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 CUSTOMER OPERATING GUIDE

# The Complete Guide to Shipping **less-than-truckload (LTL)** in the US

Everything your team needs to ship LTL with confidence: how the network actually works, what the carriers will and will not do, where the costs come from, and how to set the right expectations with your own customers (the businesses and people you ship to).

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# How to use this guide

Less-than-truckload (LTL) is one of the most cost-effective ways to move palletized freight in the United States. It is also one of the most misunderstood. The shippers who have the smoothest experience are not the ones who fight the system; they are the ones who **understand how it works and set the right expectations with their own customers** about pickups, transit, and delivery.

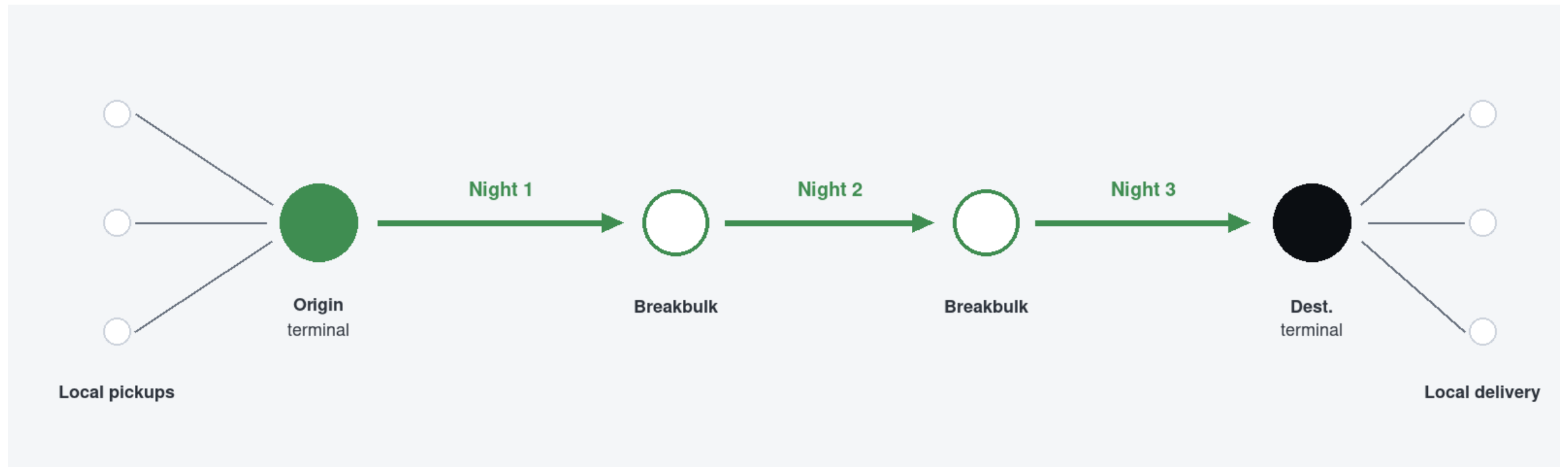
This document explains the rules of the road as the LTL industry actually operates them. Read it once end-to-end, then keep it as a reference. The sections you will return to most are freight class (Section 7), extra services (accessorials) (Section 8), transit times (Section 10), volume limits (Section 11), and claims (Section 16).

## ■ THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT IDEA

LTL is a mature, highly engineered, shared-network industry. Its processes were built over a century to keep thousands of trucks and millions of shipments moving every day. **It will not change those processes for any individual shipment.** Not for Mothership, and not for any broker or platform. Working with the system gets your freight delivered. Working against it gets it delayed.

# How the LTL network physically works

In full truckload (FTL) shipping, one truck is loaded at the shipper's dock and drives straight to the destination. LTL is the opposite: your handful of pallets shares a trailer with dozens of other shippers' freight, and it travels through a network of terminals rather than going door-to-door.



On a long lane, freight is re-sorted at one or more intermediate sorting terminals (breakbulk). A typical long lane is three nights from origin to destination, never straight door to door.

# The hub-and-spoke flow

- 1. Local pickup.** A city driver collects your freight along with everyone else's in the area and brings it to the origin service center (terminal).
- 2. Cross-dock and sort.** At the terminal your pallets are unloaded, weighed, measured, sorted by destination, and re-loaded onto a line-haul trailer headed the right direction.
- 3. Line haul.** Long-distance trailers, typically 48 ft or 53 ft vans, often run as doubles in many lanes, move freight terminal-to-terminal, usually overnight.
- 4. Relay / intermediate sorting terminals (breakbulk).** Longer lanes pass through one or more intermediate sorting terminals, where freight is unloaded and re-sorted again, often adding a night per stop.
- 5. Destination terminal and delivery.** At the final terminal your freight is loaded onto a local delivery truck for the last mile.

## ■ WHY THIS MATTERS

Your freight is **handled 4-6 times**. Every touch is a chance of damage, and every terminal stop is a scheduled, sequenced event. This is why LTL costs less than FTL, why transit is measured in business days, and why a cross-dock has almost no room to store your freight.

