

Port of LA handled 924,000 containers in January but tariffs loom large

by [Stas Margaronis](#) 2 hours ago

In January, the Port of Los Angeles handled 924,245 Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) which was “8% higher than last year, and 13% above the five-year average for the month,” according to Eugene Seroka, executive director, Port of Los Angeles.

Seroka spoke at the Port’s February 19th media briefing in which he added: “January imports landed at a robust 484,000 TEUs. That is a 10% increase over last year. In addition ... many imports arrived early to avoid scheduled production slowdowns due to the (Chinese) Lunar New Year holiday. On the export side, we shipped out 113,000 TEUs, a 10% decrease compared to 2024.

Seroka ascribed the Port’s performance to three key factors:

- Strong consumer spending and a resilient U.S. economy.
- Importers front-loading due to tariff concerns.
- Third, “we’ve seen incremental gains related to the Panama Canal and Red Sea diversions, as well as labor negotiations back East regarding East Coast labor.”

He explained that the International Longshoremen’s Association full membership will vote on a new six-year agreement with the United States Maritime Alliance: “All of us in the industry are hopeful that this will resolve the issue because it’s critical to the U.S economy for every American port to be operating at top speed with dock workers who are compensated fairly.”

Tariff Impacts on Retailers & Consumers

Seroka’s guest was Rachel Michelin, President, and CEO of the California Retailers Association.

She expressed strong concerns about the impact of tariffs being imposed by the Trump administration, especially on small retailers and consumers: “We want to make sure that the United States is competitive ... and that we support what we see the (Trump) administration at the national level is trying to do. But ... blanket tariffs are going to have an impact on consumers, and it goes back to really that impact on consumers and their pocketbook. A lot of my larger members, the national brands, they can pivot. They can bring things in earlier. They can absorb some of those costs for maybe a longer period. I worry about my smaller members, my smaller retailers ... Some of those smaller retailers are still catching up from COVID. And so, they’re finally getting ahead and finally ... getting back to normal. And now we are kind of hit with this. They do not have that luxury to absorb all those costs that might be happening ... It’s the uncertainty ... It’s the stress. And ... when ... it is your store, it’s your livelihood...”

She said under the circumstances less regulation of businesses would help alleviate the problem: “I focus a lot on California, and we follow a lot of what is going on in the Legislature and then on the regulatory side. And what we are trying to do, particularly with the Legislature, the Governor’s office is really (to) have them take a pause... Let’s pause some of the regulatory actions in Sacramento.”

Investments In Tougher Anti-Retail Crime Provisions

Michelin said that California has beefed up support for law enforcement to combat the growing problems of retail crime: “Last year we were able to get 11 bills through the Legislature that addressed this issue, but it took four years to get there ... There was a bill passed to develop the organized retail crime statute. We work with the California Highway Patrol ... and Governor Newsom has invested heavily in that. And last year, we were able to get permanent funding. We expanded that from three to five task forces. We were able to get cargo theft added, including rail into that. We were able to add enhancements for smash and grabs. We were able to add new felonies. We were able to do a lot in this package.”