

# Ocean carriers adjust calls as congestion chokes European hubs



*Container yard density is above 80% at several North Europe terminals. Photo credit: VanderWolf Images / Shutterstock.com.*

**Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe | Jul 3, 2025, 1:43 PM EDT**

Container lines are making another round of changes to services to mitigate persistent congestion at European ports, avoiding maxed out terminals and overwhelmed inland rail and waterway networks.

Longer transits around southern Africa, restructured alliance networks and bottlenecks in Asia are causing ships to arrive outside their scheduled European arrival windows. Strong peak season demand is piling on the pressure with the wave of incoming volume adding to congestion and forcing carriers to divert some services away from the congested import gateways.

Mediterranean Shipping Co. has adjusted its Asia-Europe services to mitigate the delays, omitting some ports and adding others, while congestion at London Gateway is seeing CMA CGM's Safran service from Europe to the East Coast of South America calling at Southampton instead.

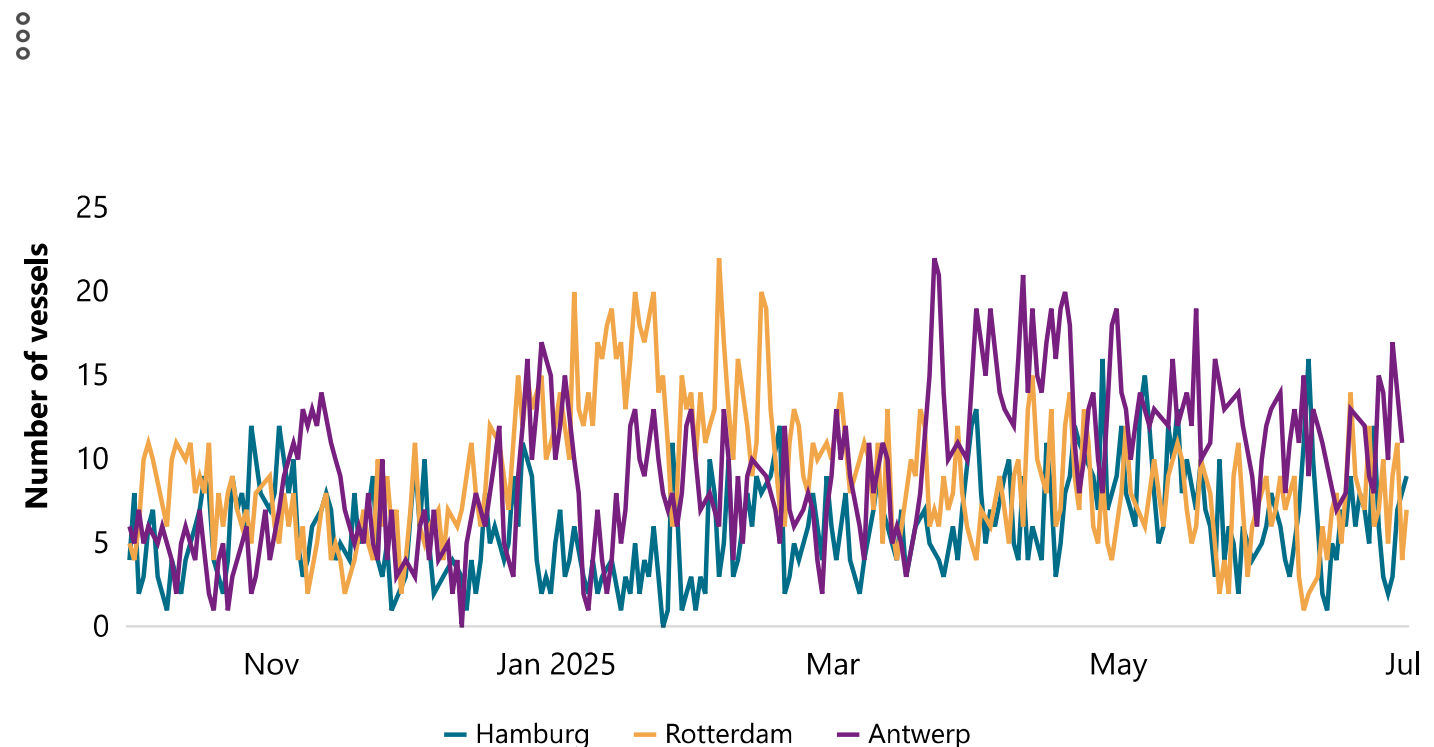
Maersk was scheduled to return its north-south NeoSamba service to London Gateway after moving it to Southampton in early June because of congestion but has decided to maintain the Southampton call.

