

## Gulf Coast ports post rising freight volumes in March

Cargo volume increase in Houston, New Orleans and Corpus Christi, Texas

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Port Houston saw steel import volumes increase 26% year over year in March to 436,256 short tons. (Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

Container and breakbulk cargo flows in March rose in Houston and New Orleans, while demand for crude oil continued to fuel shipments through Corpus Christi, Texas.

### Port Houston container volumes rebound in March

After sluggish freight flows in February, [Port Houston](#) handled 386,864 twenty-foot equivalent units in March, a 7% increase compared to March 2023.

It marked a rebound after fog disrupted February freight movements through the Houston Ship Channel, with the port handling 325,424 TEUs in February, a 13% year-over-year decline compared to February 2024.

“At the container terminals, March was our busiest month on record for loaded exports,” Mike Shaffner, the port’s director of operations, planning and technology, said during a commission meeting on Tuesday. “This is driven by strong export volume that increased by 14% compared to last March.”

Year-to-date container volumes at Port Houston’s public terminals surpassed 1 million TEUs, reaching 1.1 million, essentially flat compared to the same period in 2024, Shaffner said.

“In terms of our financials, they’re performing as expected and are slightly evolving there,” Shaffner said. “The full impact of tariffs and fees for Chinese vessels remains the variable that we’re keeping a close eye on.”

Shaffner said the port has seen three blank sailings in recent weeks, in which carriers cancel a regular weekly voyage because of low bookings.

“Three ships that were scheduled to come decided to not show,” Shaffer said. “We haven’t seen those blanks yet, and we’ve had one announcement from a trans-Pacific service that will downsize to smaller ships they move.”

Loaded exports totaled 152,857 TEUs in March, while loaded imports increased 2% year over year to 167,859 TEUs.

Steel import volumes increased 26% year over year in March to 436,256 short tons. Imports of steel are up 10% year to date compared to the same year-ago period, totaling 1.1 million short tons.

Total tonnage across Port Houston’s eight public facilities reached 13,202,844 tons through March, down 2% year to date.

Cargo volumes in April have been busier than March, according to Shaffner.

“As of today, April is trending up and we still have two days of activity remaining,” Shaffner said. “Also, April looks to be better than March because of strong demand.”

#### **Port of New Orleans sees rise in container, breakbulk cargo**

[The Port of New Orleans](#) reported moving 46,676 TEUs in March, a 3% year-over-year increase.

New Orleans recorded an 11% year-over-year rise in total breakbulk tonnage at 91,463 short tons during the month.

“In March, we saw a significant import volume of cement in super sacks, doubling the volume we received during the same period of time from last fiscal year,” Kimberly Curth, Port of New Orleans spokeswoman, told FreightWaves in an email.

“Fiscal year-to-date, we have seen 832,034 short tons of breakbulk cargo, up by 10% over the same period of time from last fiscal year. This increase is mainly driven by double-digit increases in steel, natural rubber as well as project cargo imports.”

Top container imports in March included coffee and various chemicals, followed by furniture. Top container exports in the month included plastic resins, as well as various chemicals and synthetic rubber.

Top breakbulk commodities the port handled in March included natural rubber, project cargo and bagged cargo imports.

The port handled 7,557 Class I railcar switches in March. The port handles switching operations for six Class I railroads: BNSF, CN, CSX, CPKC, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific.

#### **Port of Corpus Christi moves over 11 million tons of crude in March**

[The Port of Corpus Christi](#) moved 18 million tons of cargo in March, a 6% year-over-year increase from the same year-ago period.

The port handled 11.5 million total tons of crude oil during the month, an 8.5% increase compared to March 2024.

The Port of Corpus Christi and its customers moved 51.3 million tons of commodities through the Corpus Christi Ship Channel in the first quarter, driven primarily by increases in crude oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, according to a [news release](#).

The 51.3 million tons moved in the first quarter reflects the highest first quarter in the history of the port, as well as the first time volumes exceeded 50 million tons during a quarter.

Crude oil shipments in the first quarter totaled 33.4 million tons, up 10.5% over the same period last year, while LNG volumes were up 12.3% to 4.3 million tons.

The Port of Corpus Christi had 203 ship calls in March, compared to 198 in the same month in 2024. The port handled 437 barges in February, a 6% year-over-year decrease.