consulted in our writing, all of which have been cited throughout the article, the USPS plan calls for only 10% of the new fleet to be electric. The "upgrades" will offer only a 0.4-mile-per-gallon fuel economy improvement over the 30 year old vehicles in the current fleet. The new air-conditioned vehicles would average just 8.6 mpg. Industry standards for a gas powered vehicle are quoted at between 12 and 14 mpg. Without improvement in those statistics the trucks will burn 110 million gallons of gasoline per year. "EPA estimates show the greenhouse emissions from the Postal Service's new gas-powered trucks would total nearly 20 million metric tons over the vehicles' projected 20-year life span, roughly equaling the annual emissions from 4.3 million passenger vehicles." (Washington Post)

"Representative Gerald Connolly, the Virginia Democrat who leads the House subcommittee overseeing the United States Postal Service, called the move to invest in more gas-powered trucks "antediluvian" [very old fashioned <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/antediluvian>] and a threat to the government's ability to tackle climate change. "

"The E.P.A. estimated the climate damages that would be caused by the new fleet at \$900 million." (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/climate/postal-service-trucks-electric-climate.html>)

"Gina Coplon-Newfield, director of the Sierra Club's Clean Transportation For All campaign, says postal delivery trucks are the "perfect use case" for electric vehicles.

"They don't travel far distances in any given day. They sit idle overnight when they can charge," she tells NPR. "And they travel through neighborhoods exposing people to air pollution. So shifting to a 100% electric USPS fleet should really be a no brainer."

(<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/10/974901459/when-it-comes-to-clean-energy-usps-delivery-trucks-dont-yet-answer-the-mail>)

The Postal Reform Act of 2022, which passed the Senate March 8th, while addressing meaningful change to the USPS to improve its financial viability, does not have anything to do with the electrification of its fleet. "There are also other issues that aren't addressed in this bill, including making postal vehicles electric and protecting voting by mail."

(<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/09/1085544583/the-senate-has-passed-bill-to-save-usps-billions-of-dollars-and-reform-deliverie>; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3076/text>)

"Established in 1775 to promote the free exchange of ideas across the colonies, the Postal Service is among the country's oldest government institutions -- yet it operates with few of the financial benefits of being a federal agency while still bearing many of the costs...Unlike private courier services such as UPS and FedEx, the USPS cannot excise unprofitable routes because Congress stipulates that the Postal Service delivers to all homes in America -- including a remote community in the Grand Canyon, where the mail is delivered by mule." (<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/14/politics/usps-reform-act-explainer/index.html> ; <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/06/business/congress-usps-funding-problems/index.html>)

We are sure that when financial numbers are crunched, the unfortunate decision made by the USPS to replace gas guzzlers with more gas guzzlers is going to bust the budget, not help it. This is a tragic missed opportunity. Given the current global scenario, it is time to invest in alternatives to fossil fuels, not more gas guzzlers.

Beck, Thomas W., Together We Build, “Alternate Facts USPS Upgrades to Fossil Fuel Fleet”, *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, April 11, 2022, <https://www.eptrail.com/2022/04/11/together-we-build-alternate-facts-usps-upgrades-to-fossil-fuel-fleet/>