MONTHLY CONTAINER SHIPPING BAROMETER

July 2025

upply

OCEAN FREIGHT RATES: THE DRIVING FORCES OF PROFITABILITY ARE FAILING

In a context of sluggish demand, freight rates in container shipping are falling or at best stabilising depending on the market. The most profitable segments are affected.

Highlights of the month

Red Sea attacks resume

After a period of calm, Houthis attacks on commercial ships resumed violently in July, with two ships sunk and at least four crew members killed. This resurgence of attacks has put at risk the prospect of a return of container traffic via the Suez Canal in the second half of the year. War risk surcharges to cross the Strait of Bab-el Mandeb are soaring again.

> “War risk surcharges to cross the Strait of Bab-el Mandeb are soaring again”

This situation, however, did not prevent ships belonging to the car manufacturer BYD from using this route without incident. On July 15, the BYD X'IAN ro-ro ship passed through the Suez Canal on its maiden voyage between Singapore and Italy, and a few days earlier, on June 27, the BYD HEFEI did the same. “We expect the tonnage of vehicle carriers transiting through the Canal to increase by at least 20% in the second half of 2025 compared to the first half of the same year” said Admiral Osama Rabiee, Chairman and CEO of the Suez Canal Authority. A move that has led observers to question the guarantees obtained by the Chinese company to transport such high-value goods, at the same time as the attacks were resuming.

Sluggish demand

On July 27, 2025, the United States and the European Union concluded a trade agreement. The US will apply a 15% tariff to the vast majority of EU exports. The agreement still contains many grey areas, but exporters and importers still hope to finally have a more stable framework for managing their trade relations.

While the tariffs saga may have supported demand in the first half of the year, through an effect of forward purchasing, it is clear that structurally, East/West container volumes risk weakening on the transpacific route and stagnating with Europe. The growth of containerised trade is now clearly oriented towards intra-Asia and Indo-Pacific. This stagnation in volumes should not be considered as the market stalling but as a high plateau that the market seems to have reached with regard to transoceanic containerised trade.

Alert on the transport of electric vehicles

The American company Matson has announced that it now refuses until further notice the transport of electric cars and plug-in hybrids, because of the classification of their lithium-ion batteries as hazardous materials. This news, which has gone somewhat unnoticed, illustrates the headache facing shipping companies in this market. On the one hand, they can hardly ignore this rapidly growing segment, but on the other hand, the number of claims related to the transport of these products continues to increase, in proportions that are now worrying for insurers. While the International Maritime Organization (IMO) remains silent on this issue for the moment, insurers will certainly take tougher positions.

“ Insurers will certainly take tougher positions ”

Effects of the new US maritime policy

For now, the Trump administration’s ambitions to “restore U.S. maritime domination” are producing moderate effects. Operators are giving assurances, while remaining cautious. CMA CGM has thus attracted the good graces of the American administration by deciding to register the CMA CGM Phoenix under the American flag. The prospect of introducing a tax on ships built in China or operated by Chinese companies when they call in the United States is also causing a stir. According to a report by the Economic Research Institute of the Korean Development Bank, quoted by Maritime Executive, Korean shipyards recorded a dynamic first half, particularly in the container sector. China still largely dominates the market, but Korea is undoubtedly benefiting from American policy. Japan, on the other hand, is having difficulty extricating itself from the situation.

