

MONTHLY CONTAINER SHIPPING BAROMETER



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OCEAN FREIGHT RATES LITTLE AFFECTED BY INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS

Military action in the Middle East did little to destabilise container freight rates in June. Maritime professionals showed great sang-froid despite the wide-ranging international instability.

Main developments

Israeli-American strikes in Iran

The Israeli-American attack on Iran did not fundamentally destabilise maritime trade in June. The market stayed solid on oil prices and freight rates, with only limited movement in reaction to the intensification of the conflict in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the attack will have a major impact on operations, since it has delayed the prospect of the wide-ranging return to the Suez Canal which the shipping companies had written into their budgets for the second half. As things stand, the return to the canal cannot be envisaged operationally before the fourth quarter, given that it will necessarily be implemented progressively.

Now that it has become a long-term phenomenon, the deviation round the Cape of Good Hope is set to become a sort of new norm. This is not a bad thing for shipping companies, which can thus maintain an economic balance, which is generally favourable to them. The interest this represents is not difficult to understand: the route round the

Cape of Good Hope uses 7-10% of total operating capacity between Asia and Europe. This enables the shipping companies to absorb relatively smoothly the excess capacity generated by the arrival of the new ships they ordered in great numbers, thanks to the profits they earned during the post-pandemic period.

After the Covid-19 pandemic and the attacks of the Houthis in the Red Sea, therefore, an extraneous event has affected the container shipping sector, helping the shipping companies to stay in good financial health. The Israeli-American operation against Iran should ensure that 2025 is more profitable than expected for the companies offering container shipping services, whether as direct operators or non-vessel operating common carriers (NVOCCs).

Shippers insist on Cape of Good Hope route

Cargo insurance premiums for ships transiting the Suez Canal are, in any case, dissuading shippers from going through the Red Sea. In a new development, moreover, some shippers are insisting on use of the Cape of Good Hope route when they make their reservations, as to avoid having to pay extra for their cargo insurance.

Limited risk in the Strait of Hormuz

Following the strikes on Iran, oil prices climbed but then quickly fell again. Fears that the Strait of Hormuz could be closed faded even if this eventuality cannot be totally excluded. From the strategic and financial points of view, members of the BRICS alliance, particularly China, clearly have an interest in keeping the strait open. If it were to be closed, it would probably be at the initiative of Israel or the United States. Proportionally, by comparison with the 1970s and 1990s, the Strait of Hormuz plays a less decisive role in so far as the oil going through it today accounts for only 17-20% of global oil traffic. According to some sources, moreover, trading in the oil concerned bears little relation to the performance of Western economies. As the oil markets themselves demonstrated via the fall in prices at the end of the month, there is no immediate threat to supplies. Today, there are plenty of alternative options for sourcing and refining purposes. Moreover, Western stock levels are high.

Let's be clear. A barrel at less than USD60 is not viable for many producers. It offers the advantage of hitting Russian revenues and maintaining peace over petrol prices in the West but is not sustainable in the long term. Most market players would find USD80 a more acceptable break-even point.

More attacks on ships' electronic systems

The British maritime alert body, United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), issued an alert on 16 June regarding [an increase in electronic interference in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz](#). Similar interference was reported in the Red Sea in May.

This hybrid warfare involves the emission of electronic signals which disrupt or block satellite navigation systems. Jamming was one hypothesis put forward to explain [the grounding of the MSC Antonia](#). More recently, "spoofing" operations have also been seen. These involve the use of fake signals, which result in GPS sensors giving wrong geographical locations, which risk disorientating ships affected by effectively taking virtual control remotely over their courses.

The performance of Gemini

Sufficient time has now passed for us to be able to make a first assessment of the performance of Gemini, the alliance launched by Maersk and Hapag Lloyd in February. We cannot but conclude that the high standards the alliance has set itself and its operational discipline are paying off. Gemini has fulfilled its promises regarding quality of service with a reliability rate of more than 90%.

Another interesting indication is that the market generally is showing improved quality of service to a greater or less degree, showing that Gemini's differential hub and spoke strategy is generating competition which is beneficial for shippers.