"The current diversion from London Gateway to Southampton will be extended by an additional four weeks, to maintain high service reliability during peak demand periods and to avoid port congestion," Maersk told customers in its July market update this week.

HMM is reporting yard density of 80% and above at several terminals in Rotterdam, Hamburg and Antwerp with full berths and vessels arriving late. Data this week from port visibility provider Portcast shows 11 vessels waiting to berth at Antwerp-Bruges, nine at Hamburg and seven at Rotterdam.

## Port delays persist at congested European gateways

Numbers of vessel waiting at designated port harbor zone



Source: Portcast

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**Related data for this chart**

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Kuehne + Nagel's visibility tool SeaExplorer noted that port congestion in North European ports of Antwerp, Hamburg and Bremerhaven was extending transit times, with delays in berthing, operational disruptions and high yard utilization over 92% identified as key factors.

Disruption is also extending into inland transport networks. Ocean Network Express is warning of long wait times for trucks and barges in North European hubs, with some terminals suspending the redelivery of empties, while Maersk warned customers of rail disruption in Hamburg from July 2 until July 9.

"During this period, no rail transport to or from the Port of Hamburg will be operationally feasible, and customers are kindly asked to change their ocean bookings from Hamburg to Bremerhaven where possible," the carrier noted.

## **Low water limits barge loading**

Intermodal transport operator Contargo said average waiting times for the handling of its barges this week were 78 hours in Antwerp and 64 hours in Rotterdam. Contargo also warned that low water levels on the Rhine were limiting barge loading and generating low water surcharges.

In the north of Italy, major infrastructure works are scheduled on the national railway line serving ports of Genoa, La Spezia and Vado Ligure. At the Port of Genoa, no rail services will be available between Aug. 2 and 31, with Maersk not accepting rail cargo from July 21.

In the first four months of 2025, total Asia-Europe volume was up 9% year over year at 6.13 million TEUs, with the Asia-North Europe segment rising 6.6% to 3.72 million TEUs and Asia-Mediterranean surging 12.14% to 2.4 million TEUs, according to the latest volume data from Container Trades Statistics.

While Asia-Europe volume data for June is not yet available, carriers and forwarders are reporting robust cargo bookings through the summer months. At the same time, carriers have deployed a record amount of capacity on the North Europe corridor in July while also increasing blank sailings on the trade lane.

