



# How to Compare LTL Freight Carriers

Your Guide to Choosing  
the Right Carriers for  
Your Shipments

Choice is a wonderful thing, isn't it? However, when it comes to choosing less-than-truckload (LTL) freight carriers, sometimes the range of choices can feel overwhelming. There are more than 200 LTL carriers in North America, greatly varying in size and service offerings, which can make it daunting to know just where to start.

Fortunately, you don't have to make those decisions on your own! At Worldwide Express, we have more than 30 years of experience helping small and mid-sized businesses optimize and manage every aspect of their freight operations.

**This guide will walk you through the different LTL carriers and service options available to you, so you can make the right choice for your business the**

# ▶▶▶ Begin With the Basics of LTL Carriers

Before diving into the different types of LTL carriers and which one(s) are right for your business, let's define the role of an LTL carrier in the freight shipping world.



## What is an LTL carrier?

Simply put, LTL stands for “less than truckload.” If a given shipment doesn't fill a complete truckload, it needs to be combined with other shippers' cargo in order to most efficiently fill a trailer's worth of space.

LTL carriers specialize in doing just that — aggregating cargo from multiple shippers that's moving to the same rough geographic area. Think of it like the game Tetris, but with freight inside a shipping truck. Shipping LTL optimizes the trailer space for the carrier and saves you money, since you're only paying for the portion of the truck that your cargo occupies. [Dive into our website for details on how LTL shipping works.](#)

## Where to start with choosing an LTL carrier


Now that you understand the “what” of LTL, it's time to dive into the “who” and the “how.” Just because all LTL carriers generally do the same thing — combining multiple shipments together into a full truckload — doesn't mean they are all the same or offer the same types of services.

When it comes to choosing the LTL freight carrier that's right for you, you have many options to consider beyond simply the initial quote. You'll want to consider which carrier is the most efficient for your type of shipment. What is the footprint of the carrier's service area? What services does a given carrier provide, and what do they specialize in?

On the next page, we'll break down the most common types of freight carriers, along with their relative advantages.

# ▶▶▶ Create the Right Carrier Mix for Your Map

Whether you're shipping across the state, across the country, or everywhere in between, it's essential to select carriers who operate where you need them. And while each carrier's specific service area may vary slightly, their network generally falls into one of the major categories below.



## Local and sub-regional LTL carriers

If your business operates in and serves a small geographic footprint, local or sub-regional LTL carriers are an excellent solution for your freight needs.

These carriers are experts in their core service area, and as such, you can trust they're going to deliver efficiently. Because they're generally smaller in resources and reach than other carriers, however, they're only an ideal fit for shipments within an immediate area around your business.

## Regional LTL carriers

Regional LTL carriers operate in select regions or regional groupings within the country, for example the Midwest, the East Coast, etc. If you're operating in a condensed area, such as a set of contiguous states, a regional carrier may provide better capacity for your needs than a national carrier, as well as broader coverage than a sub-regional carrier.

## National LTL carriers

If your shipments head coast to coast, or travel between regions, you need a carrier with a network that can support your wide-ranging needs. National LTL carriers provide coverage all across the country, often hitting all the major ZIP codes.

Often, national LTL carriers operate in major markets nationwide, so if you're shipping to a smaller destination, they may team up with a smaller-scale partner carrier to get your freight delivered on time.

## Asset-light LTL carriers

Operating on a model of maximum efficiency, asset-light LTL carriers serve as large a coverage area as possible while keeping their truck, driver and terminal numbers low. This is accomplished through sharing terminals with other carriers, using intermodal or full truckload shipping for longer hauls and outsourcing last-mile services to regional or local carriers.

While your shipment may change hands more often and have a longer transit time, these carriers can often offer an undeniably low cost for their services.

[See the different service areas covered by the 75+ LTL carrier partners in the Worldwide Express portfolio with this map.](#)



## The Intersection of Freight: Volume LTL and Partial Truckload

For shipments larger than a standard LTL, but still not quite a complete truckload, there are in-betweens such as volume LTL and partial truckload — and many times these services are offered by the LTL carriers you already use and trust. Understanding the **small but important differences** between these two services can open up additional freight possibilities and solutions for your business.

One of the biggest differences is that volume LTL requires a **freight class** and carriers are free to choose their own prices, whereas partial truckload shipping is based on market price and does not require a freight class designation.

# ▶▶▶ Pick Carriers With the LTL Shipping Services You Need

Once you know how to compare and contrast the different types of LTL carriers, including whether they operate in your service area, you can consider additional options to customize your shipping experience even further. The best LTL freight carriers offer many special services to meet the unique shipping needs of your business.



## Refrigerated freight shipping

In the shipping world, “reefer” refers to refrigerated trucks. Reefer service focuses on providing a refrigerated, long-term shipment range, and minimizes the use of terminals to transfer products. The key to this service is that reefer LTL shipments maintain your shipment at the same base temperature throughout its journey. Cool!



## White glove services

If the name of this service sounds a little more high-end, that’s because it is. White glove delivery service goes above and beyond for freight that demands more than the usual level of attention. Do you have an especially heavy shipment like antique furniture? Are you shipping something that is particularly sensitive, such as a stock of vintage wines, or expensive, like a new home entertainment system? White glove service guarantees the utmost care for these types of special shipments.



## Hazardous materials handling

When shipping potentially dangerous materials (including bio-waste, chemicals and other hazardous items) there are strict rules and regulations in place to protect your customers and your business. Shipping hazardous materials (or hazmat) requires expert staff, specially trained and on call around the clock, along with specially licensed drivers.



## Trade show shipping

Trade shows are your opportunity to put your business in front of new clients and customers, so a broken or late booth display could literally be the make-or-break for your brand. Carriers experienced in trade show deliveries know how to navigate the constrained timelines and corridors of event spaces to help you be best in show, then get your materials to their next display destination.

**Specialty services don’t stop here.** Oversize items that require special equipment to handle, time-sensitive shipments that can’t afford a delay in transit, materials bound for limited-access locations — each requires an LTL carrier capable of accommodating your unique business needs. Asking about specialty services on the front end means you won’t be met with unwanted roadblocks when you start booking shipments with your carrier of choice.

# ▶▶▶ Select Carrier Partners With Confidence

With a greater understanding of what LTL freight is, the different carrier types and their customizable service options, you're now empowered to select the perfect partner for your shipments.

Far from being intimidating, the wide world of LTL shipping is now fully at your fingertips, allowing you to customize your experience and meet your business's unique needs.



## Get help choosing an LTL carrier

As you go through your LTL journey, you may still have questions arise or need specific issues addressed. Worldwide Express is the third-party logistics provider (3PL) of choice for tens of thousands of small and mid-sized business across the country. Our team of shipping experts has seen it all and is standing by to assist you with selecting the right LTL carrier, or with any other aspect of your shipping operations.

Our customers have the benefit of our relationships with the best of the best in the LTL industry. We carefully vet every carrier partner in our network, ensuring that they offer the right mix of coverage, service levels, reliability and value for your shipping dollar.

Worldwide Express customers also enjoy exclusive access to SpeedShip<sup>®</sup>, our proprietary transportation management system. This powerful online tool gives you one convenient spot to compare multiple carriers, evaluate their specialties and pricing and make an informed decision for every shipment you make. Fast and flexible, SpeedShip lets you compare carriers, create shipments and manage their progress from anywhere, anytime.

▶▶▶ [wwex.com](https://www.wwex.com)

## Ready to ship with the best?

The best partners, expansive options, top-tier technology and personalized customer service: Worldwide Express has it all! Let our team of shipping pros create a complimentary, customized LTL freight quote for you today!