“The high standards the alliance has set itself and its operational discipline are paying off”

China-US trade negotiations

In May, Washington and Beijing concluded a preliminary agreement providing for the suspension of most of their respective tariff increases on each other's goods for 90 days and the easing of a certain number of restrictions. There was a fresh round of negotiations between the two countries in London in mid-June, which led to the signing of a framework agreement on 26 June. It is understood that China has agreed to review and approve applications to export controlled goods, particularly rare earths, to the United States, while the US has agreed to cancel a certain number of restrictive measures on the importation of Chinese goods. China confirmed that the new agreement had been signed but, so far, all the details of the agreement have not yet been made public. As a result, it is still too early to know what tariffs will be applied from 9 July, when the truce between the two nations is due to end.

COSCO intervenes in Hutchison Ports affair

In April, Beijing intervened to stop Hutchison Ports selling its non-Chinese terminals to a consortium formed by US investment group BlackRock and MSC subsidiary Terminal Investment Limited (TiL). The project was launched to satisfy US president Donald Trump, who had complained that China was controlling the Panama Canal via Hutchison's terminals at either end of it in Balboa and Cristobal. In June, sources close to the affair indicated that COSCO was now part of the consortium involved in the talks, confirming the seriousness with which China is treating the affair. The outcome of the talks is as yet uncertain. If they fail, the Trump administration will have failed to achieve its objective of taking control of the canal and this is likely to have serious consequences.

“COSCO would be now part of the consortium involved in the talks”

Federal Maritime Commission chair steps down

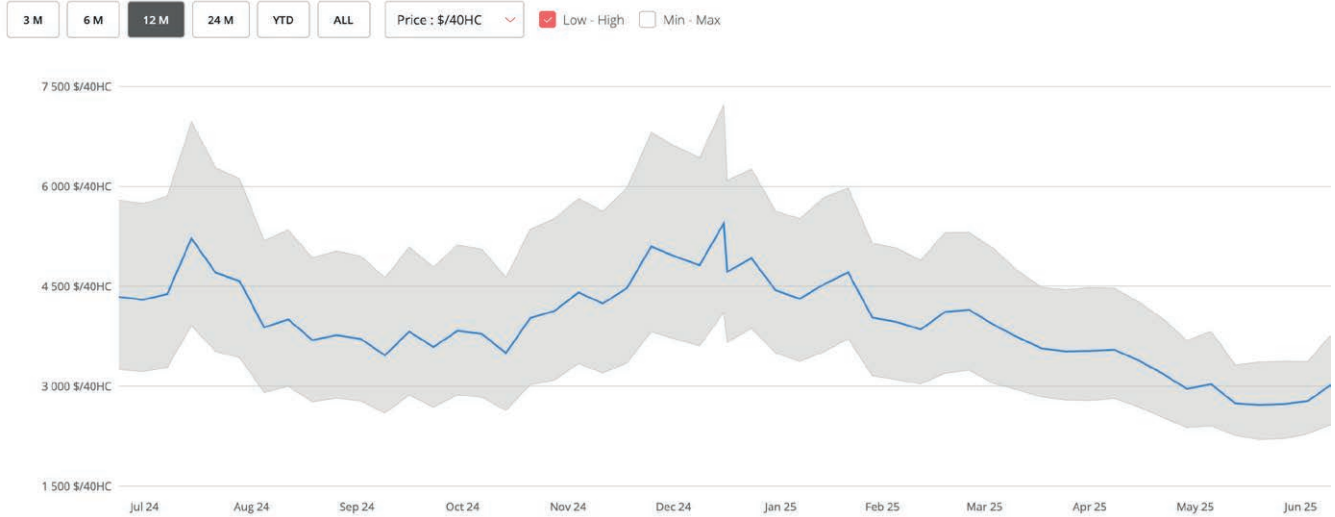
US Federal Maritime Commission chair Louis E. Sola ended his tenure on 30 June 2025. He was appointed a commissioner in 2018 during Donald Trump's first term as president, then appointed commission chair in January 2025, a few days after Trump started his second term. His departure was a surprise, therefore. The pedigree of his successor, whose appointment, will need to be ratified by the US Senate, will be closely scrutinised.