# When to ship LTL, and when not to

LTL is the right tool for a specific job. Using it for the wrong job is the most common (and most expensive) mistake shippers make.

## A perfect fit when

You are moving roughly **1-6 palletized handling units**, the shipment weighs between about **150 and 10,000 lbs**, your freight is sturdy and well-packaged, and you can live with delivery measured in **business days** rather than hours.

## Use another mode when

You have **more than about 10 pallets, more than about 12 linear feet, or over about 10,000 lbs** (use full truckload (FTL)); you need **same-day or guaranteed-hour** arrival (use local same-day or expedited); or the freight is fragile, high-value, or will not survive 4-6 handlings.

For local metro moves where speed and real-time visibility matter, Mothership's **Local Same-Day** service keeps freight on one truck with no terminal stops. For shipments that outgrow standard LTL, the right mode is FTL.

## ■ SET EXPECTATIONS

The shippers with the best LTL experience are not the ones with the most leverage. They are the ones who tell their customers up front how LTL works and what to expect.

# The top 25 U.S. LTL carriers by revenue

The U.S. LTL market is highly concentrated: the top 25 carriers account for roughly **91% of a ~\$53-billion market**. These are large, regulated, public-company-scale operations.

Revenue: SJ Consulting / Logistics Management, 2024, including fuel surcharge.

National = coverage across the lower 48. Regional = concentrated in certain regions or specific lane types (for example expedited or inter-regional).

## ■ HOW TO READ THIS TABLE

This is the U.S. market landscape ranked by revenue, **not Mothership's carrier roster**. The carriers and rates available for any given shipment depend on the lane, and Mothership surfaces the best options automatically at quote time. The largest carrier overall is not necessarily the right (or even an available) carrier for your origin, destination, and freight.

The next two slides list all 25, including PITT OHIO at rank 15 and Sutton Transport at rank 23.

# Ranks 1 to 12

| #  | Carrier                    | 2024 Rev. | Founded | Reach    | Known for / position                                                                                                     |
|----|----------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | FedEx Freight              | \$9.1B    | 2001    | National | Largest U.S. LTL carrier; ~400+ service centers, ~85k daily shipments; priority versus economy tiers.                    |
| 2  | Old Dominion (ODFL)        | \$5.8B    | 1934    | National | The service benchmark: publishes ~99% on-time and a sub-0.1% claims ratio; repeatedly #1 in independent quality surveys. |
| 3  | Estes Express Lines        | \$5.0B    | 1931    | National | Largest privately held LTL carrier; fastest-growing of the national carriers; broad coverage and capacity.               |
| 4  | XPO                        | \$4.9B    | 2011    | National | Pure-play LTL technology leader; AI routing and automated load planning; ex-Con-way network.                             |
| 5  | R+L Carriers               | \$3.8B    | 1965    | National | Family-owned, asset-based national carrier known for value and broad direct coverage.                                    |
| 6  | Saia                       | \$3.2B    | 1924    | National | Reached true national scale in 2025 (214 terminals across the lower 48); aggressive expansion.                           |
| 7  | ABF Freight (ArcBest)      | \$2.7B    | 1923    | National | One of the oldest names in LTL; unionized, heavy/specialized freight strength.                                           |
| 8  | TForce Freight             | \$2.5B    | 1935    | National | Former UPS Freight / Overnite, now part of TFI International; national asset-based network.                              |
| 9  | Southeastern Freight Lines | \$1.7B    | 1950    | Regional | Southeast service leader; consistently top-rated for quality in its region.                                              |
| 10 | Central Transport          | \$1.6B    | 1932    | National | CenTra-owned national carrier; broad footprint, value positioning.                                                       |
| 11 | Averitt Express            | \$1.1B    | 1971    | Regional | Southeast-centric with integrated LTL, TL and supply-chain services.                                                     |
| 12 | Knight LTL                 | \$1.1B    | 2021    | Regional | Knight-Swift's LTL arm (AAA Cooper and Midwest Motor Express); fast-growing super-regional.                              |

## Ranks 13 to 25

| #  | Carrier                         | 2024 Rev. | Founded | Reach          | Known for / position                                                  |
|----|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | Dayton Freight Lines            | \$1.0B    | 1981    | Regional       | Midwest direct carrier; strong on-time reputation and next-day lanes. |
| 14 | Forward Air                     | \$0.95B   | 1990    | National       | Expedited, airport-to-airport heritage; premium/time-sensitive LTL.   |
| 15 | PITT OHIO                       | \$0.94B   | 1979    | Regional       | Top-rated Northeast/Mid-Atlantic carrier; premium regional service.   |
| 16 | A. Duie Pyle                    | \$0.62B   | 1924    | Regional       | Northeast service leader; integrated warehousing and dedicated.       |
| 17 | Roadrunner                      | \$0.44B   | 2005    | National       | Metro-to-metro long-haul LTL with a direct, terminal-light model.     |
| 18 | Daylight Transport              | \$0.39B   | 1977    | Inter-regional | Top-rated inter-regional carrier; expedited coast-to-coast lanes.     |
| 19 | Oak Harbor Freight Lines        | \$0.34B   | 1916    | Regional       | Pacific Northwest direct carrier with dense West Coast coverage.      |
| 20 | Ward Trucking                   | \$0.26B   | 1931    | Regional       | Northeast/Mid-Atlantic family carrier; high regional service scores.  |
| 21 | Cross Country Freight Solutions | \$0.22B   | 1986    | Regional       | Northwest and intermountain coverage including hard-to-reach lanes.   |
| 22 | Magnum LTL                      | \$0.16B   | 1986    | Regional       | Upper-Midwest and Northwest regional specialist.                      |
| 23 | Sutton Transport                | \$0.12B   | 1979    | Regional       | Wisconsin-based upper-Midwest next-day specialist.                    |
| 24 | Lynden Transport                | \$0.11B   | 1954    | Regional       | Alaska and Pacific Northwest specialist; multi-modal reach.           |
| 25 | Peninsula Truck Lines           | \$0.10B   | 1958    | Regional       | Top-rated Western/Pacific Northwest regional carrier.                 |