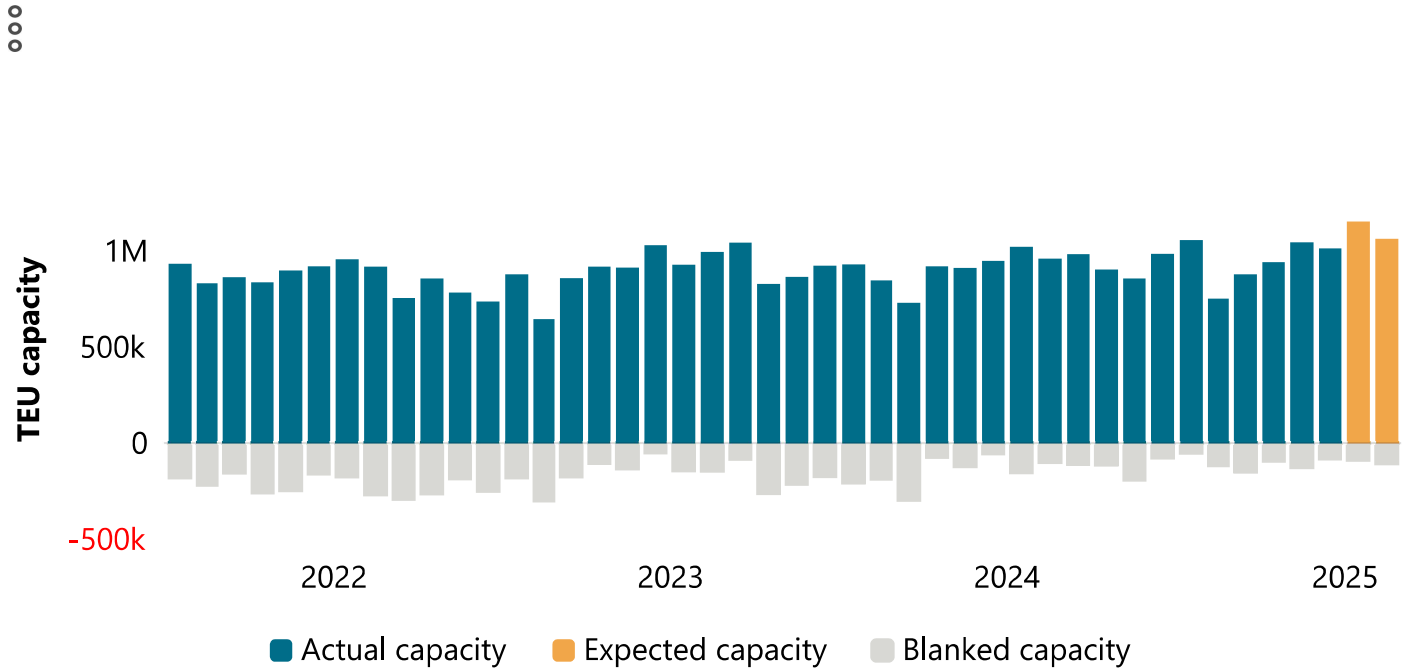
Freight-all-kinds (FAK) rate increases for Asia-North Europe were imposed from July 1 by MSC (\$4,300 per FEU) and CMA CGM (\$4,100/FEU), pushing rates on the trade lane

up almost \$500 to \$3,350/FEU, according to rate benchmarking platform Xeneta.

Data from visibility provider eeSea shows carriers on Asia-North Europe will deploy a record 1.15 million TEUs in capacity in July and blank 85,727 TEUs. In August, the deployed capacity will drop to just over 1 million TEUs while 104,790 TEUs will be cut from the trade.

Sharp drop in expected Asia-Europe capacity in August with rise in blank sailings

Container ship capacity deployed from Asia to N.Europe, with historical blanked capacity, capacity estimates and blank sailings already announced.



Notes: As of June 24, 2025

Source: eeSea

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Carriers are taking the opposite approach on Asia-Mediterranean, where a record 882,845 TEUs of capacity will be deployed in August, up 50,000 TEUs compared with July, eeSea data shows. Blank sailings will decline from almost 80,000 TEUs in July to 20,000 TEUs in August.

“Strong demand from Asia to North Europe and the Mediterranean is forecast for the rest of July in line with seasonality ... we encourage customers to book as early as possible in order to secure space,” advised Maersk in its July update.

Forwarders are giving their customers the same advice. “To avoid delays caused by congestion, blank sailings, and container shortages, it is recommended to book space at least one to two weeks in advance for Asia and EU ports,” Taiwan-based forwarder Dimerco Express Group noted in a July market report.

Dimerco said some China origins were beginning to apply overweight surcharges to Asia-Europe containers as carriers prioritized light cargo and high-cube containers to improve ship utilization.

“Early booking is strongly recommended for heavy cargo in small containers,” the forwarder warned.

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