“His departure was a surprise, therefore”

Prices

Asia-Europe

Shanghai - Le Havre

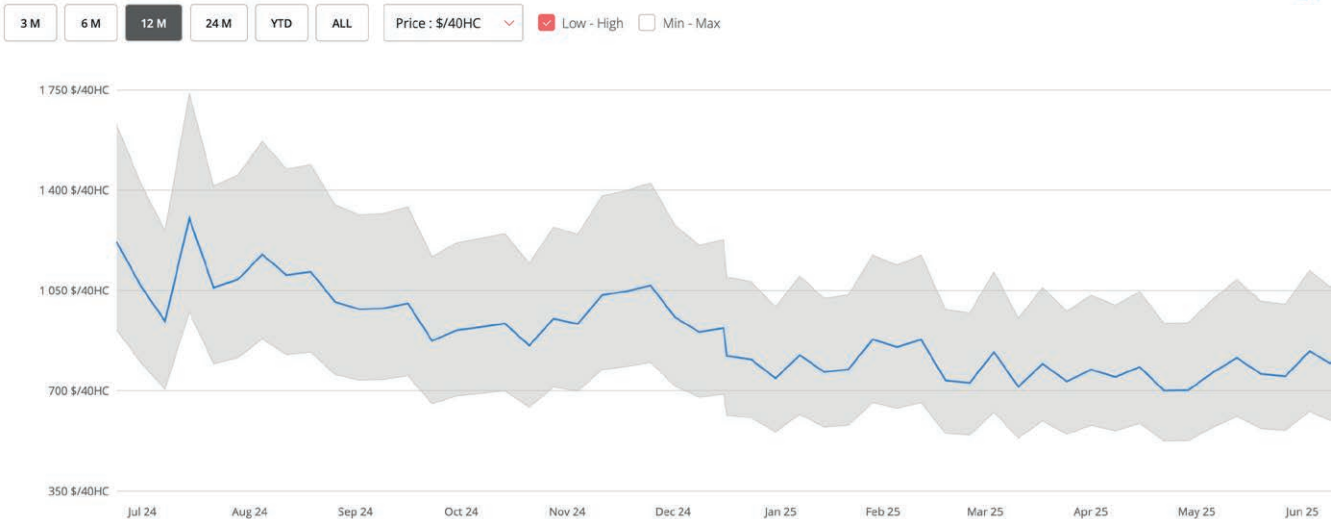


Port-to-port rates (spot and contract combined) billed for direct sailings from Shanghai to Le Havre, THC included, for a 40' HC DRY container carrying dry, non-dangerous goods. NB: diagram shows median not average rates. Source | [Uapply](#)

Rates started rising again slightly on Asia-Europe routes after having been eroded in previous months. Capacity has been kept under control and even reduced slightly in relation to demand on Asia-West Med routes.

