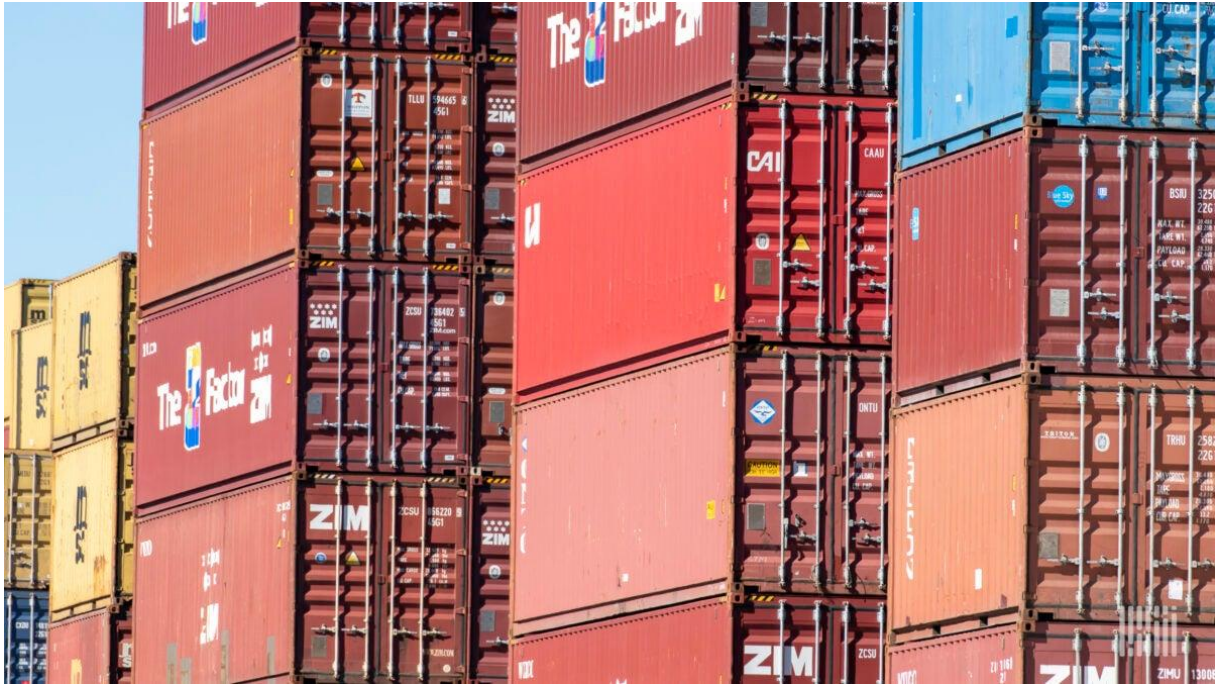


Retailers expect January US container volumes to stay elevated

NRF revises year-end box data upward

[Stuart Chirls](#)

Friday, January 10, 2025



(Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

Container flows through U.S. ports are set for a strong finish as substantial end-of-year gains point to impressive improvement in 2024.

The swell of traffic has been fueled by shippers stockpiling imports in an effort to avoid the whipsawing of simmering labor issues and threats of fresh tariffs in the coming year, according to the National Retail Federation.

American ports handled 2.17 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in November, according to the trade group's Global Port Tracker, in a release. The data excludes the ports of New York and New Jersey, which have yet to report. Volume was off 3.2% from October but ahead 14.7% year over year (y/y).

The NRF projected December volume at 2.24 million TEUs, up 19.2% y/y, and pushing full-year totals to 25.6 million TEUs, 15.2% ahead of 2023.

That growth came before port employers and union longshoremen on Wednesday [came to an agreement](#) on container-handling automation, averting what many feared would be a disastrous strike when the current contract extension expires Jan. 15.

"The new contract brings certainty and avoids disruptions, and we hope to see it ratified as soon as possible," NRF Vice President for Supply Chain and Customs Policy Jonathan Gold said, in the release. "But the agreement came at the last minute, and retailers were already bringing in spring merchandise early to ensure that they would be well-stocked to serve their customers in case of another disruption.

“The surge in imports has also been driven by President-elect Trump’s plan to increase tariffs because retailers want to avoid higher costs that will eventually be paid by consumers. The long-term impact on imports remains to be seen.”

Members of the International Longshoremen’s Association will continue to work under the terms of the current master contract while the union and employers represented by the United States Maritime Alliance hash out the details of a new six-year pact.

“We have narrowly averted a strike, but that doesn’t mean there hasn’t been an impact,” said Hackett Associates Founder Ben Hackett, who produces the Port Tracker. “Importers had already front-loaded cargo in anticipation of delays, giving a boost to imports in December and early January.”

The forecasts revised previous estimates from before the October longshore port contract extension and November elections.

November was projected at 1.91 million TEUs and December at 1.88 million TEUs, for 24.9 million TEUs for all of 2024.

January is forecast at 2.16 million TEUs, an increase of 10% y/y; February volume is seen declining 4.5% to 1.87 million TEUs as China factories shut down for Lunar New Year; March traffic is projected at 2.13 million TEUs, up 10.6%; April up 8% to 2.18 million TEUs; and May at 2.2 million TEUs, a gain of 5.9%.

Find more articles by Stuart Chirls [here](#).