

Port of LA reports volume down 30% in first week of May

by [Stas Margaronis](#) 17 hours ago

The Port of Los Angeles reported that container volumes are down 30% for the first week in May due to the imposition of tariffs on imports, according to Eugene Seroka, Executive Director Port of Los Angeles.

Speaking at the Port's May 19th media briefing, Seroka said: "Volume in the first week of May here at the Port of LA was down more than 30% on the import side of our ledger."

He added that the decline for the rest of the month is likely to be "substantial when we close the books on this month. Although it is difficult to forecast right now with the sliding ... vessel utilizations and seemingly the stop/start focus on various (trade and tariff) negotiations."

In a statement issued on May 12th, Seroka said: "The 90-day pause and reduction of tariffs between the United States and China is welcome news for consumers, American businesses, workers and the supply chain. Even with this announcement, tariffs remain elevated compared to April 1. To avoid further uncertainty and disruption of trade, both sides should work together swiftly toward a long-term agreement. Additionally, it's important for the United States to work with other nations to reduce existing tariffs."

Seroka said that on the cargo side of the business, cancelled sailings are reducing volumes: "The impact is real ... for the month of May, 80 or so, sailings were expected to arrive in Los Angeles. 17 of those have been canceled as of right now, 10 cancellations remain on the books for the month of June."

The impact of existing tariffs is raising the price of imported goods based on the Yale University Budget Lab, "estimating that the effective tariff on Americans is between 16% and 18%, the highest it has been since 1934."

In summary, the expectation is that "we will see a little bit of an uptick in bookings in Asia cargo coming over. You will not see a deluge of freight here at the Port of Los Angeles. That likely means that there will be lower inventory across a variety of retail sectors and in the parts supply ... of our business for American factories. That will leave us with fewer selections of products and likely higher prices. But for now, uncertainty remains in every business meeting that I have, and trying to find a way to make the best decisions for companies possible still remains elusive."

Christmas Season Orders Uncertain

This comes at a time when May is the month when companies issue their orders for year-end and holiday sales: "May is traditionally the month where a lot of purchase orders go in for the year-end and Christmas holidays. It typically takes about three months to send an order to a factory, have those goods made, and get them ready to ship from Asia to the United States. So, this 90-day pause (between the United States and China on tariffs) is not a long time in our business."

This is likely to result in disruptions of imported goods during 2025: "This is complicated, and it is very difficult to shut down the supply chain to the degree we did and then fire it back up without any kind of bumps in the road. So, there will be more to be seen, but we will have more detailed information

as products come in. And while individual companies may say that their bookings are up ticking or they are seeing this in certain commodities, that combination of information may not be as wide-reaching as some would think. So, we will see the aftereffect of this once the cargo passes through.”

April Volumes Robust

Seroka noted that “although it is a rear-view mirror look, the Port of Los Angeles handled a robust 843,000 container units in April, 9.5% more than last year. This ranks as our third-best April on record, surpassed only by the pandemic years of 2021 and 2022. The Port has now seen 10 straight months of year-on-year growth, driven in part by retailers and manufacturers bringing in cargo ahead of tariffs focusing on imports. April volume landed at 439,020 twenty-foot equivalent units ...a 5% increase over last year. That boost is largely due to importers getting a last push of cargo before the tariffs hit: a pattern we've seen play out since last year.”

Hyundai Proposes Building and Selling Cranes to U.S. Ports

South Korea’s HD Hyundai Samho is proposing to build and deliver ship-to-shore cranes to U.S. ports as an alternative to cranes built in China.

Seroka welcomed additional competition in the ship-to-shore crane market: “What comes to mind with this question is that price and quality will all be important factors. As you know, these shoreside cranes are not a transactional business. They have got a pretty good book life and useful life associated with operating at ports like ours.”

Seroka praised Hyundai but noted that challenging world leader ZPMC, whose cranes are built in China, will be tough: “Hyundai is a good company and what I would say ... competition should improve quality and make prices more competitive. So, we welcome them to the market and let us see how we can get folks together to work on making this part of our business a little bit more competitive in the future.”

Bloomberg’s Laura Curtis noted that the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) is looking at proposals to add tariffs to Chinese made cargo handling equipment including ship to shore cranes and asked how these tariffs would impact the Port of Los Angeles.

Seroka replied that “It is likely to make those unique pieces of equipment more expensive for the marine terminal operator and the folks that run those businesses. So, we will have to see what comes out of this. But again, you do not have a lot of choice when going out and looking for shoreside cranes. And the few that have stepped up since this discussion really took place in earnest last summer (2024) showed cost two and a half ... three times more than what's on the books today. So, we have to learn a lot more. That is my hope for the future of shoreside cranes and other cargo handling equipment.”

AAPA Opposition

In May 19th press release responding to a proposed additional 100% tariff on Chinese-manufactured ship-to-shore (STS) by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) and the Trump Administration, the American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) continues to “fiercely advocate for the port and maritime industry.”

AAPA President and CEO Cary Davis testified in a hearing before USTR on behalf of the port industry alongside several other U.S. port stakeholders. articulating strong opposition to additional tariffs on Chinese STS cranes:

"Applying a new 100% tariff to Chinese STS cranes will not create a domestic crane manufacturing industry out of thin air ... It will only increase costs for public port authorities."

Port of Oakland Reports a Decline in April

In other California port news, the Port of Oakland handled 185,499 TEUs (twenty-foot containers) in April, marking a 14.7% decrease in overall cargo volume from March 2025. The slowdown is driven by market uncertainty as well as softening demand in exports, both influenced by recent shifts in U.S. trade policy: "Container volume remained stable during the first four months of 2025; however, uncertainty and high tariffs impacted our China volume. We anticipate similar volume in May with a strong recovery in June," said Port of Oakland Maritime Director Bryan Brandes. "The Port remains focused on service reliability and close coordination with our partners and customers, as market dynamics continue to evolve."

Stas Margaronis

WEST COAST CORRESPONDENT