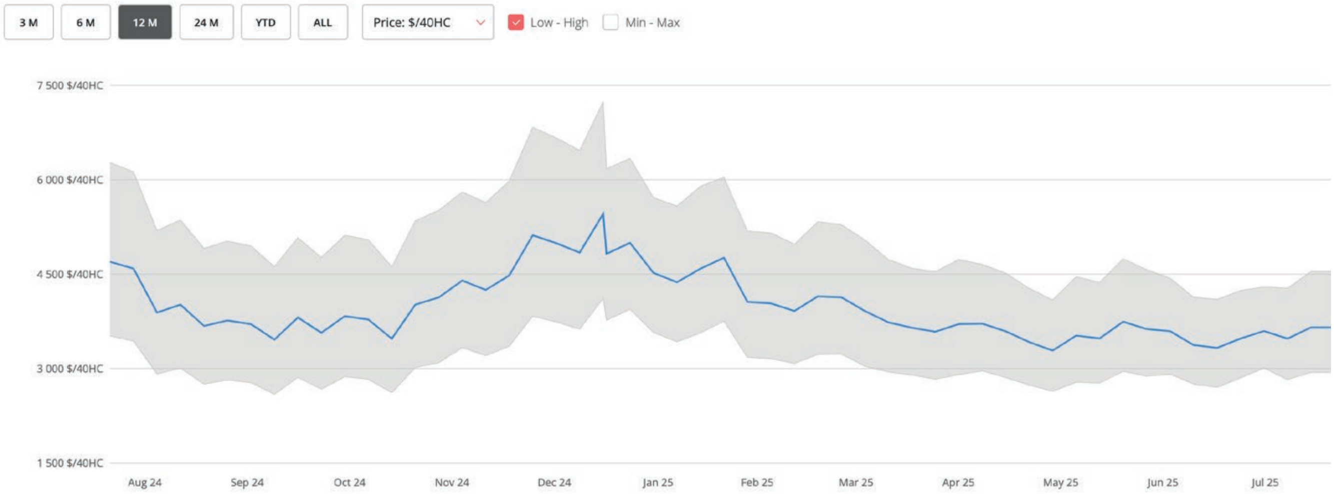
Resurgence of the dual civil and military identity of maritime transport

While decades of peace in Europe had led to a fairly clear separation of civil and military activities in the maritime transport chain, the increasingly conflictual context is reshuffling the cards. In an interview given to the Financial Times in early July, Boudewijn Siemons, CEO of the Port of Rotterdam Authority, announced that the port had reserved berths for ships carrying military cargo and drawn up plans to redirect commercial traffic in the event of war, adding that Rotterdam was coordinating its operations with its neighbour Antwerp. As we have been pointing out for several years now, control of merchant fleets is more than ever a sovereignty issue, but the impacts of geopolitical developments on maritime and port organisation go far beyond that. Large commercial ports are also becoming targets again, with the question of their defence as a fairly obvious corollary.

