

Teamsters' Efforts Advance At Con-way, FedEx LTL Units

By Rip Watson
Senior Reporter

Teamsters union organizing efforts are advancing at FedEx Freight and Con-way Freight, the two largest nonunion less-than-truckload carriers, according to National Labor Relations Board records.

At Con-way, Local 657 led the effort for a representation election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board that has been set for Sept. 12 in Laredo, Texas, according to NLRB officials.

Separately, Local 107 submitted signed petitions to NLRB seeking representation elections at a FedEx Freight terminal in Philadelphia and another in Cinnaminson, New Jersey.

NLRB records show no previous representation elections at FedEx Freight, the largest nonunion LTL carrier, and none in two decades at Con-way, the third-largest. Under NLRB rules, an election can be requested when more than 30% of workers at the potential bargaining location ask for one. Each election

is for an individual terminal, and not for the entire network of 355 terminals at FedEx or the more than 300 at Con-way.

"The Teamsters union is committed to improving workers' jobs and their lives," spokeswoman Leigh Strobe told TRANSPORT TOPICS on Sept. 2. "We regularly receive requests for help from workers who are struggling against unfair and predatory employers."

FedEx spokesman Brian Anderson told TT the company is aware of the organizing efforts.

"At this time, no elections have been scheduled," said Anderson, adding that previous petitions to organize FedEx Freight service centers have been withdrawn before an election.

"FedEx believes a majority of our employees will oppose the Teamsters' plan to unionize these service centers," he continued. "Our thriving, competitive work environment provides a more flexible, team-oriented and customer-focused work model than the union offers."

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"Con-way officials believe that the Laredo employees will also reject union representation," company spokesman Gary Frantz told TT, noting that the election affects only that location.

Anderson also said FedEx "respects the rights of our employees to decide for themselves" and that the parent company, which ranks No. 2 on TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of for-hire carriers in the United States and Canada, would cooperate with NLRB.

Officials at Local 657 in San Antonio and Local 107 in Philadelphia didn't return calls and messages seeking comment.

The moves at each carrier probably are one-time events, though they could signal a new era with a few more representation elections on the local level, Thom Albrecht, a BB&T Capital Markets analyst, told TT.

Union leaders three years ago announced a targeted effort to unionize more workers at FedEx. Pilots of FedEx planes are members of the Air Line Pilots Association, but other workers are nonunion.

FedEx Ground workers' status as contractors has sparked multiple efforts to challenge their status on grounds they should be classified as employees. Workers must be employees to participate in unions, under federal labor law.

"It is no secret that FedEx exploits its workers," Strobe said. "The Teamsters union has worked to bring fairness to FedEx and to the package delivery industry. That commitment remains."

The Teamsters already represent workers at YRC Freight, the second-largest LTL carrier. It also represents workers at UPS Freight, the fourth-largest LTL fleet, as well as ABF Freight, which is No. 7.

The FedEx Freight and Con-way Freight activities are the first steps in a lengthy process for union organizing efforts.

Based on NLRB data for the latest fiscal year, 1,986 petitions were filed seeking an election. About one-third of those were withdrawn or dismissed. Of the 1,330 elections held, unions won 852.

If the union does win an election, that initiates a contract negotiation process but does not guarantee a contract will be agreed on and ratified.

FedEx Freight and Con-way previously have been the target of multiple unfair labor practice charges filed at NLRB by unions. All of those cases have been closed.

Con-way has been a nonunion LTL operator since the carrier was formed in 1983 by parent company Consolidated Freightways Inc., which also owned unionized carrier CF Motor Freight. That business was renamed Consolidated Freightways Corp when it was spun off in 1996. It was shut down six years later.

UPS Freight workers became Teamsters three years after UPS, which ranks No. 1 in the TT100, acquired Overnite Corp. in 2005.

The transition for 12,000 UPS Freight workers to union representation followed more than a decade of organizing efforts that didn't produce a contract when Overnite was a separate company.

UPS has a separate contract covering at least 235,000 package workers that is the largest U.S. labor agreement, according to the union.

The UPS Freight contract is the only recent union win among large LTL carriers. It has represented workers at YRC, its predecessors and at ABF for decades.

"Organizing FedEx Freight and Con-way Freight ought to be priorities," said Ken Puff, an organizer at Teamsters for a Democratic Union, told TT. "Organization in trucking creates power for the union. When you have density in transportation, that enhances the union's overall power."



Workers at two FedEx Freight terminals have sought union