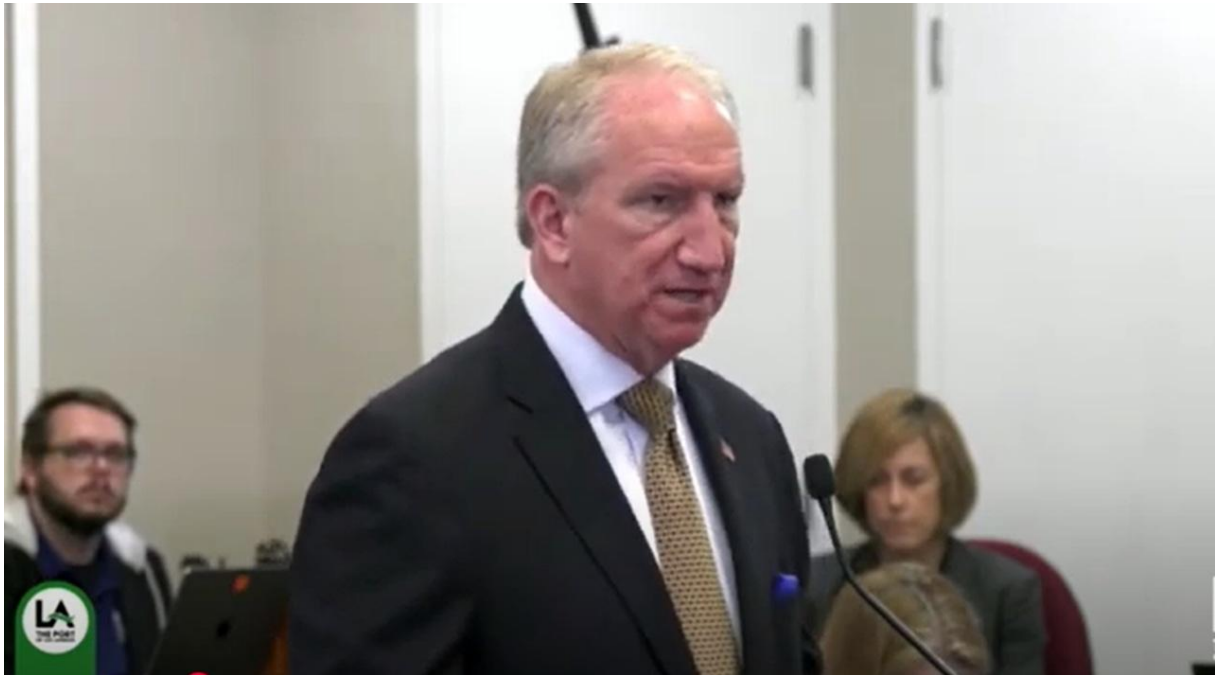


Port of LA expects pullback in global trade

Uncertainty is the watchword from Gene Seroka Executive Director of the US West Coast gateway port as shipment bookings drop 20% on previous year.

Barry Parker, New York Correspondent

May 20, 2025



Gene SerokaCredit: Screenshot Port of LA YouTube video

If there is any doubt that shipping gets into the news when economic conditions are “uncertain”, the [Port of Los Angeles'](#) (POLA) monthly always insightful media briefing, held on May 19, should dispel such doubt. Port Director Gene Seroka was effusive in thanking all the journalists who came aboard, via Zoom, saying that “we have over 80 media outlets participating today...the largest media turnout that we’ve had in our six years of these monthly briefings.”

The subject of the uncertainty was tariffs and trade flows, unarguably crucial to the [US](#) economy (and those of trading partners) but also very difficult to predict during the current “pause” or temporary reduction phases- where, presumably, numerous discussions are underway in the background with trading partners of the United States. Repeatedly during the nearly hour-long webinar, Seroka would qualify his answers to the barrage of media questions by reiterating that “The uncertainty remains...tariffs are still elevated.”

Referring to upcoming deadlines in July and August- when present pauses will expire, he said: “These will lead to trepidation- not knowing where we’ll all land.” Rather than making specific forecasts, he talked about “a stop start focus” in various trade negotiations, and an “information whipsaw” during his remarks.

Related:[LA and Long Beach ports remain concerned over tariff uncertainty](#)

At the Port of Los Angeles, April saw excellent results on imports, as vessel arrivals and discharges occurred in the month after cargo shippers rushing to load their boxes, prior to the April 5th commencement date of tariffs. Seroka’s overview of results showed that POLA handled 843,000

container units during April, 2025- up 9-1/2% from the comparable 2024 throughput, (and exceeded only by 2021 and 2022 pandemic era numbers. In speaking about the import component - more than half, at 439,000 teu, he attributed the strong showing to “retailers and manufacturers bringing in cargo ahead of the tariffs”. He explained the strong import showing by noting “that boost is largely due to importers getting a last push of cargo before the tariffs hit.”

Volumes through the Port of Los Angeles are likely to be reduced, after the April scramble and then subsequent “blanking” of sailings from overseas ports inbound to POLA. Seroka alluded to a big volume drop in the early weeks of May. “The May volume drop is likely to be substantial when we close the books on this month,” he suggested.

In remarks, Seroka said, “Looking ahead, it’s a challenge for businesses, economists and ports to forecast,” asserting that: “At least for the short term, it’s clear that we’ll see a pullback in global trade.” Seroka indicated that logistics sources in his vast network were pointing to bookings at “80% of what you’d expect this time of year.” He said: “What probably comes out of this is lower inventory levels across the board.” In POLA, he suggested that over the next months, “We will see a more deliberate flow,” with carriers “not getting the utilisation they would like.” Indeed, he alluded to a handful of POLA-bound voyages cancelled in May, all involving sailings from China.

Related:[US-China tariff deal – no rush to book Pacific cargo](#)

There is sometimes a silver lining to bad news, including sluggish cargo flows. Responding to a question regarding “impacts” of reduced cargo moves on the POLA, Seroka artfully turned the question around and suggested that the next few months were providing an optimal time for maintaining facilities and handling necessary refurbishments that were not possible during the high volume periods over the past half decade. Such measures would also help keep workers employed, he suggested.