Europe-Asia

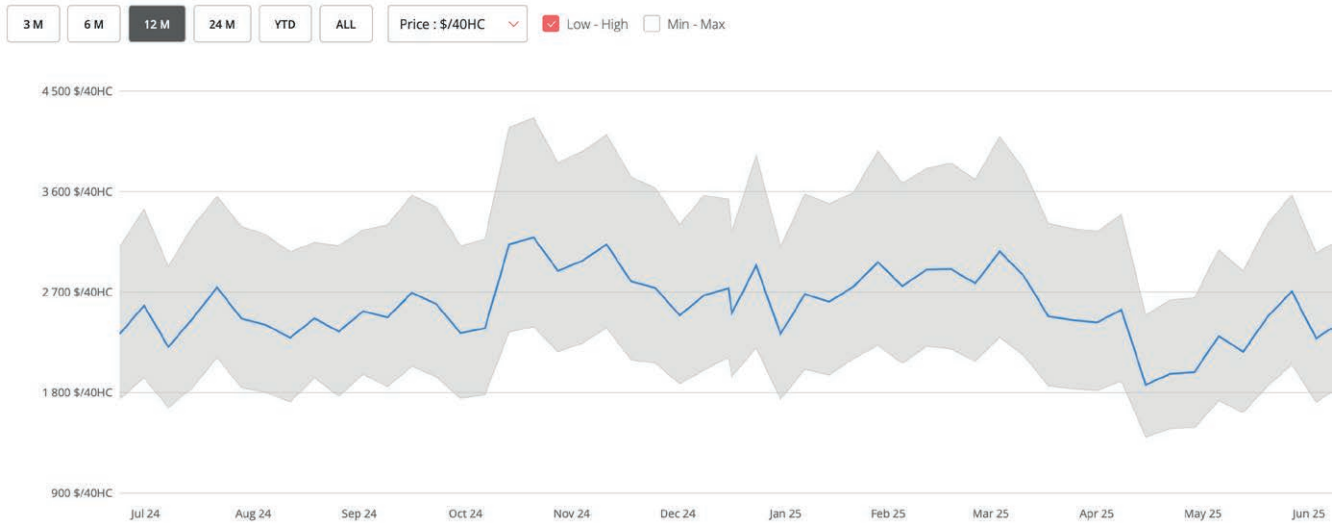
Rotterdam - Shanghai



Port-to-port rates (spot and contract combined) billed for direct sailings from Rotterdam to Shanghai, THC included, for a 40' HC DRY container carrying dry, non-dangerous goods. NB: diagram shows median not average rates. Source | [Uapply](#)

Transatlantic

Antwerp - New York

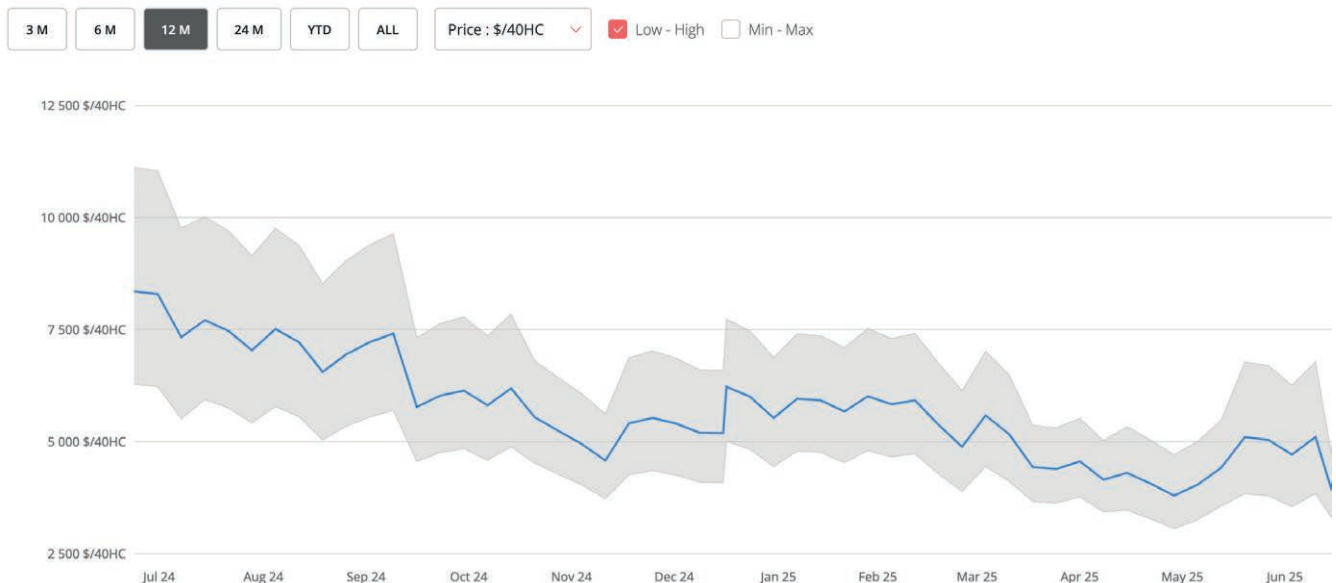


Port-to-port rates (spot and contract combined) billed for direct sailings from Antwerp to New York, THC included, for a 40' HC DRY container carrying dry, non-dangerous goods. NB: diagram shows median not average rates. Source | [Upplify](#)

The transatlantic market saw a small rise in rates at the start of the US-EU trade war truce, but rates quickly fell back again. Towards the end of June, we saw a slight upward movement, but this remains to be confirmed. It could have been due to the impending deadline for the end of the trade war truce on 9 July.