# Direct versus interline carriers

Not all coverage is created equal. The biggest predictor of pickup reliability, tracking accuracy and document speed is whether the carrier runs your shipment on **its own assets** the whole way.

## Direct carriers

Service the shipment entirely (or almost entirely) on **their own drivers, trucks and terminals**. Payoff: more on-time pickups and deliveries, more accurate tracking, and faster proof of delivery (POD) document availability. **Choose direct when transit time and visibility matter most.**

## Interline carriers

Hand the shipment off to **third-party drivers, trucks and terminals** for part of the route. Trade-off: fewer on-time events, less accurate tracking, and slower proof of delivery (POD) turnaround, in exchange for reach and price. **Choose interline when price is the priority.**

There is no universally better answer, only the right answer for a given shipment. Mothership surfaces both so you can weigh speed and visibility against cost on every lane.

# Liftgates, pallets and equipment limits

A hydraulic tailgate (liftgate) is the platform on the back of a truck that raises and lowers freight when there is no loading dock or forklift. It is safety equipment with real limits, and those limits are physical, not negotiable.

**~2,500 lbs**

Typical max weight per liftgate cycle (range across carriers about 1,300-3,500 lbs)

**80-89 in**

Typical platform width: comfortably handles a standard 48 in x 40 in pallet

**30-70 in**

Typical platform depth; longer pieces may not fit and need a dock or terminal pickup

## ■ IF IT WILL NOT CLEAR A LIFTGATE

If a single handling unit exceeds roughly **2,500 lbs or about 96 in in length**, it likely will not clear a liftgate. Split it across pallets, arrange a dock/forklift, or plan a terminal pickup.

# When can you use a liftgate?

Use this check before booking, and tell us about both ends. The answer can differ at pickup and delivery.

| If this is true at the stop                                   | Liftgate?           | What to do                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| No loading dock and no forklift on site                       | Required            | Add a liftgate to that stop at booking.                                        |
| Residential or curbside delivery                              | Required            | Liftgate (usually with a residential fee) almost always applies.               |
| Each pallet is at or under ~2,500 lbs and fits the platform   | Works               | A standard liftgate handles it.                                                |
| A loading dock is available                                   | Not needed          | Skip it: freight rolls straight off at the dock.                               |
| A forklift is available on site                               | Not needed          | Skip it: the forklift loads and unloads.                                       |
| A single piece is over ~2,500 lbs or longer than the platform | Will not fit / lift | Use a dock or forklift, split the load, or arrange a terminal pickup/delivery. |

# Pallet weight and dimensions

When a liftgate is not needed (a dock or forklift is available at both ends), pallets can be heavier. Most LTL carriers will accept individual handling units up to roughly **4,000-10,000+ lbs** depending on tariff, with total shipment weight commonly capped before volume rules apply.

- **Standard pallet footprint:** 48 in x 40 in. Keep freight stacked within the footprint. Overhang invites damage and reclassification.
- **With a liftgate:** keep each pallet at or under ~2,500 lbs and within the platform size.
- **Without a liftgate (dock/forklift):** heavier pallets are fine, but any single piece over **8 ft (96 in)** triggers an over-length charge, and pieces past **12 ft** climb steeply.
- **Always cap pallet height** so a non-stackable load does not get rated as if it fills the full trailer height (carriers often treat a 48 in non-stackable pallet as 96 in tall for cubic-capacity rating (cubing)).

# Density, freight class and the 2025 NMFC changes

Every LTL shipment is assigned a **freight class** (from 50 to 500) and one or more **National Motor Freight Classification (NMFC) item codes** maintained by the National Motor Freight Traffic Association (NMFTA). Class drives price: lower numbers (denser, sturdier, easier-to-handle freight) cost less; higher numbers cost more. Historically class balanced four factors: **density, handling, how well it packs with other freight (stowability), and liability**.

## ■ NEW: CARRIERS NOW EXPECT AN NMFC NUMBER ON EVERY COMMODITY

Carriers are increasingly requiring a valid NMFC item number for each commodity on the Bill of Lading (BOL). A missing or incorrect NMFC is one of the most common triggers for a reclassification rebill (a corrected invoice after the carrier re-weighs or re-measures). Mothership is rolling out **AI-powered NMFC lookup** in the cargo-description field so you can classify accurately at booking.

