

# Shippers, carriers face wave of port congestion, vessel delays in Asia, Europe



*Holiday port closures at ports including Le Havre, Barcelona, La Spezia and Marseille-Fos have added to delays on Asia-Europe and Mediterranean services. Photo credit: Sergii Figurnyi / Shutterstock.com.*

Keith Wallis, Special Correspondent | Dec 31, 2024, 1:13 PM EST

Shippers and ocean carriers on the Asia-Europe trade will be facing vessel delays into February as a raft of issues ranging from holiday port closures, vessel bunching in Asia and labor shortages in Hamburg cause serious port congestion with lengthy ship queues and berth waiting times.

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“There were more than 120 vessels at anchor waiting for berth off both ports last week. We understand it’s the most severe level of congestion worldwide.”

The spokesperson added the congestion at the two Chinese ports was “unlikely to improve before the Lunar New Year,” which begins Jan. 29.

Guangzhou-based Winsail International Logistics said Shanghai is experiencing berthing delays of three to four days depending on the terminal.

“Qingdao and Ningbo are facing delays of two to three days,” a senior executive at the company told the *Journal of Commerce*.

The source pointed out that intra-Asia regional services are suffering more delays than mainline services due to the short voyage lengths of two to three days between ports and the large number of calls on services. That was echoed by FIBS Logistics, with the spokesperson saying the forwarder is experiencing vessel delays of “more than two weeks on the Shanghai-Manila corridor” on a transit that should take five to six days.

There were also more than 50 vessels waiting to berth in Manila last week amid severe congestion due to high yard utilization, partly due to the large volume of empty containers and vessel bunching caused by ships arriving late.

Taiwan’s Evergreen Line said on Dec. 20 that it had deployed three sweeper vessels to load empty containers at Manila to ease congestion at off-dock container yards and container terminals. That came after the Confederation of Truckers Association of the Philippines had threatened to stop accepting import containers from Evergreen due to congestion issues.

The Philippines customs bureau said the problem of handling empty containers was an issue facing all carriers, not just Evergreen.

That comes as carriers are again experiencing equipment shortages at ports in China and Vietnam as shippers consign cargo ahead of the Lunar New Year.

CMA CGM is the worst affected with a shortage or tight supply of containers last week at all main ports in mainland China, Taiwan and Vietnam, except Guangzhou and Hong

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Ocean Network Express (ONE), OOCL, Cosco Shipping and Evergreen are experiencing tight availability of 20-foot and 40-foot containers in Shenzhen.

## Lengthy delays in Hamburg

Meanwhile, labor shortages at Hamburg are causing berthing delays of up to 10 days for ships operating Asia-Europe services for THE Alliance, according to sailing schedules released by ONE. The labor issues are part of a wider shortage of personnel, with nearly 40% of companies in Germany reporting staff shortages.

The delays have been exacerbated by congestion and labor issues at other ports, including Rotterdam.

Strikes, labor shortages and congestion at Genoa will delay berthing at the Italian port in January by up to six days for some vessels operating Asia-Mediterranean services, ONE schedules show.

Christmas and New Year port closures at ports including Le Havre, Barcelona, La Spezia and Marseille-Fos have also added to delays on Asia-Europe and Mediterranean services.

The holdups have contributed to schedule delays of about a month on some Asia-Europe services, with the longest a 35-day slippage in the arrival of the 23,964 *TEU HMM Algeciras* operating the Far East 4 service. The vessel was scheduled to arrive at London Gateway on Dec. 29 but is now not expected until Feb. 2, according to the latest port itinerary. Schedules show the ship is expected to face a 10-day delay in Rotterdam and an extra four-day wait at its next call, Hamburg, where it's due on Jan. 25.

The 23,664-TEU *Busan Express*, operating the FE3 service, is set for a 10-day wait at Hamburg, with berthing now scheduled for Jan. 17, according to ONE schedules. Its arrival has already been held up due to congestion and holiday port closures at Rotterdam.

The short voyage between North European ports such as Le Havre and London Gateway gives little opportunity for vessels to claw back the accumulated delays. But schedules also show THE Alliance anticipates it will recover two days on the transit

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