Transpacific

Shanghai - Long Beach



Port-to-port rates (spot and contract combined) billed for direct sailings from Shanghai to Long Beach, THC included, for a 40' HC DRY container carrying dry, non-dangerous goods. NB: diagram shows median not average rates. Source | [Upplify](#)

On the transpacific market, the shipping companies introduced a lot of extra capacity over a short period to meet the strong demand induced by fears of a new increase in US tariffs for goods from China. Capacity is now in excess, however, and this led to a decline in freight rates at the end of the month. Spot market rates have started to fall below contract rates, which is never a good sign for the shipping companies. The transpacific market will probably not be a cash cow for the shipping companies in 2025, as it was virtually throughout 2024.

Services

The improvement in the reliability of regular line services was confirmed in May. According to Sea Intelligence, 66% of ships on the routes it analysed were on time.

The shipping companies are nevertheless continuing to follow a “blank sailing” strategy. In its latest monthly report, British consultancy Drewry estimated that there would be 48 cancellations out of a total of 713 voyages between 30 June and 3 August, which represents a cancellation rate of 6.7%. Transpacific sailings from the United States to Asia were the most affected, representing 46% of all cancellations. Next were sailings from

Asia to Europe and the Mediterranean, which accounted for 38% of cancellations. Finally, round trips between Europe and North America took up the remaining 16% of cancellations.

Drewry indicated that 93% of voyages took place according to schedule, although Ocean Alliance and Premier Alliance registered above-average cancellations rates. MSC, Gemini and non-alliance operators recorded cancellation rates of less than 5%.

India – United States

MSC has decided to merge its Sentosa and Clanga services. To maintain a service between the Indian sub-continent and the US west coast, vessels on its Chinook service now serve North America, the Indian sub-continent and the Far East. They operate on a loop which takes in Dammam,

Hamad, Cai Mep, Hai Phong, Shenzhen, Ningbo, Shanghai, Qingdao, Busan, Seattle, Vancouver and Prince Rupert before returning via Busan, Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo, Guangzhou, Singapore and Nhava Sheva.

Asia – US East Coast

The introduction of customs duties in the US has encouraged shipping companies to reduce capacity between Asia and the United States. **MSC** and **ZIM** have reactivated MSC’s Empire service which MSC is now operating jointly with ZIM. It takes in Busan, Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo, New York, Norfolk, Baltimore, Jacksonville and Balboa.

Premier Alliance (HMM, ONE and Yang Ming) has dropped the call in Wilmington on its service Asia-US East Coast service. The ships now call in Xiamen, Shenzhen, Ningbo, Shanghai, Busan, Colon, Savannah, Charleston, Jacksonville, Colon, Savannah, Charleston, Jacksonville, Colon and Busan.

Europe – Indian sub-continent

Port Qasim has been dropped from **MSC**’s service between northern Europe and the Indian sub-continent.

The service now calls at Colombo, Nhava Sheva, Hazira and Mundra in the Indian sub-continent.

Mediterranean – Red Sea

In a change to **MSC**’s service between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, the port of Alexandria has been replaced by Abu Qir.

The itinerary now covers the ports of Gioia Tauro, Malta, Abu Qir, King Abdullah, Jeddah, Aqaba, Port Said, Damietta, Tekirdag, Valencia and Barcelona.

Asia – Indian sub-continent

The service operated jointly by **CoscoSL** and **OOCL** between Asia and the Indian sub-continent is being modified again. The calls in Shanghai, Ningbo and Shenzhen have been dropped.

The service now calls in Guangzhou, Hai Phong, Yangpu, Singapore, Karachi, Mundra, Nhava Sheva and Colombo.

Asia – Europe

MSC's Albatros service has been reorganised. The Asian ports of Busan, Tanjung Pelepas and Ulsan have been dropped, as have the European ports of Aarhus, Göteborg, Rotterdam, Wilhelmsen and the Moroccan port of Tangiers. According to consultants Dynamar, this reorganisation is linked to the end of MSC's 2M alliance with Maersk, since all of these ports have links with the Danish operator.

