



JIMMY LAROUÉ/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

FedEx Ground deliveries in Suffolk and Hampton Roads have been delayed by weeks, and sometimes months, by a bevy of issues – company officials cite increased online purchasing due to COVID-19, while others said the issues predate the pandemic.

# FedEx Ground-ed? Deliveries not getting to destinations

**BY JIMMY LAROUÉ**  
STAFF WRITER

Your guess is as good as his when it comes to whether Tidewater Tire Center owner Tim Drames will get his FedEx Ground deliveries to his Suffolk business on North Main Street,

or when those shipments will arrive.

And that's not good for a family-run business that has staked a reputation on doing quality, reliable work in a timely manner. Drames said some customers have been understanding about the situation; others have

not been as kind.

"I can't even give them a specific week. That's pretty bad when I used to be able to give a specific time and date," Drames said. "I used to be able to go, 'Well, by 12 o'clock on

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# Ground-ed: Hundreds frustrated with delays

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Wednesday, I should have your stuff. We should be able to get you in and out that afternoon.' I can't even tell them a specific week. At this point, I can't even tell them if I can get it done this month."

Drames estimated that he's spent about \$4,000 on orders for his business and another \$1,000 on personal orders that he hasn't received since April 22 from FedEx Ground, which uses independent contractors to deliver goods to Suffolk addresses and the Hampton Roads region from its warehouse in Hampton off of Floyd Thompson Boulevard.

After hours waiting for the phone to ring and speaking with representatives at FedEx, no one from either the company's corporate office or its Hampton warehouse has given him answers.

A FedEx Express driver, who requested anonymity to speak about company issues they were not authorized to discuss, said they had spoken with a FedEx Ground driver with a Suffolk route. The Express driver, who works out of a Norfolk facility and has a route in Suffolk, was told there was a new contractor for FedEx Ground delivery in the area. The Express driver was also told that all of the FedEx Ground drivers serving Suffolk had quit, including the person the Express driver had spoken with.

Drames said he spoke with another person with FedEx Air who told him that more than 40 people had either quit or were fired at the Hampton warehouse.

The Express driver also said at least some of the backlog of undelivered packages at the Hampton warehouse predates the coronavirus pandemic.

A FedEx Ground spokesman, in a statement, admitted to challenges in delivering packages to addresses in Suffolk and the Hampton region.

"FedEx Ground is experiencing a surge of pack-

age volume due to e-commerce growth during the current pandemic, while navigating associated business closures and other constraints that have impacted operations in the Hampton, Virginia area," said FedEx Ground spokesman David Westrick in a statement. "We offer our sincerest apologies for any inconvenience caused by recent service delays and appreciate our customers' patience as we work with our service providers to implement contingency plans designed to restore service levels."

Westrick said people who have concerns about their shipments should visit [fedex.com](http://fedex.com) for more information or call the FedEx customer service number at 1-800-GoFedEx.

Alan Miles had ordered a pair of bicycles from Walmart.com about two weeks ago and received notice at the time that they would be shipped by FedEx Ground to his home on White Marsh Road with two-day delivery.

Sounds good, he thought.

Shortly after, he said his wife received another notice from Walmart letting them know the bicycles wouldn't arrive until May 4.

Again, that was fine with them, Miles said. They weren't in a rush to receive the bicycles, especially since they were non-essential items.

However, he and his wife subsequently got emails saying their bicycles would be delivered "the next day."

Those next days came and went without bicycles, so Miles called FedEx's 800 number, and when he spoke to someone, again, he was told the bicycles were at the Hampton FedEx Ground warehouse and they would arrive the next day.

"I called them two or three times, and they kept on telling me the same thing," Miles said.

When Miles' bicycles still did not arrive, his daughter reached out to a friend who worked for FedEx Ground to get the phone number for the Hampton warehouse.

Miles said someone in Hampton returned his call, but didn't have any better news for him.

"I said, 'Look, I'll come and get 'em,'" Miles said. "I said, 'Can I come get 'em, since you all have a problem with delivering 'em?'"

Miles was told his bicycles were still on a truck, and that they didn't know when the truck would be unloaded.

Once more, he called FedEx's 800 number, and once again, he was told he would have his bicycles the next day. His wife called Walmart to try and cancel the order. However, Miles said she was told that wasn't possible because the item had been shipped, and gave her another date by which they would be delivered.

He's reached out to FedEx on several occasions — to the corporate office and to the warehouse where the bicycles are in Hampton — and still has no indication when he may get the bicycles.

"It's frustrating. ... It could be a month or more before we get the stuff," Miles said. "It went from two-day shipping, to three weeks, and then it'll be here Saturday, it'll be here Monday, then Tuesday."

Others from Suffolk on social media have shared his frustration with not

getting items they ordered weeks ago, but like Miles, have not gotten a response or their packages. One person shared a video of the Hampton FedEx warehouse where packages were sitting outside earlier this week. By Thursday evening, the packages were still visible outside, but with a canopy over top of them.