# What changed in 2025

Effective **July 19, 2025** (NMFTA Docket 2025-1), the classification system underwent its most sweeping revision in years, shifting roughly **2,000 commodities from commodity-based to density-based** classification and replacing the old 11-tier density scale with a more granular **13-tier scale**. A further docket (2026-1) is scheduled to begin rolling out in early 2026.

The practical upshot: **density now drives class for most freight**. Density is weight divided by total cubic feet (pounds per cubic foot). The more accurately you measure and declare, the more accurately it prices.

## Write descriptions that prevent reclassifications

- **Describe the actual commodity**, not a vague label: "steel shelving brackets," not "parts" or "freight."
- **Give precise, packaged dimensions and weight**. Measure after palletizing and wrapping, including overhang.
- **State stackability and packaging** accurately; declaring non-stackable freight as stackable is a frequent dispute trigger.
- **Include the NMFC code and class** on the Bill of Lading (BOL) when known. Mothership's quoting tools classify for you, but accurate dimensions and descriptions are still on you.

# Extra freight services (accessorials) explained

Extra freight services (accessorials) are charges for any service beyond standard **dock-to-dock** pickup and delivery. They are not optional surprises. They are priced services the carrier must actually perform. The golden rule: **declare every accessorial you will need at booking**. If a driver arrives without the right equipment or instructions, the result is a failed attempt, a redelivery fee, and a delay.

## ■ THE CHEAPEST ACCESSORIAL IS THE ONE YOU DECLARED UP FRONT

Charges added after the fact because a liftgate was missed or a site turned out to be residential almost always cost more than declaring them at booking, and they come with a delay. When in doubt, declare it.

The next two slides list the common accessorials and when you need them.

# Common accessorials (1 of 2)

| Accessorial          | What it is                                                                                                                                                                         | When you need it                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Liftgate             | Hydraulic platform to raise/lower freight without a dock.                                                                                                                          | No dock or forklift at pickup or delivery; most residential moves.                                                                                    |
| Residential          | Surcharge for service to a home or home-based business.                                                                                                                            | Any address zoned or used as residential, even if a business operates there.                                                                          |
| Limited access       | The carrier may arrange a smaller vehicle and/or charge a fee for delivering outside a commercial zone.                                                                            | Schools, churches, farms, military bases, storage facilities, construction sites, and commercial properties without a loading dock often qualify too. |
| Inside delivery      | Driver moves freight just past the first doorway / point of entry. This is not room-of-choice delivery (white-glove): no placement in a chosen room, unpacking, or debris removal. | Freight must go inside the entrance rather than stop at the curb or dock.                                                                             |
| Delivery appointment | The carrier contacts the delivery location and sets a time that works for both. Carriers set appointments themselves. They do not accept pre-made ones.                            | Your customer requires a scheduled time to receive the freight.                                                                                       |
| Call before delivery | Carrier calls ahead before delivering. This is advance notice, not a scheduled appointment.                                                                                        | Your customer needs a heads-up to be ready but does not require a set time.                                                                           |

# Common accessorials (2 of 2)

| Accessorial               | What it is                                                                 | When you need it                                                       |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Over-length               | Surcharge for long pieces.                                                 | Any single piece over ~8 ft (96 in); steeper over 12 ft.               |
| Reconsignment / diversion | Address change after dispatch, or a return.                                | Delivery address changes in transit, or freight is refused.            |
| Wait-time fee (detention) | A fee for holding the driver past the free waiting time to load or unload. | Freight is not ready, or loading/unloading runs long (see Section 12). |
| Sort and segregate        | Driver/dock separates freight by piece, item number, or purchase order.    | Your customer requires freight broken out on arrival.                  |
| Tradeshow / convention    | Delivery to or pickup from an event venue.                                 | Often pairs with limited access, appointment and liftgate.             |

# Appointments, Amazon docks, and ZIP-to-ZIP quotes

## Appointments are delivery-only, and the carrier sets them

**Call before delivery** is advance notice, not a scheduled time. A **delivery appointment** is a set time the carrier books with the receiver. There are **no pickup appointments**. LTL carriers will not accept a pre-made appointment you arrange. Request the appointment accessorial and let the carrier coordinate directly with your customer.

## Delivering to Amazon (and other appointment-only docks)

Amazon fulfillment centers accept freight **by scheduled appointment only**, and the **carrier or broker** books it, not you, through Carrier Central using purchase order (PO) / advance shipping notice (ASN) / Amazon reference number (ARN) and pallet count. Amazon issues an incoming shipment appointment (ISA) ID. Miss the window and freight is turned away, plus storage and redelivery. Do not promise a delivery date until the appointment is confirmed.

## You cannot approve accessories at the time of delivery

The driver is on a sequenced route and **cannot wait for call or email approval**. If an accessorial is needed, **the carrier decides on the spot**. Withholding approval typically triggers wait-time fee (detention) or return-to-terminal storage that costs more than the accessorial. **Declare every accessorial at booking**.

