

## Near-normal water levels allowing more ship transits through Panama Canal



*Services that had been rerouted away from the Panama Canal due to transit restrictions are now returning as the canal's water level normalizes. Photo credit: Solarisys / Shutterstock.com.*

Michael Angell, Senior Editor | Jun 28, 2024, 1:45 PM EDT

The Panama Canal's freshwater reservoirs are entering summer at close to normal levels, prompting the canal's operator to increase the number of large ships moving through the waterway and allowing the ships to carry more cargo.

The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) said in an advisory this week it will open one more booking slot for neo-Panamax vessels — the largest class of ships that can transit the canal — starting in August, bringing the total number of daily neo-Panamax transits to nine.

In addition, the ACP said that it will add a booking slot for slightly smaller super-Panamax ships starting in the last week of July, bringing the total number of daily

super-Panamax slots to 19.

Overall, the Panama Canal will be able to handle 35 ships per day starting in August; that compares to 24 daily booking slots at the start of May.

The increase in the number of ship transits comes as Panama sees relief from a drought that began in mid-2023 and reduced water levels in Gatun Lake, which provides the fresh water used in the canal's lock system. That forced the ACP to reduce the number of daily ship transits to as few as 18 as of last October.

Carriers promptly started rerouting their trans-Pacific East Coast networks away from the canal due to fears those reduced transits would last through the first quarter of 2024. But rains have returned to Panama, bringing Gatun Lake to about an 83-foot depth, ACP data shows, which is its five-year historical average depth for July.

Amid the increase in the lake's levels, carriers have started bringing back Panama Canal services that had been suspended.

The ACP also lessened the draft restrictions on neo-Panamax vessels, allowing vessels of 48-foot draft to transit the canal. During the height of the drought, neo-Panamax ships were limited to a 45-foot draft, forcing the vessels to carry less cargo.

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