

XJT at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 2004

Number of pilots: More than 2,800

Operations: Flies as United Express to 42 states plus destinations in Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean

Pilot bases: Chicago, Ill.; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colo.; Houston, Tex.; Kansas City, Mo.; Newark, N.J.; and Washington, D.C.

Headquarters: Atlanta, Ga.

Fleet: 251 airplanes, including ERJ 135s and ERJ 145s

ExpressJet

Pilots Reach Tentative Agreement

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ExpressJet pilots are currently faced with making a tough decision: voting on a tentative joint collective bargaining agreement (JCBA). This agreement, if ratified, would be the leading pilot contract in the regional airline industry. It would also be a significant step toward completing the merger of ExpressJet and Atlantic Southeast that began in 2010.

“This was a difficult negotiations process,” says Capt. Chris Grable, chairman of the ExpressJet pilots’ Master Executive Council (MEC). “The landscape has changed drastically over the last three years, affecting the tone at the bargaining table and the direction of the agreement. As we fought to secure improvements, the company

sought concessions. With the JCBA, we were able to protect much of our pay and quality of life and help position the company for success.”

In November 2013, the ExpressJet and Atlantic Southeast MECs each approved the tentative JCBA to go out to the combined membership for ratification. This decision was not made lightly. The MECs analyzed the JCBA, existing pilot contracts, and market trends.

The JCBA is a top-tier regional pilot contract. While other agreements have some sections that are better, the overall compensation, quality-of-life protections, and employee benefits within the JCBA make it an industry-

leading contract for the fee-for-departure airlines. It is also, however, a concessionary agreement in that there were some changes to the pilots’ work rules and benefits in order to reduce costs. The two pilot groups’ leaders believe that this difficult decision will help stabilize the company so that it can better compete and win new business.

Airline performance is also key. It has suffered since the merger, and efforts are being made to rebuild operational integrity. While weather, maintenance, and other reasons certainly play a role, the root cause for this degradation is that the company is running two separate airlines. Management is working to address these issues, and progress is being made; however, much work lies ahead to get the operation running smoothly.

SkyWest, Inc., which owns ExpressJet/Atlantic Southeast and SkyWest Airlines, has been making moves to reflect its operations as mainline carriers further reduce their 50-seat capacity. In mid-2013, SkyWest unveiled a huge aircraft order of approximately 600 new jets, totaling nearly \$22 billion. It plans to be the launch customer for the 80-seat Embraer 175-E2 and take delivery of existing Embraer 175s later this year. SkyWest’s strategy includes running two profitable airlines so that it can place aircraft based on geographical demand.

Although there are no guarantees for larger aircraft or new business, the JCBA, if ratified, would position the pilot group for maximum success.

In December 2013, the

Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC), composed of pilot negotiators from ExpressJet and Atlantic Southeast, and representatives from both MECs conducted road shows in all of the pilot bases to educate pilots about the agreement. They were also in the crew rooms and conducted all-pilot conference calls. Voting opened in mid-December and will close on January 14. The informational blitz will continue throughout the voting period to ensure that every pilot has an opportunity to ask questions about the agreement and provide feedback.

The ultimate decision on this tentative JCBA is in the hands of the pilot group. Many of the provisions, if it is ratified, would be effective February 1. There are, however, some items contained within the agreement that would either be phased in (such as a preferential bidding system) or out (such as the defined contribution plan) over a specified period of time.

If the agreement is not ratified by a majority vote, per the Transition and Process Agreement, the parties would then enter into mediated discussions under the National Mediation Board. It is uncertain at this time whether the pilots would be starting from the failed agreement or if management would seek deeper concessions.

“ExpressJet has a proud history, and our pilots are some of the best in the business. We remain committed to building a successful super-regional airline that benefits all stakeholders—partners, passengers, investors, and employees,” concludes Grable. 



From left to right, F/O Will Blackburn, Capt. Eric Easterlin (now a United first officer), Capt. Brian Rosenstein, Capt. David Oeswein, and Capt. Andrew Olson at an ALPA leadership event on Capitol Hill.