## Quotes are ZIP code to ZIP code (postal code). The address can still change the price

At quote time the carrier sees postal codes, class, and dimensions, **not** the street. Road weight limits, a smaller truck, a missing liftgate, or access problems (trees, steep roads, a long dirt driveway) can change the final price or block delivery. Tell us everything you know about the site up front.

# Pickup and delivery windows

LTL drivers run a daily rhythm dictated by the network: **they deliver in the morning and pick up in the afternoon**. A driver leaves the terminal with a full truck, empties it on the delivery route, and only then has room to collect new freight on the way back.

- **Pickups** are typically afternoon, after deliveries are done. Most carriers require a pickup to be requested by an early-afternoon cutoff, with a **minimum ~2-hour ready window**. Block out 4 hours to be safe.
- **Deliveries** generally occur during business hours, weighted toward the morning. Residential and appointment deliveries are scheduled into the route.
- **Line haul runs overnight** between terminals. Pickup and delivery operations run **Monday-Friday**. Weekends generally are not service days.

## ■ SET YOURSELF UP TO WIN

Request pickups early in the day so dispatch can route the driver to you, keep your dock ready for the whole window, and offer the widest window you can. The earlier and looser your window, the more reliably it gets served.

# When a pickup or delivery attempt fails

Because each driver runs a tightly sequenced route, a wasted stop has a real cost, and it shows up as an added charge on your invoice (a rebill):

## Freight not ready at pickup

If the shipment is not packaged, labeled, and staged when the driver arrives, the driver usually **cannot wait**. The stop is logged as a **missed pickup**, and a failed-attempt / redelivery fee is billed.

## No one available to receive

If the driver arrives within the window and there is no one to accept the freight (or the site cannot take it), the freight returns to the terminal. A **redelivery fee** (plus possible storage; see Section 13) is charged.

### ■ ALWAYS SHIP ON THE MOTHERSHIP BILL OF LADING (BOL)

Book and print the BOL that Mothership generates, and make sure that is the document handed to the driver at pickup. If the shipper uses their own BOL instead, tracking can fail to flow back to you, and the carrier may not honor the quoted rate. **One Mothership BOL, on every shipment.**

# Transit times are estimates, not promises

Standard LTL transit times are **estimates expressed in business days**, not guaranteed arrival times. The network does not speed up for an individual shipment.

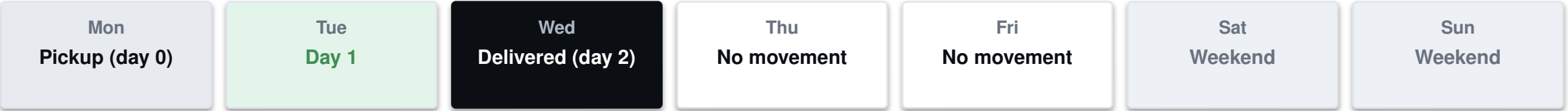
- **The pickup day does not count.** A "3-day" transit clock starts the business day after pickup.
- **Weekends and holidays are not transit days.** A 3-day estimate quoted on a Thursday typically delivers the following Tuesday.
- **Rural lanes add time** when the delivery terminal only services an area a few days a week.
- **Need a date certain?** Most national carriers offer guaranteed service (by a business day, sometimes by a time) on qualifying lanes for a premium.

## ■ GUARANTEED DELIVERY SERVICE: THE FINE PRINT

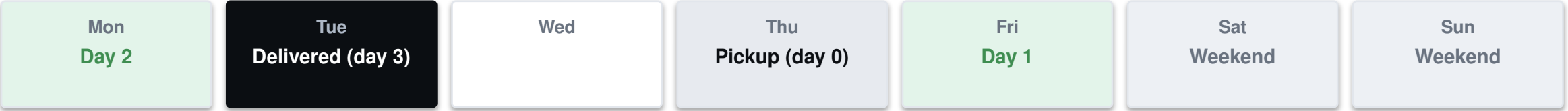
Guaranteed delivery service commits to the **delivery** date, not the pickup. If the pickup is missed or runs late, the guaranteed delivery date typically slides back one business day. Some **delivery accessorials can void a guaranteed quote**. Once you have added accessorials, confirm the guarantee still applies.

# How the business-day clock works

Scenario A: picked up Monday, 2-day estimate -> delivers Wednesday, same week



Scenario B: picked up Thursday, 3-day estimate -> delivers Tuesday (weekend does not count)



WHY CALLING CANNOT CHANGE IT

Once freight is in the network it moves on the next scheduled line haul. No amount of calling, escalating, or asking will conjure an extra trailer departure or an earlier delivery route. The useful thing we can do is set the right expectation up front and choose a guaranteed service when timing is critical.

# Shipment size and capacity limits

Standard LTL pricing assumes your freight shares a trailer. When a shipment gets big enough to dominate trailer space, carriers switch to **volume** / **linear-foot** / **cubic-capacity** pricing, because that space could have carried other paying freight.

