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[Home](#) > Shippers face growing delays in Ningbo due to Shanghai cargo diversions

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Vessel wait times at Ningbo have increased to about three or four days compared with less than 24 hours before the lockdown in Shanghai, a carrier executive said. Photo credit: Shutterstock.com.

Shippers and carriers are facing lengthening vessel wait times at China's Ningbo as facilities at the world's third-busiest container port become congested with cargo diverted from Shanghai, now entering the fourth week of an indefinite COVID-19 lockdown.

Exporters face additional headwinds later this week when China starts a nationwide five-day Labor Day holiday from April 30, which is likely to further stymie cargo movements on top of trucking and warehousing shortages as China battles a fourth COVID wave.

That comes as some carriers are starting to skip Shanghai on intra-Asia services even as cargo conditions improve in Shanghai as more warehouses reopen and restrictions are eased for the import of dangerous goods cargoes.

“A large proportion of the container cargo exports from Shanghai and Zhejiang province are now shipped via Ningbo. Consequently, Ningbo has become very congested,” a senior executive at a Hong Kong-based freight forwarder told JOC.com.

Highlighting the cargo increase, 14-day average ocean volumes through the Port of Ningbo-Zhoushan surged 14 percent, visibility provider FourKites said in its latest China lockdown and supply chain impact report published Monday.

“Most freight originating in Shanghai has diverted to Ningbo, causing congestion in several warehouses, and container constraints,” a Maersk spokesperson said. Both Ningbo and Shanghai will be among the ports affected by three blank sailings on the AE1 and AE55 services next month as Maersk grapples with restoring schedule reliability on the Asia-Europe trade, the carrier said Monday.

## Bad weather adds to woes

Vessel wait times at Ningbo have increased to around three or four days compared with less than 24 hours before the lockdown in Shanghai, a senior carrier executive told JOC.com.

“Shanghai and Ningbo are both operating with low efficiency. Shanghai due to a lack of labor and Ningbo from congestion caused by increasing ad-hoc vessel calls and bad weather,” said Danny Hoffmann, managing director of Hong Kong’s Gold Star Line, the intra-Asia affiliate of Zim Integrated Shipping Services.

Hapag-Lloyd warned in a customer advisory Friday that Ningbo could be affected by strong winds and monsoon conditions, “which might cause port closure and lower vessel productivity.”

“Due to long waiting times, it is very difficult for customers to deliver the cargo to warehouses in Beilun,” FIBS Logistics said in an advisory Monday.

Three of Ningbo’s five container terminals are in Beilun.

“Some Ningbo suburbs are also in lockdown and therefore we need to carefully monitor supply chain and transport restrictions with vendors,” the Hong Kong forwarder told JOC.com

Adding to the disruption at Ningbo, Ningbo Beilun Second Container Terminal, which is used by Ocean Network Express (ONE), is carrying out dredging operations which could affect vessel operations.

Carriers and freight forwarders said cargo operations at Shanghai, the world’s largest container port, are showing signs of improvement even as container and trucking volumes continue to drop, according to FourKites data.

“For Shanghai, the availability of ISO tanks and dangerous goods containers is improving,” the Hong Kong-based forwarder executive told JOC.com.

Maersk lifted a stop on new bookings for dangerous goods cargoes Friday after the yard density for dangerous goods eased, the carrier said.

“A few CFS warehouses have re-opened again,” FIBS Logistics said.

“Shanghai is handling transshipment from other ports via feeder services and local barges,” the forwarding executive added.

Despite the improvement, ONE confirmed Monday it would omit Shanghai on a May 2 sailing on its Japan-China-Vietnam service to restore schedule reliability.

FourKites said the 14-day average ocean cargo volume through Shanghai is down 24 percent compared with March 12, the day before Shanghai went into partial lockdown.

Ocean dwell times at Shanghai have also risen with imports now at 8.9 days, up 162 percent compared with March 12, while dwell times for exports are up to 7.3 days, FourKites said Monday.

The 14-day average over-the-road and intermodal shipment volume is down 78 percent for loads arriving in Shanghai compared with March 12, with a 57 percent drop for loads leaving Shanghai, FourKites data showed Monday.

That comes as concern is mounting that Beijing could be facing a Shanghai-like lockdown later this week after a surge in cases over the weekend in the capital's Chaoyang district. Some areas of Tianjin, about 80 miles southeast of Beijing, have been locked down, the Hong Kong forwarder said.

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