NATIONAL DELIVERY EXPRESS / LOGISTICS & DELIVERY INSIDER

THE LOADING DOCK

THE CHANGING BUSINESS OF DELIVERY

Returns, faster delivery expectations, and a major Alabama freight investment are reshaping how goods move.



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RETURNS BECOME A LOGISTICS STRATEGY

A new UPS-TikTok Shop agreement shows why returns are becoming an operating system of their own - not simply the last step after a sale.



WHAT CHANGED

UPS announced a partnership to provide no-box, no-label returns for TikTok Shop sellers in the United States. Through Happy Returns, shoppers can bring eligible merchandise to roughly 10,000 return locations. Items are scanned, bagged, consolidated and moved in bulk to processing hubs.

THE BIGGER SHIFT

Consolidation changes the economics of the return trip. Instead of sending every item through the network separately, operators can combine products, identify the next destination sooner and reduce unnecessary movement. The partnership also uses automated and manual review to help address return fraud and accelerate restocking.

WHY BUSINESSES ARE PAYING ATTENTION

Retail returns totaled about $850 billion in 2025, according to the National Retail Federation figure cited by Reuters. Nearly one in five online purchases was returned. A separate estimate cited by Reuters put the average cost of a return at 27% of the product's purchase price.

NDE ANALYSIS

For regional businesses, the useful lesson is not that every return needs a consumer drop-off network. It is that returns should have a defined transportation path. Scheduled pickups, consolidation points and clear disposition instructions can turn scattered reverse movements into a planned workflow. NDE must confirm the requested pickup schedule, locations, freight profile and return destination before service begins.

A RETURN PROGRAM NEEDS THREE DECISIONS

1. **COLLECTION**
   Where and when will returned items be gathered?
2. **CONSOLIDATION**
   Can items moving to the same destination travel together?
3. **DISPOSITION**
   Will the item be restocked, repaired, redirected or removed?

SOURCE: Reuters, Sept. 29, 2026 - UPS and TikTok Shop returns agreement. Figures are attributed in Reuters reporting.



SAME-DAY DELIVERY ENTERS A NEW PHASE

A reported postal pilot tests what happens when packages enter the network later in the day but are still expected to reach customers before nightfall.

THE REPORTED TEST

Postal trade outlets citing USPS Correspondence 5381 describe an Amazon PM Delivery Pilot. Under the reported process, Amazon packages arrive around midday, clerks sort them manually, and city carriers deliver them during an afternoon-evening window.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

The test should not be described as a nationwide service commitment or proof that every market can support the same schedule. Pilot operations are designed to reveal staffing, sorting, route and cost challenges before broader decisions are made.

REPORTED PILOT FLOW

12-1 PM
PACKAGES ARRIVE

MIDDAY
MANUAL SORT

2-8 PM
DELIVERY WINDOW

The schedule above reflects public reporting about the pilot. Actual locations, volumes and operating results may vary.

THE BUSINESS QUESTION

Later order cutoffs can be valuable, but they compress the time available for receiving, sorting and route execution. The operational question is not simply, “Can it move today?” It is whether the package, receiver, route and exception process are ready before the promised window begins.

NDE TAKEAWAY

Businesses considering time-sensitive service should bring NDE the cutoff time, shipment profile, destination list and required completion window. Availability and timing require direct confirmation.

SOURCE: Postal trade reporting, Sept. 2026, citing USPS Correspondence 5381. Pilot details remain subject to change.



ALABAMA FREIGHT INFRASTRUCTURE MOVES FORWARD

A federal loan of up to $2.52 billion advances the Mobile River Bridge and Bayway Project - a major regional investment tied directly to freight access and Gulf Coast movement.

$2.52B
MAXIMUM TIFIA LOAN

6 LANES
NEW MOBILE RIVER BRIDGE

7.5 MILES
BAYWAY TO BE RESTRIPED

UP TO 30 MIN
PROJECTED TRAVEL-TIME SAVINGS

WHAT THE PROJECT CHANGES

The project calls for a new six-lane, cable-stayed bridge over the Mobile River, interchange and traffic-flow improvements, and additional Bayway capacity. Federal transportation officials say the work will reduce a major I-10 bottleneck and improve access to the Port of Mobile.

WHY IT MATTERS TO FREIGHT

Hazardous materials are currently prohibited from the George Wallace Tunnel, forcing hundreds of trucks to use alternate routes. The planned corridor would create a more direct interstate option while expanding hurricane-evacuation capacity and supporting port-related commerce.

REGIONAL NDE PERSPECTIVE

Infrastructure announcements do not change delivery conditions overnight. Construction schedules, traffic patterns and project completion still matter. But the investment signals the long-term importance of the Gulf Coast freight corridor. Businesses moving goods through Alabama and the Mississippi Gulf Coast should continue reviewing lanes, delivery windows and alternate routes as work progresses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Sept. 18, 2026. Project scope and estimates are agency statements.