## ~12 linear ft

Common single-shipment limit before linear-foot rules apply

## 6+ pallets

Roughly where standard LTL pricing starts to climb

## ~750 cu ft

Cubic-capacity trigger when density is low (under ~6 pounds per cubic foot)

### ■ MOTHERSHIP QUOTES STANDARD LTL UP TO 10 PALLETS

We provide LTL quotes for shipments up to **10 standard pallets**. We do **not** quote volume or partial-load LTL. When freight is larger than standard LTL (more than ~10 pallets, ~12 linear feet, or ~750 cubic feet), the right mode is full truckload (FTL).

# The split-shipment rule

Do not **hand over the freight to the carrier (tender)** between the same origin-destination pair, on the same carrier, on the same day, if together it crosses the volume threshold. Carriers can (and do) combine same-lane, same-day shipments and re-rate the whole thing at volume pricing.

If you have two same-day shipments on the same lane, split them across two carriers, or send the second only once the first is already in transit, so each hand-over (tender) stays within standard LTL.

## ■ WHY THIS EXISTS

A light, bulky load that eats 12 feet of deck but weighs little blocks the carrier from loading anything else there. Cross the threshold and standard discounts evaporate; the shipment can re-rate at a steep premium.

## Free wait time and wait-time fee (detention)

LTL free wait time is **short (often just 15 to 30 minutes)**, and for good reason. Each driver has a full route of other pickups and deliveries, and a single delay cascades down the line. Past free time, carriers charge a wait-time fee (detention), commonly billed per 15-minute increment or hourly.

Just as often, the driver simply **cannot wait at all**. If your freight is not ready, the driver may have to leave to protect the rest of the route and that night's line-haul departure, resulting in a missed-pickup or redelivery fee rather than detention. This is not the driver being difficult; their schedule is set by dispatch and the network.

### ■ HOW TO AVOID IT

Have freight palletized, wrapped, labeled and staged at the dock **before** the window opens. If you know loading will take longer than the free window, tell us in advance so we can set expectations with the carrier.

# Free storage and why cross-docks charge

Carriers allow only a short window of free storage at a terminal, commonly on the order of **a day or two**, before daily storage charges begin. The reason is structural: a cross-dock is engineered to move freight **straight across** from an inbound trailer to an outbound one. It is not a warehouse.

When freight has to be stored, it occupies the very limited dock floor the terminal needs to keep freight flowing, and it gets **handled several additional times** by dock staff. Storage usually accrues when your customer cannot accept delivery, an appointment cannot be scheduled, or paperwork holds the freight.

## ■ KEEP FREIGHT MOVING

Confirm your customer can accept the shipment, request any required delivery appointment promptly, and keep documentation clean. The faster freight clears the dock, the less it costs everyone.

# Certified scales, dimensionalizers and rebills

At the terminal, carriers re-weigh and re-measure freight on **certified scales and automated dimensionalizers**. The certificate they generate is the **legal proof** of the freight's weight and dimensions, and it is as much evidence as the carrier will provide.

These are large, heavily regulated companies, and the person at the scale is an **hourly employee with no incentive** to overstate your freight. When a shipper sees a pattern of weight/dimension rebills, the cause is almost always **at the warehouse, at the time of packing**, not at the scale. Carriers are selling weight and space. If your freight occupies more space or weighs more than declared, they re-rate it.

## ■ IMPORTANT: "WE JUST DISAGREE" DOES NOT WIN A REBILL

A weight/dimension rebill backed by a certified scale or dimensionalizer cannot be resolved by disagreeing with it. It can only be prevented by precise weighing and measuring at the warehouse **before the freight ships**. If you are seeing frequent rebills, the fix is operational at packing, not an argument with the carrier.

# Rebill disputes and timelines

Because rebills come from certified measurement, they are hard to overturn, but the window and process matter, and Mothership builds in protection.

- **Mothership gives you 10 days** to review and dispute a rebill **before** payment is required.
- **Most other platforms bill you first** and only then ask you to file a dispute. Mothership's pre-payment review window keeps you in control before any money changes hands.
- Carriers allow the legally permitted dispute window after payment is made. If the dispute is decided in your favor, the amount is **refunded**.
- Winning a dispute requires **evidence that contradicts the certified measurement**: typically your own certified scale ticket and documented, packaged dimensions from the time of shipping.

## ■ THE TAKEAWAY

The strongest dispute file is the one you build at your own dock: certified weights, measured-and-photographed dimensions, and accurate descriptions captured before the freight leaves. Disputes are won with documentation, not with opinion.

# Liability limits and freight claims

Carrier liability is governed by the **Carmack Amendment (US freight-liability law)** and is **not** full-value insurance. Carriers limit liability to a released value tied to class and commodity, commonly a dollar amount per pound (used goods can be as low as \$0.10/lb; new goods often fall somewhere between roughly \$0.50 and \$25/lb, by tariff).

## ■ THE COVERAGE GAP

A 100-lb shipment of electronics worth \$5,000 might carry liability of only a few hundred dollars. For high-value or low-weight freight, standard liability rarely matches actual value. That is the gap **FreightProtect** full cargo coverage is designed to close.

