

TCRC, CN negotiations adjourn

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WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Talks between officials with Canadian National Railway and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference Union, or TCRC, which is representing roughly 1,700 locomotive engineers have adjourned without an agreement, but more negotiations are scheduled for next week.

Meetings between the two sides, including two federal government mediators, began last week and continued through to the end of Friday, Mark Hallman, Director of CN's Communications and Public Affairs department, said.

Another week of negotiations, beginning October 5, 2009, have been set, he said.

Hallman would not disclose any details of the negotiations, other than to restate that "CN continues negotiations with the TCRC and remains optimistic that talks with the union will produce a settlement on a new collective agreement."

Officials with the TCRC were not available for comment.

Daniel J. Shewchuk, president of the TCRC, last week was optimistic that a successful conclusion to the negotiation process could be reached despite a number of issues on both sides still left to be addressed.

Shewchuk also acknowledged last week that there have been a lot of rumours circulating from both sides, including talk of a strike vote as well as reports the company was planning lockout action.

"As a precautionary measure and in a worst case scenario, a strike vote is being taken in the event that a lockout should occur and if the mediated negotiation process is terminated unexpectedly," Shewchuk said. "But there is no intention of going on strike at this time."

He said the members of the locomotive engineers have until October 2 to return the mail-in strike ballot vote.

Hallman would not comment on the lockout rumours.

However, before any kind of strike/lockout can occur, a process must be followed by all parties involved.

As required by the Canada Labour Code, the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB), a federal tribunal, will review the TCRC's application as to whether any of CN's services are essential and must be maintained by TCRC represented employees in the event of a disruption.

The CIRB will hold a conference call with the two parties October 2, 2009, to discuss the issue further.

A rail labour dispute would come at a critical time, as the harvest in Canada is in full gear and the need to meet export commitments at Canada's export facilities is the heaviest.