Prices

Asia-Europe

Shanghai - Le Havre

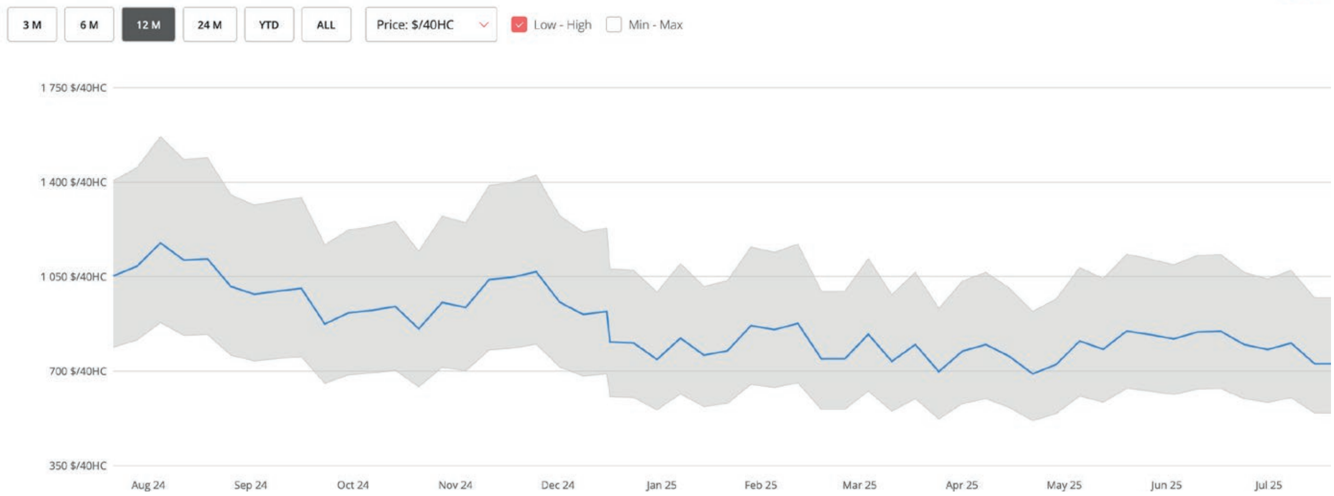


Evolution of invoiced prices (mix of spot and contract) between Shanghai and Le Havre, THC included, on the basis of a 40' HC DRY container, for dry non-dangerous goods in port to port. NB: this graph shows the evolution of the median rate and not the average rate. Source | Upply

On the Asia-Europe route, maintaining the passage of ships by the Cape of Good Hope route is no longer enough to fuel tension on the market. Attempts to restore freight rates are stalling in the context of the start of the summer "peak season" which, for the moment, is disappointing in terms of volume forecasts. Competition between shipping companies to fill ships leaving Asia, is very real and fierce and they are struggling to do this.

Europe-Asia

Rotterdam - Shanghai

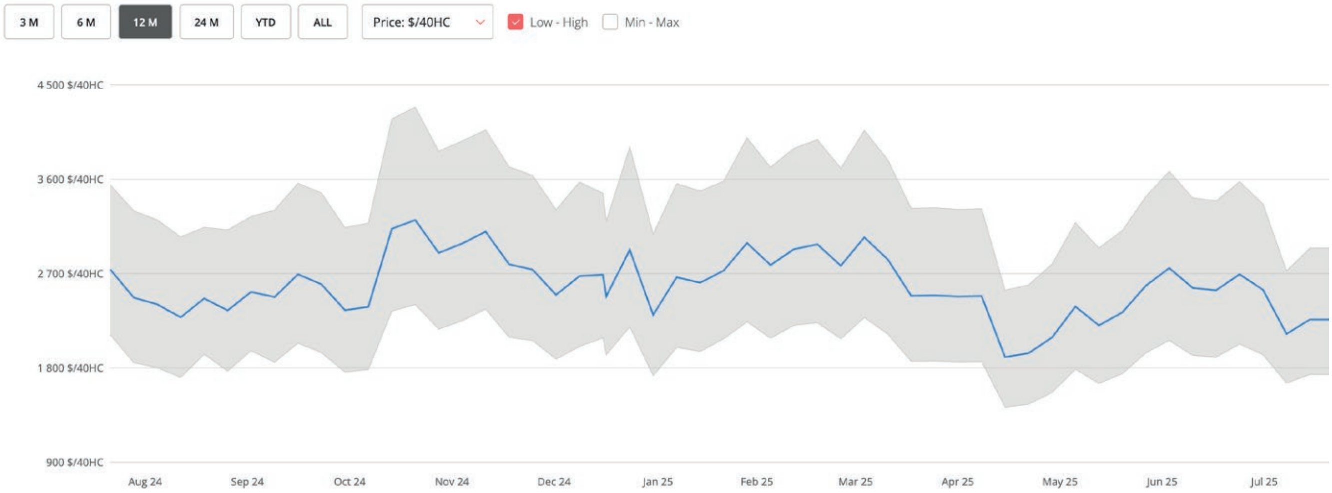


Evolution of invoiced prices (mix of spot and contract) between Rotterdam and Shanghai, THC included, on the basis of a 40' HC DRY container, for dry non-dangerous goods in port to port. NB: this graph shows the evolution of the median rate and not the average rate. Source | Upply

On the Europe-Asia route, dry freight rates are not taking off and full volumes disappoint overall, which is not, however, the case for reefers. On the dry side, the export rate market remains in competition with the empty market, in a so-called "better than empty" logic.