## How a claim works

- **Inspect and note at delivery.** Before signing the delivery receipt, check piece count and condition, and write specific damage notes. This is the single most important step.
- **Evidence to file:** Bill of Lading (BOL), signed delivery receipt (proof of delivery (POD)), the commodity invoice, photos of the damage, and an itemized statement of the loss.
- **Pay the freight charges in full** (claims are not processed until the freight bill is paid) and keep the damaged freight for inspection/salvage.

## The legal clock

- **File within 9 months** of delivery (or expected delivery).
- **Concealed damage:** notify the carrier within **5 business days** of delivery.
- The carrier must **acknowledge within 30 days** and **pay, decline, or offer within 120 days**, with status updates every 60 days thereafter.

# How LTL tracking really works

LTL tracking is **not real-time GPS**. It is **scan-by-scan status updates**: a record of scan events as freight is picked up, arrives and departs each terminal, and goes out for delivery, typically updated **only once or twice a day**.

## ■ A KEY FACT ABOUT VISIBILITY

The status you see on the Mothership platform is the **exact same information the carrier's own customer service has**. Calling or emailing the carrier will not surface details that are not already in the system. When an update is not there yet, it is because the next scan event has not happened, not because someone is withholding it.

Operational events on the ground (see Section 19) get reported after they happen, often when the truck returns to the terminal at end of day, not as they occur.

## Why you can't contact the carrier directly

Unlike full truckload (FTL) and local delivery, where you may hold a direct relationship with a carrier, **LTL networks do not permit their drivers to be contacted by, or to contact, shippers directly**. Everything routes through the carrier's customer-service organization, without exception.

That is not a Mothership limitation; it is how the LTL industry is structured. The upside is that you have a **single, accountable point of coordination in Mothership**, with deep integrations into each carrier's systems, so you get the same authoritative data the carrier has, plus a U.S.-based team to push on issues through the proper channels.

# Why no platform or broker controls the LTL carriers

No broker or platform has more operational control over an LTL carrier than another. If an LTL carrier misses a pickup booked through one platform, it would have missed it through any other, because the cause is on the road, not in the software.

## 1. The stuck driver

The carrier's driver hits the stop before yours and they are not ready, loading the truck only halfway. The driver and trailer are now stuck there against their will and cannot make your pickup in the window.

## 2. The 3 became 6

The prior shipper said 3 pallets but hands over 6. The driver must take them, and now there is no room for yours. The truck heads back to the terminal to unload and may try to return, but by then your dock may be closed, so the pickup rolls to the next day.

### ■ WHERE MOTHERSHIP ACTUALLY HELPS

We cannot override physics or a carrier's network, and we will always be straight with you about that. What we can do is prevent a meaningful share of these failures before they happen: deep technical integrations, accurate classification and accessorial detection at booking, and intelligent monitoring through pickup, tracking and delivery.

# Reconsignments and diversions

A reconsignment (also called a diversion) is a change to a shipment's delivery address (or another material detail) **after the freight is already moving** inside the carrier's network. They are common, and they are one of the more expensive and delay-prone things that can happen to a shipment.

**Redirecting it means the carrier has to:**

1. **Locate and hold** the shipment at whatever terminal it has reached.
2. **Re-rate the new lane:** the price changes to reflect the new destination, and a reconsignment fee is added.
3. **Re-route it** onto the next available line haul, which may not depart until the next scheduled run.

## ■ THE CHEAPEST RECONSIGNMENT IS THE ONE YOU NEVER NEED

The transit clock effectively restarts from the point of diversion, and the cost can climb well beyond the original quote. Confirm the correct, final delivery address before you book.

# Receiver contact information

Incorrect or missing receiver contact information is one of the single most common causes of delayed deliveries, and one of the easiest to prevent.

The destination terminal frequently needs to reach the receiver before it can complete the last mile: to set a delivery appointment, confirm receiving hours, arrange a liftgate or limited-access service, or simply get directions to a hard-to-find site. If no one can be reached, the freight does not move. It waits at the terminal (accruing storage, Section 13) until contact is made.

## ■ WHAT GOOD CONTACT INFO LOOKS LIKE

Provide a **name, a phone number, and an email** for someone who can actually answer and authorize the delivery, not a generic main line. Double-check it at booking. A few seconds here routinely saves days of delay later.

# Hazardous materials (hazmat)

Hazmat shipments are federally regulated, and they only move smoothly when the paperwork is complete and correct. Missing or inaccurate information (a frequent issue with overseas shippers unfamiliar with U.S. rules) will stop a shipment cold and can create real safety and legal exposure.

**To hand over hazmat freight to the carrier you must provide, at booking:**

- The **proper shipping name, UN/NA number, hazard class / division, and packing group.**
- A **hazmat-compliant Bill of Lading (BOL)** with a 24-hour **emergency-response phone number.**
- Correct **labels, markings, and placards**, and packaging that meets **49 CFR** requirements.
- The current **Safety Data Sheet (SDS)** for the commodity.