A number of new port calls have been added to the service's itinerary. They are Cai Mep, Kwangyang, Shenzhen, Singapore, Felixstowe, Gdansk and London. The loop now takes in Tianjin, Dalian, Kwangyang, Ningbo, Shanghai, Yantian, Shenzhen, Singapore, Felixstowe, London, Bremerhaven, Gdansk, Bremerhaven, Felixstowe, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh and Shanghai.

Asia – Mediterranean

ZIM is to add the port of Aliaga to its ZMP service from 8 August on. This follows the dropping of the service's call in Valencia. The loop now comprises

Busan, Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo, Da Chan, Cai Mep, Ashdod, Haifa, Mersin, Aliaga, Derince and Istanbul.

Transpacific

The two Gemini operators, **Hapag Lloyd** and **Mærsk**, are extending their Asian coverage. The alliance's WC1 service is now to call in Nansha and the WC2 is to include a call in Tianjin.

Emirates Shipping Line has moved into the transpacific market. On 22 July, it is launching a fortnightly service between Ho Chi Minh, Shekou and Seattle.

Transatlantic

CMA CGM's Victory Bridge service is now calling in Zeebrugge instead of Antwerp so as to avoid congestion in the bigger port. The service now takes in Southampton, Rotterdam, Zeebrugge, Bremerhaven, Veracruz, Altamira, Houston and New Orléans.

Hapag Lloyd has suspended its call in Montreal. Following a technical problem affecting the Livorno Express and with no other ships available immediately, the service's 7 June and 16 June sailings from Antwerp and Liverpool have been cancelled.

Mediterranean

SeaLead has added an intra-Mediterranean between Italy and Turkey. The service, which began

operating on 25 June, calls in Gemlik, Izmit, Istanbul, Aliaga, Salerno.

Operations

Port reliability

Sea Intelligence has tried [to measure the reliability of 202 ports over the last 14 years](#). To assess punctuality as accurately as possible, it awarded more points for reliability in 2025 than in 2012. "In our experience," it said, "recent results are more indicative of future performance." The consultancy also takes into account the number of calls made in the ports. Clearly, the greater the number of calls made in a port, the greater the risk of a loss of reliability. The ports of South and Central America come top of the listings. Santa Marta in Columbia came first with a reliability rating of 94.5%. The four leading ports were in Columbia, Peru, Ecuador and Costa Rica. Next came the French Caribbean ports of Fort-de-France in Martinique and Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe. The two French ports scored 86% and 85.3% respectively.

The leading European port came sixth. The Dutch port of Vlissingen registered a score of 85.2%. The French port of Dunkirk was in the top 20. It came 18th with a score of 80.3%, behind the port of Calgary. The British port of Tilbury came 15th.

This assessment method puts the world's leading contained ports, particularly those in China, northern Europe and North America, at the bottom of the table. They handle the greatest number of weekly port calls. Calling at less frequented ports is an assurance of reliability, therefore, even if these ports serve smaller markets. The listing also takes account of port call reliability, although this depends largely on the strategies of the shipping companies.

Port congestion in northern Europe

Antwerp and Rotterdam are continuing to experience congestion, with the result that a

number of shipping companies cancelled their calls to the two ports in June.

Low water levels

The first low water alerts were issued on the River Rhine. High temperatures in June reduced water levels on the river and navigational restrictions led to companies reducing their loading capacity by 50% between Duisburg and Basel. According to a Reuters report, inland waterway operators were nevertheless able to increase the number of barges they had in service to meet demand. During the last heat wave in 2022, the fall in water levels in the Rhine caused congestion in the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp. The same situation could arise in the weeks to come. The railways do not have enough capacity to meet demand for a modal switch.

A number of shipping companies have announced, moreover, that they are bringing in low water surcharges this summer for cargo destined for Montreal because of low water levels on the Saint Lawrence.



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The "Services" and "Operations" sections of this barometer are produced in collaboration with Hervé Deiss, who is a journalist specialized in maritime transport and port issues.



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