Transatlantic

Antwerp - New York

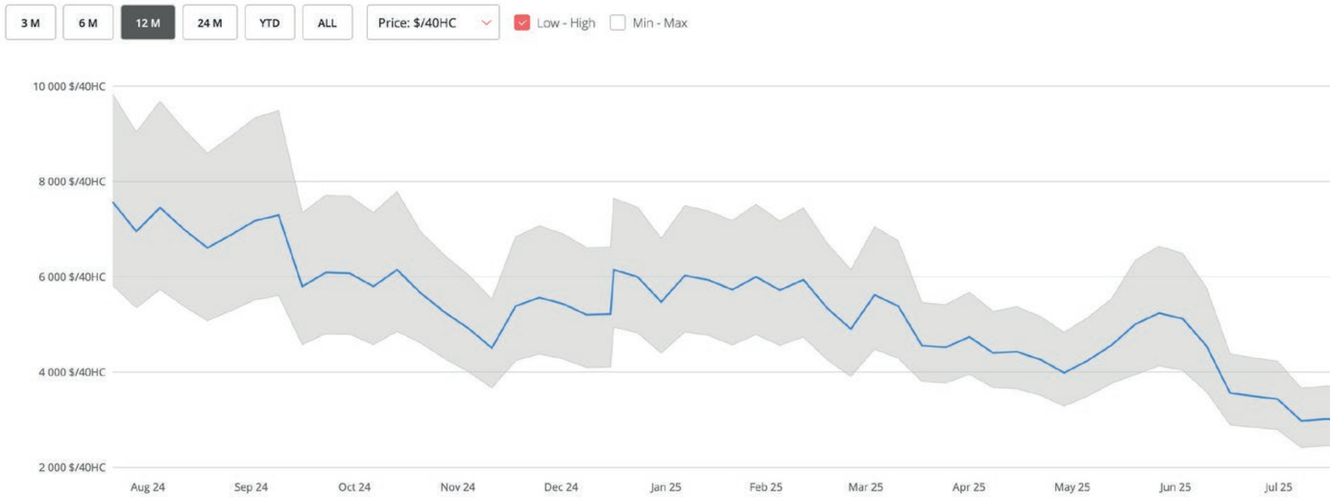


Evolution of invoiced prices (mix of spot and contract) between Antwerp and New York, THC included, on the basis of a 40' HC DRY container, for dry non-dangerous goods in port to port. NB: this graph shows the evolution of the median rate and not the average rate. Source | Upply

The Transatlantic market is proving very resilient. The market has already improved but is stabilising, and seems to be taking relatively little account of tariff announcements.

Transpacific

Shanghai - Long Beach



Evolution of invoiced prices (mix of spot and contract) between Shanghai and Long Beach, THC included, on the basis of a 40' HC DRY container, for dry non-dangerous goods in port to port. NB: this graph shows the evolution of the median rate and not the average rate. Source | Upply

The spot freight rate market continues to crumble on the Transpacific corridor, now evolving below the USD 3,000 threshold on the 40' sector and settling at levels below Asia-Europe spot rates. Companies are seeing with dread one of the key components of their 2024 profitability disappear, which does not bode well for the second half of the year.

Services

Reliability continues to advance in the containerised regular line sector. According to Sea Intelligence's monthly study, the reliability rate of shipowners increased by 1.6 points in June compared to May, reaching 67.4%. In June, the Gemini alliance, which includes Mærsk and Hapag Lloyd, took the lead with 90%, followed by MSC (75%). Sea Intelligence points out that the reliability rate is measured on mother ships. This precision is very important since Gemini bases its strategy on serving a few ports per continent and deploying feeder services for other ports.

