

Trans-Pacific blank sailings soar as ocean shipments plunge

Tariffs hammer China export container volumes

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(Photo: Evergreen Marine)

In recent weeks, the container shipping industry has seen significant changes in scheduled vessel capacity, particularly on routes connecting Asia to North America, in response to the volatile trade climate and the rapidly changing tariff situation.

[SONAR](#)'s Container Atlas data indicates a 20% decline in China order bookings year on year through mid-April, as shippers mull shifts to Vietnam and other manufacturing centers in the region.

"Our distributors have been urging us to order, order, order, to get ahead of tariffs," an independent housewares retailer told FreightWaves. "I told them we have enough inventory as it is but it is starting to feel like they're taking advantage."

"But at some point we're going to have to manage through this tariff *mishegas*," she said, using the Yiddish term for craziness.

For the Asia-North America West Coast route, there has been a notable decrease in scheduled capacity for weeks 16-19 of 2025. Six weeks ago, 1.43 million twenty-foot equivalent units was planned for deployment. However, by week 15, this had dropped to 1.37 million TEUs, representing a 12% reduction, according to a new report by analyst Sea-Intelligence.

The Asia-North America East Coast route has experienced an even more pronounced decline. Over a six-week period, scheduled capacity for weeks 16-19 fell from 1.01 million TEUs to 867,000, a substantial 14% decrease.

Perhaps the most striking change has been the dramatic increase in blank sailings. Just three weeks ago, only 60,000 TEUs was scheduled to be blanked for weeks 16-19. This figure skyrocketed to 250,000 TEUs within a week as carriers announced numerous blank sailings in response to the tariffs.

that sent China exports plunging. By week 15, the total blanked capacity for this period had further increased to 367,800 TEUs.

A blank, or void, sailing is a scheduled voyage that is canceled or on which scheduled ports of a rotation are skipped. Carriers use blank sailings for a variety of reasons, including to shore up rates when demand is off.

Interestingly, the trans-Atlantic trade has not experienced similar fluctuations. Capacity on this route has remained largely stable, likely influenced by the recent announcement of a 90-day tariff pause by both the Trump administration and the European Union.

These rapid adjustments in shipping capacity reflect the industry's current short-term approach. With tariffs being imposed and suspended on an almost daily basis, both shipping lines and cargo owners appear to be making only immediate supply chain adjustments. They seem to be waiting for the situation to stabilize before implementing any long-term network changes.