The FedEx Express driver said they often get confused for FedEx Ground drivers, and that person has received multiple complaints while hitting the 40 to 50 places on their daily route. On a daily basis, the complaints about FedEx Ground deliveries run about "20 to 30" per day. The Express driver said they had not seen a FedEx Ground truck in Suffolk in the past week.

However, Drames said he did receive a FedEx Ground delivery Tuesday.

That driver told him the company had brought in workers from out-of-state to try and clear the backlog of packages that have been at the Hampton warehouse for months, and Drames said the driver described the situation at the Hampton warehouse to him, "as a complete mess, like a tornado hit the blades."

That didn't give Drames any reassurance when or if he would get the other 10 items he was waiting for from FedEx Ground.

"The only answer I keep getting," Drames said, "is you'll basically get it when you get it."

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# Road paved way for Amazon

**BY JIMMY LAROUÉ**  
STAFF WRITER

The road that paved the way for Amazon to start building in Suffolk and Chesapeake came into being before the birth of the company — but was completed only two years ago.

In April 2017, crews began the second phase of the \$27 million project to expand Nansemond Parkway in the city from Helen Street to the Chesapeake city line, and from there, Portsmouth Boulevard began expanding from the city line to Jolliff Road. The first phase was completed in 2013, and overall, encompassed about 1.5 miles.

Without that expansion, which put Portsmouth Boulevard at four lanes all the way to Interstate 664, Suffolk Economic Development Director Kevin Hughes said Amazon would not be building in the city or in Chesapeake.

The company, which started business in 1994, would not have chosen Suffolk to build the largest industrial building in Virginia at an overall square footage of more than 3.8 million with its robotics fulfillment center.

And it would not have chosen to build a 650,000 square-foot processing center two miles away along that widened Portsmouth Boulevard in Chesapeake.

“Related to the road widening, it was decades in the making,” Hughes said Wednesday. “If the city hadn’t committed to building the industrial park in Northgate Commerce Park and come to terms with Upton Farms, and begin to invest into it, we’re probably not pushing the way we are, or were, on expanding Nansemond Parkway, or going to the city of Chesapeake to expand Portsmouth Boulevard.

“So, an action that happened 30 years ago was seen kind of pay off in that aspect.”

Hughes said Amazon did a traffic impact study that supported the two cities’ investment in expanding their roads.

“Because we expanded the intersection, because we ran it all the way to (Interstate) 664, it passed,” Hughes said. “It works. I can pretty much assure you, if we had not done those things, it would have failed.”

Hughes said it puts into per-

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spective the long-term, sticking-to-it vision that is necessary in municipal economic development and regional economic development, adding he is only building off the work that his predecessors did, and the work their predecessors did before that.

“Just because you go after a program today, doesn’t mean it’s going to pay off tomorrow,” Hughes said. “It could be a long-term goal out there.”

It showed the regional approach then, and it allowed the two cities, and others, to expand that regional approach that lured Amazon to be in both places now.

When the project is complete, Suffolk will have the two largest industrial buildings in Virginia, the other being Target Upstream Distribution Center at about 2.3 million square feet. Of note, the city also has the largest office space in the state, at about 400,000 square feet, on the Department of Defense campus.

At about 1,500 employees for Target, according to Hughes, and 1,000 for the Amazon facility in Suffolk when it opens sometime in 2021, they will be two of the largest private sector employers in the city.

“This one was different in my experience in the fact that it had multiple regional partners,” Hughes said. “A lot of

people played a different role. You had two projects announced, one company. It’s really unusual, and then the proximity, the history behind the road widening. It was a really interesting (dynamic).”

That regionalism was on display as Chesapeake Mayor Rick West noted, with laughter from the audience at Tuesday’s press conference, that his city was trying to get Suffolk’s 1,000-full-time-job facility versus the one they did get that will create 500 full-time jobs.

“It starts to look and feel and sound like collaboration,” West said. “And, in the end of the world that commerce and trade operate in, which is economic development,

when communities collaborate together, good things happen.”

Asked Wednesday about the competition with Chesapeake for the Amazon facilities with the glow of the announcement still fresh, Hughes demurred.

“We were glad he got the facility he got,” Hughes said, laughing.

West and Suffolk Mayor Linda T. Johnson were together then, in 2018, when they cut the ribbon on the road project, and they were together again Tuesday.

“Some people don’t even know that there’s 17 jurisdictions that make up Hampton Roads,” Johnson said. “Think about it. Our transporta-

tion, economic development, trash, broadband, none of that can happen individually, so you have to work as a team. And I think the best thing that has ever happened to Hampton Roads is that we now have a team.”

Hughes, with the groundwork having been in place with the road expansion, is ready for what comes next.

“The announcement, when the governor comes down and the pomp and circumstance of it, it’s always a great high-five moment,” Hughes said. “It’s good to get everyone on the same page and excited about an announcement, then the fun really begins. The construction, the support,

the hiring, that’s when the rubber meets the road.”

