

Carrier alliance shifting causes February dip in trans-Pacific vessel capacity



eeSea's forecast has the number of services on the eastbound trans-Pacific increasing by four to 53 in February. Photo credit: UNIKYLUCKK / Shutterstock.com.

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The restructuring of carrier alliances is causing a short-term capacity shift in the trans-Pacific, giving cargo owners about 20% more functional capacity this month compared with a year ago but still 8% less than in January, according to analysis by maritime intelligence firm eeSea.

eeSea's forecast has the number of services on the eastbound trans-Pacific increasing by four to 53 in February. And although services are increasing, functional capacity on the trade lane will decrease.

"A spike in total service versions should not mislead anyone to think there will be an equal spike in capacity," eeSea said in its Far East-West Coast North America trade

lane review published Jan. 31.

As services get reorganized, the most significant drop in capacity will take place in the second half of February after Lunar New Year, with about 7% of the lost capacity attributed to a short month and “gaps in service handoffs,” eeSea said.

Amid the capacity shift, several sources cited congestion at Chinese ports, including Shanghai and Ningbo, at the start of the Lunar New Year holiday. The slowdowns at origin are further tying up functional capacity, widening the impact of the simultaneous alliance revisions.

Stephen Nothdurft, vice president of North American sales at forwarder MOL Consolidation Service, said some of the congestion can be attributed to cargo arriving at Chinese ports too close to the holiday, with a lack of vessel space to serve the cargo during the alliance reshuffling.

“The late product combined with the reshuffling just added a little bit of chaos,” said Nothdurft.

The eeSea report attributes the dip in February capacity to several factors, including “heavily delayed arrivals on service versions on their way out, blank sailings announced for the 2025 Lunar New Year, the shorter [month] and gaps caused by some alliance services petering out as early as December whilst others have had their start dates pushed back.”

Overall, forecast blank sailings from eeSea remain conservative for February, with only four on the books as of now, down from 19 in January and compared with seven expected in March. With the temporary market influences expected to wane, eeSea data suggests that trans-Pacific capacity will stabilize at normal levels by the second quarter.

“The capacity slump normalizes back to pre-transition values in the [approximate] 330,000 TEU range by the time we reach week 13 at the end of March,” eeSea said.

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