A study by Drewry reports slightly lower results for the Gemini alliance, with 89% reliability on the transpacific and Asia-Europe routes, and 87% on the transatlantic. However, six months after the implementation of the services, we can consider that the Gemini alliance is on track to deliver on its founding promise, which consisted of guaranteeing customers a reliability rate of 90%, while this same rate was around 60% for both companies in February.

Moreover, Drewry's study shows that the other two alliances performance is much worse. Premier Alliance has a reliability rate of 44% on the Trans-Pacific route and 19% on the Asia-Europe routes. Ocean Alliance scored 33% on the Trans-Pacific route and 38% on the Asia-Europe route.

These figures explain the maintenance of blank sailings by the shipping companies. Between July 28 and August 31, Drewry identified 48 cancelled services out of the 713 announced, or 7% of cancellations. Cancellations affect 50% of transpacific routes, 33% of Asia-Europe and Mediterranean services and 17% of the transatlantic route.

Transatlantic

CMA CGM has added a ship to the Victory Bridge service as of August 2, the OOCL Vera Cruz. The aim is to improve the reliability of transatlantic links. The Victory Bridge connects the ports of Southampton, Rotterdam, Zeebrugge, Bremerhaven, Veracruz, Altamira, Houston and New Orleans.

OOCL changed the European service of the AT3 service, following the entry into service of a new ship, MH Perseus. The rotation in Europe is now between Rotterdam, Zeebrugge, Bremerhaven and Southampton.

Asia – Europe

Maersk AE5 service as of 25 August, integrates two stopovers in the ports of Aarhus and Gothenburg. The new rotation will be between Qingdao, Yantian, Tanjung Pelepas, London, Hamburg, Bremerhaven, Aarhus, Gothenburg, Rotterdam and back by Tanjung Pelepas. Changes that the shipping company justifies by the situation concerning port congestion in Europe. To avoid delays in the service of European markets, Mærsk relies on the port of Aarhus in Denmark. The goal is to deploy feeders to ports where the risk of disruption is higher. This change also concerns **Hapag Lloyd's** NE4 service, which has been affected by stopover changes.

Asia – Europe (continuing)

MSC is bringing back into service its three links between Europe and Asia, Swan, Britannia and Lion, with adaptations, indicates the Dutch consulting firm Dynamar. On the Swan service, the stopover at the port of Antwerp is replaced by Felixstowe. The new rotation takes place between Busan, Ningbo, Shanghai, Xiamen, Shenzhen, Singapore, Sines, Le Havre, Rotterdam, Gothenburg, Aarhus, Hamburg, Felixstowe, Port Kelaang, Singapore and back to Shenzhen. On the Britannia service, the stops at Ningbo, Antwerp and Mundra are replaced by stops at Guangzhou and Colombo. The rotation now operates between Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Ho Chi Minh, Singapore, Colombo, Felixstowe, Gdansk, Klaipeda, Gdynia, London, Las Palmas, Colombo, and Singapore. Finally, the Lion service will no longer have stops in Busan, Guangzhou and London. The rotation now operates between Qingdao, Ningbo, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Singapore, Zeebrugge, Antwerp, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Le Havre, Abu Dhabi, Jebel Ali, Singapore, and Shenzhen.

Mediterranean – United States

MSC will adjust the service between the Mediterranean and the United States from September in order to guarantee the reliability of the schedules. The stopovers at the port of Algeciras are replaced by a call at Malaga. The new rotation will be between Aliaga, Tekirdag, Piraeus, Iskenderun, Haifa, Marseille-Fos, Barcelona, Valencia, Malaga, Sines, New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah.

Mediterranean – India

Unifeeder launched a service between the Indian subcontinent and the Mediterranean starting July 5. The 42-day rotation takes place between the ports of Istanbul, Izmit, Mersin, Port Said, Aqaba, Jeddah, Nhava Sheva, Mundra, Jeddah, Aqaba, Port Said, Alexandria and back to Istanbul.

