

## GUEST COMMENTARY

with **Ruth Y. Goldway**



### Stimulus Green Stamps

President Obama's energy plan calls for putting one million electric plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015. General Motors produced and tested such cars in California in the '90s but, as described in the 2006 documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?* the industry didn't move forward. The U.S. Postal Service and Ford Motor Company conducted trials of an electric vehicle from 2000-02 but did not expand the project. Now, after witnessing the effects of \$100-a-barrel oil and evaluating improvements in batteries and charging technology, Silicon Valley companies such as Better Place are demonstrating in countries like Israel and Denmark that converting to electric vehicles is technologically realistic. And here in the US, it can be implemented very quickly if some of the approximately \$80 billion included in the energy development package in the Stimulus Bill that President Obama signed in February and in other promised spending programs go to greening the second largest company in the nation — the Postal Service.

The Postal Service has one of the largest real estate inventories (with over 30,000 buildings) and the largest civilian vehicle fleet in the nation. The fleet is so large that just converting its 142,000 LLV-type delivery trucks to electricity would reduce gasoline consumption by up to 68 million gallons a year, reduce air pollution and save the Postal Service millions of dollars annually. In a short time, USPS could deliver your mail and packages in vehicles that are powered by electricity from solar panels installed on the roofs of mail sorting centers and local post offices — a self-sufficient loop.

You could plug in your new electric car at the local post office while you buy stamps, drop off return parcels and recyclable products that the USPS ships back to their source. Green jobs — outfitting buildings and converting trucks — would be created in neighborhoods nationwide.

No earmarks, no questionable contracts involved — rather a trusted, independent agency would spend money efficiently and effectively on a proven, ready-to-go technology that will clean the air and save dollars. Having received federal funds for these capital improvements, the Postal Service could focus more on programs to conserve natural resources.

It could refashion its networked delivery system to better interface with logistics companies, with UPS and FedEx and with government agencies to support local needs.



*The four cent stamp portrays an electric automobile, or more appropriately, an "Electric Vehicle Service," as illustrated in the turn of the century Baltimore and Ohio Railroad flyer.*

The Postal Service reaches every address in the nation. Its carbon footprint per household is relatively small and could be put to use in a myriad of ways that reduce an individual's need to drive while delivering better services and information to and from the door.

Unfortunately, the Stimulus Bill omits any specific reference to the Postal Service. However, the bill does include approximately \$300 million for greening "GSA Federal Fleets" and \$5.5 billion for "GSA Federal Buildings" and billions more for retrofitting and solar energy investment.

The Postal Service has already made its own admirable green efforts to reduce consumption by providing fully recyclable "Cradle-to-Cradle" packaging, investing in paperless data tracking and billing, supporting innovative two-way envelopes and initiating a "mail-back" program to collect and recycle a growing number of small electronics, such as ink cartridges and cell phones, and to allow proper disposal of unneeded pharmaceuticals.

But with dropping mail volumes creating a cash crunch, the Postal Service can't be expected to go green on its own. The administration should direct that some of the stimulus funds and other energy conservation efforts it enacts in the coming months go to every community around the country by investing in the Postal Service.

Neighborhood post offices could become local green hubs; thousands of electric-powered delivery trucks could take to the road; and we could all share, in a tangible way, in the benefits of the President's visionary energy plan. ■

**RUTH Y. GOLDWAY** is a member of the United States Postal Regulatory Commission. This represents her individual opinion.