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# Amazon coming to Suffolk

Company announces 1,500 jobs in Suffolk and Chesapeake locations

**BY JIMMY LAROUÉ**  
STAFF WRITER

Amazon is primed to deliver a sizeable presence of the world's largest online retailer to Suffolk.

But the company will also have a significant presence in neighboring Chesapeake, as local, state and company leaders hailed the regional effort that secured the new facilities, which will be located just

miles apart from one another.

In a deal formally announced Tuesday, Suffolk's Northgate Commerce Park will be the site of a robotics fulfillment center and will be the largest industrial building in Virginia

— second-largest overall to the Pentagon. The \$230 million facility — according to the building permit for the site — will have a footprint of 822,833 square feet and, at 95 feet and four-and-a-half stories tall, will

have an overall square footage of more than 3.8 million.

Workers at the Suffolk fulfillment center will work alongside robotics and other tech-

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JIMMY LAROUÉ/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

Northgate Commerce Park in Suffolk will be the site of Amazon's 95-foot, four-and-a-half story robotics fulfillment center, which will be the largest industrial building in Virginia, and, encompassing 3.8 million square-feet, will be the second-largest in the state to the Pentagon.

## Amazon: Officials on hand for announcement

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nologies to pick, pack and ship smaller-sized customer orders such as books, toys, electronics and home goods.

The city of Chesapeake's facility in Western Branch will be a 650,000 square-foot processing center that will handle bulk goods and break them down into smaller orders that will feed its supply chain.

Both facilities are set to open sometime next year and bring a combined 1,500 full time jobs — 1,000 in Suffolk and 500 in Chesapeake.

"This affects all of Virginia," Gov. Ralph Northam said during a press conference at Old Dominion University's Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center in Suffolk. "And when you talk about jobs, 25,000 new jobs that came to Northern Virginia with the fulfillment, the processing centers, another 10,000 jobs that create another 40,000-plus jobs in surrounding businesses, so this has been a big deal for Virginia to move our economy forward."

Ardine Williams, Amazon vice president of workforce development, touted the access of the two sites to the Port of Virginia, along with a good infrastructure and strong workforce, good education system and collaboration among localities, as reasons for locating them in Suffolk and Chesapeake.

The deal with the two cities proves, she said, how committed the company is to the state, with the company's investment of more than \$34 billion in facilities, cloud infrastructure, research facilities and employee compensation. The company has more than 10 fulfill-



JIMMY LAROUÉ/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

The members of the Suffolk City Council, along with Delegate Clinton Jenkins, left, were on hand Tuesday at Old Dominion University's Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center in Suffolk as Amazon formally announced it would build a multi-story robotics fulfillment center in Northgate Commerce Park and a processing center in nearby Western Branch in Chesapeake.

ment and sortation centers in the state, and along with the company's Arlington East Coast headquarters, it also has 13 Whole Foods Market locations in the state and three Prime Now Hubs, including one in Virginia Beach.

Williams also boasted of the company's compensation package to employees, with \$15 per hour minimum pay and benefits including full health, dental and vision, as well as a 401k package with a 50-percent company match and up to 20 weeks of paid parental leave.

"I think it really underscores our commitment to the commonwealth of Virginia," Williams said. "It also highlights, I think, the collaboration of Hampton Roads, when you think about multiple cities coming together. ... It also really enforces the quality of education here and the workforce that's available, because it's really employees that make any endeavor successful, and so having access to the workforce here in Hampton Roads is tremendously important."

Suffolk Economic Development Director Kevin Hughes said site

plans for Amazon's facility in Northgate Commerce Park were approved in December. The Conlan Company received a building permit from the city March 5 and dirt has been moving at the site, as it was Tuesday.

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership worked with both cities, along with the Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance and the Port of Virginia, to secure the Amazon projects. The company is eligible to receive benefits from the port's Economic and Infrastructure Development Zone Grant Program — the maximum allowed is \$500,000 — along with funding and services to support the company's employee training activities through the Virginia Jobs Investment Program.

Chesapeake Mayor Rick West said his city tried to get the larger facility that went to Suffolk.

"It is true, governor. There is a little bit of a rivalry here. I'm not going to stand up here and lie to you. We were pushing hard to get that

thousand-job facility," West said to laughter.

Later when posing for photos with members of Chesapeake's City Council, he got more laughs when he said, "We're number two, we're number two. ... in the state."

However, West said both projects would not have happened without the two cities working with one another, in particular on Portsmouth Boulevard. He called it a new day in the region.

"In the old days, I think mayors would have probably fought and had a lot of pushing and nothing would have been done," West said. "But today, I celebrate with Suffolk for a thousand jobs. And I know you celebrate (with us)."

Said Suffolk Mayor Linda Johnson: "We couldn't have done this without the state. It took a lot of partners and a lot of work. ... We cannot operate as individuals. Yes, we're individual cities, and we owe to the people that elected us, but in order to give the people who elected us what they need, we've got to collaborate with everybody."