Intra-Europe

CMA CGM has expanded the coverage of its ISX (Irish Sea Express) service with the addition of a call at the port of Zeebrugge. From now on, the rotation will take place between Zeebrugge, Antwerp, Dunkirk, Liverpool, Dublin, Belfast, and Greenock. The Zeebrugge stopover provides a connection with the Victory Bridge service to the Gulf of Mexico.

Mærsk has readjusted the rotation of its Canada Express Service. Departure dates have also been changed. From now on, ships will call at ports in the following order: Antwerp, Bremerhaven, Rotterdam, Montreal and Halifax.

Europe – Central America

Mærsk has reorganized the service to the Gulf of Mexico countries. The Danish shipping company is creating a service between Europe, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Marketed under the name CAX, it will serve from the end of September Antwerp, Southampton, Hamburg, Bremerhaven, Newark, Manzanillo (Panama), Puerto Antioquia, Puerto Moin and return by Manzanillo. This new service will replace both CRX and COEX services. The stopovers in South America have been modified for the CLX service. The last port of service will now be Santa Marta Magdalena. The port of Southampton takes on the role of its first European stopover. As for the Rotterdam and Antwerp stops, they are reversed. The Dutch port is now the last European port to be called at after Southampton and Antwerp. Finally, the two Mexican ports of Veracruz and Altamira will be served by a dedicated rotation on the TA4 service from Northern Europe.

Trans-Pacific

ONE has reorganised the rotations of the EC2 and EC3 services. The shipping company is cancelling calls to Jacksonville (between Charleston and Manzanillo) until further notice. The new rotation takes place between Xiamen, Yantian, Ningbo, Shanghai, Pusan, Manzanillo, Savannah, Charleston, Manzanillo and Pusan. As for the EC3 service it now includes a call in the port of Jacksonville. The new rotation has been in place since August 2. It operates between the ports of Laem Chabang, Cai Mep, Singapore, Colombo, Halifax, New York, Jacksonville, Savannah, Charleston, Norfolk, New York, Halifax and Singapore.

The situation of the Transpacific market has incited **MSC** to modify its rotations between Asia and North America. Therefore, the Pearl service is temporarily suspended. To maintain market service, stopovers are postponed on both Orient and Sentosa services. Their rotations are modified. A stopover in Haiphong is added to the Orient service and one is added in Xiamen on the Sentosa service.
Hapag Lloyd announces the withdrawal of the westbound stopover in Ensenada on its TPM service. The new rotation affects the ports of Ningbo, Shanghai, Qingdao, Busan, Yokohama, Ensenada, Manzanillo, Puerto Quetzal, Buenaventura, and Guayaquil.

China – India

Evergreen started a new service between China and India since July 7, the CIX8. The four ships assigned to this rotation will call at the ports of Qingdao, Xiamen, Nansha, Da Chan Bay, Port Klang, Colombo, Nhava Sheva, and Mundra.

Operations

Port congestion

The HMM shipping company has taken stock of the situation in Europe. Disruptions continue, particularly in the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg, Antwerp and Zeebrugge, mainly due to a shortage of labour. To the south, the port of Genoa is also affected, as well as Valencia in Spain. On the other hand, all signals are green for the French ports of Le Havre and Marseille-Fos.

Purchase of CK Hutchison ports

Last March, Hong Kong-based Hutchison Ports has entered into exclusive negotiations with a consortium formed by the American investment fund Black Rock and Terminal Investment Limited (TiL), a subsidiary of the MSC group, for the sale of almost all of its ports. But China immediately voiced its opposition to the project, and the period of exclusive negotiations expired on July 27, without any settlement being concluded.

On July 28, CK Hutchison said it was in talks with a consortium interested in its $22.8 billion ports business to add a “major strategic investor” from China to the bid, after Beijing announced it was investigating the deal.

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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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