## ■ NEVER SHIP UNDECLARED

Undeclared or misdeclared hazmat is a serious violation. It endangers dock and line-haul workers and carries significant fines. If you are unsure whether a commodity is regulated, treat it as hazmat until its SDS confirms otherwise. Not every carrier or lane accepts every hazard class, and a hazmat accessorial fee applies. Declare hazmat up front, every time.

# Restricted commodities: alcohol and nicotine

Not classic hazmat, but restricted all the same. Quoting the wrong carrier gets a shipment rejected at pickup or pulled mid-network.

## Alcohol (beer, wine, spirits)

Not every carrier is licensed to carry alcohol across all 48 contiguous states. Limit your carrier options to ones that accept it, or risk a pickup rejection.

## Nicotine, vapes and tobacco

Many carriers have blacklisted nicotine-related freight (including coils, disposables, and packaging) from their networks. If a carrier finds it in their network, they will pull the shipment off their dock and require you to recover it, plus any resulting fees.

### ■ LIMIT THE QUOTE

Limit your quote to carriers that accept the commodity every time.

# Trade-show and convention deliveries

Trade-show freight runs on a different set of rules than ordinary business delivery. There are two delivery paths, and choosing the right one matters.

## Advance warehouse

Ship **early** (often up to ~30 days ahead) to the show's advance warehouse. The official show contractor (for example Freeman or GES) receives, stores, and then moves your freight to your booth for move-in. Timing is forgiving. **The safer choice for LTL.**

## Direct to show site

Freight goes to the venue only during a narrow, **assigned target date and time** during move-in. Trucks check in at a **marshalling yard** and are released by target time. Miss the window and freight is refused or rerouted, at your expense.

Expect an **exhibitor kit**, a general contractor, and **drayage / material-handling** fees billed by weight (so a **certified weight** matters). **Target dates are rarely negotiable.** Because LTL adds handling and timing variability, the advance warehouse is almost always the right call for show freight.

# Why shipping through Mothership wins

It can seem like going direct to a carrier should be cheaper. In practice, the opposite is true, for a structural reason: **aggregation**. Mothership pools the freight of a very large number of shippers. That combined volume is many times larger than what any single business brings to a carrier. That scale buys two things you cannot get on your own:

## Deeper discounts

Pre-negotiated tariffs built on aggregate volume beat the rates an individual shipper can command.

## Better service and accountability

If a carrier causes a problem, the cost of losing Mothership's book of business dwarfs the cost of losing any one shipper, so issues get prioritized.

The same logic applies across LTL and FTL: a broker with real scale gets you **better prices and better service** than going direct, with none of the long-term contracts. That is the whole idea behind Mothership.

# The expectation-setting checklist

Run this list before you book, and share the relevant parts with your customer (the person receiving the freight).

- **Measure and weigh precisely** after palletizing and wrapping (including overhang) to prevent reclassifications and rebills.
- **Describe the commodity accurately** and note stackability; let the platform handle class/NMFC.
- **Declare every accessorial** up front: liftgate, residential, limited access, inside delivery, delivery appointment, call-before.
- **Confirm the final delivery address** before booking. Mid-transit reconsignments are slow and costly (Section 20).
- **Give complete receiver contact info** (name, phone, email) so the terminal can schedule and deliver (Section 21).
- **Ship on the Mothership Bill of Lading (BOL)** so tracking flows back to you and the quoted rate is honored.
- **Declare hazmat fully:** UN number, class, packing group, Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and emergency contact (Section 22).

## The expectation-setting checklist (continued)

- **Confirm dock/forklift availability** at both ends; add a liftgate if either lacks one.
- **Keep shipments within standard LTL:** up to **10 pallets** (and roughly 12 linear ft / 750 cubic feet); split same-lane, same-day hand-overs (tenders) so they do not combine and re-rate. Larger freight moves as full truckload (FTL).
- **Stage freight before the pickup window** opens; request pickups early with a wide window.
- **Set transit expectations in business days.** Pickup day does not count, weekends are not transit days; choose guaranteed service when a date is critical.
- **Expect scan-by-scan status updates**, updated once or twice a day. The platform shows the same data the carrier has.
- **Inspect and note at delivery** before signing; keep the Bill of Lading (BOL), proof of delivery (POD), invoice and photos for any claim.
- **Consider FreightProtect** whenever cargo value exceeds standard carrier liability.

### ■ HOW YOU WIN AT LTL

Set the expectations properly with your customer upfront, prepare the freight, and let the network do what it is engineered to do.

## Sources, dating, and legal

Reliable, tech-powered LTL logistics, delivered by the most helpful humans. This Standard Operating Procedure is provided to Mothership customers as general guidance on how the U.S. less-than-truckload industry operates. Specific limits, fees, free-time allowances and liability amounts vary by carrier and are governed by each carrier's current rules tariff.

SOURCES AND DATING: Revenue: SJ Consulting / Logistics Management, 2024, including fuel surcharge. Classification: NMFTA Docket 2025-1, effective Jul 19, 2025. Claims timelines: Carmack Amendment / 49 CFR. Equipment, accessorial, volume, detention and storage figures are typical industry ranges and vary by carrier tariff. Verify carrier-specific specifications before booking.

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