International Post Corporation

Royal Mail rolls out advanced technology to speed up parcel sorting in its Bristol Mail Centre

18-07-2019

Royal Mail has installed automated parcel sortation machinery in its Bristol Mail Centre to speed up the processing of parcels. The new technology replaces a manual sorting process that can be both time consuming and physically demanding, often requiring two separate sorts to get parcels in the right place for despatch.

It will also increase Royal Mail's capacity to process parcels at peak volumes by enhancing efficiency. Currently about 12 per cent of our parcels are machine sorted. The Company plans to increase that to over 80 per cent within five years. This has obvious productivity benefits.

The Parcel Sorting Machine (PSM) is an intelligent system of conveyor belts and scanning technology that automatically sorts parcels for despatch to mail centres across the country.

The move comes as the Company upgrades its national network by rolling out parcel sorting machinery to all mail centres across the UK. The technology is being deployed to manage better the growing volumes of parcels that enter the Royal Mail network on a daily basis. It brings the sortation of parcels more in line with the sortation of letters, 90% of which are processed by automated machinery.

As the Universal Service Provider, the Company provides the delivery backbone for e-commerce in the UK. Parcels generated by UK retailers continue to be a key growth area for the Company. Within all size categories, next day parcels are expected to significantly outpace growth in other delivery time categories.

The parcel sorting technology is now operational in 12 Mail Centres in Bristol, Swindon, Hemel Hempstead, Chelmsford, Greenford, Warrington, South Midlands (Northampton), Jubilee, Gatwick, Birmingham, Leeds and Preston.

Faster parcel sorting

The new technology replaces a manual sorting process that can be both time consuming and arduous, often requiring two separate sorts to get parcels in the right place for despatch.

Under the new system, parcels are tipped onto a conveyor belt at the front end of the machine before being manually placed onto individual cells on two conveyor belts. The parcels then enter Dimension Weight Scan areas which use bar scanning technology to read the destination of 2D barcoded items. For those items that do not have a barcode, the machine uses Optical Character Recognition technology to read the postcodes.

Once the machine has registered the destination address of a parcel, the item travels along the conveyor belt on the sorter until it reaches the appropriate container. At this point, the tray opens up and the parcel drops into the container ready to be taken to vehicles for despatch.

The machine is capable of sorting parcels to 81 different destinations within the Royal Mail network, covering the entire length and breadth of the country. It can handle parcels from the size of a CD up to an item slightly bigger than a 45cm by 35cm by 20cm tray - around the size of two shoe boxes side by side or a school rucksack - with a weight range of up to 3kg.

Additional benefits

With its bar scanning technology, the machine is also able to process tracked items much more quickly.

"The roll out of this new technology is transforming the way Royal Mail processes parcels which are continuing to grow in volumes," said Simon Barker, National Operations Director, Royal Mail. "The technology will help us to speed up the passage of parcels to local mail centres. We have worked closely with our unions throughout this programme, and colleagues who work on the machine have said they prefer the quality of work compared to manual sorting."

As part of its five-year strategic plan, the Company is investing around £1.8 billion over five years in the UK's postal service. The c £1.8 billion investment programme will focus on customer service improvements, digital initiatives, network enhancements and new ways of working to deliver more productivity and efficiency. This initiative will help fund the UK's Universal Service. The planned investment brings to almost £4 billion the amount Royal Mail has invested in the UK since 2013, the year of its flotation, when it became one of the most widely-held FTSE stocks.

Source: Royal Mail

CLASSIFICATION: CORPORATE | WWW.IPC.BE © 2026