

Trans-Atlantic pricing weakens without year-end volume bump



Shippers are benefitting from a significant improvement in schedule reliability on routes from both North Europe and the Mediterranean to the US East Coast. Photo credit: Lynda McFaul / Shutterstock.com.

[Greg Knowler](#) | Sep 8, 2025, 12:52 PM EDT

The absence of another bump of volume on the horizon for the rest of the year will further weaken the westbound trans-Atlantic trade despite fully utilized ships and low levels of blank sailings, shipping executives warn.

Spot and contract rates are under pressure and US retailers' subdued expectations for the winter shopping season, as reflected by low single-digit volume growth, are adding to the uncertainty gripping the trans-Atlantic.

"With long-term rates at an all-time low and moving sideways, short-term rates could slide in the near future," Destine Ozuygur, product marketing manager at rate

benchmarking platform Xeneta, told the *Journal of Commerce's* European Shipping and Trade Outlook: The Trans-Atlantic webinar.

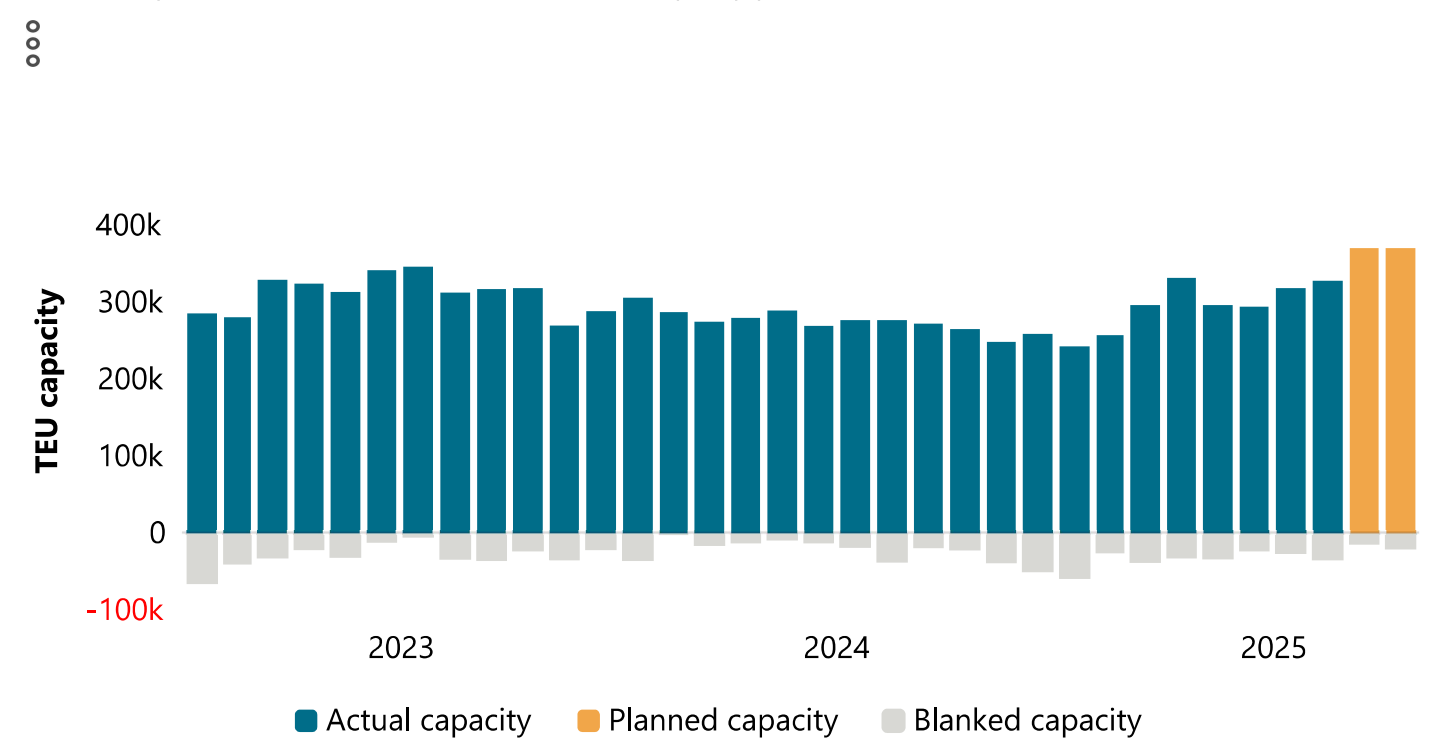
Data from Xeneta shows long-term rates from North Europe to the US East Coast signed in the last three months falling to \$627 per FEU by Sept. 8, down 42% since Jan. 1. The long-term rate has fallen 32% since June 30.

Spot rates are following the same pattern and at \$1,060 per FEU on Sept. 8, are down 43% since the beginning of the year and down 20% since June 30.

"We are not seeing blanks introduced in order to actually tighten capacity or bump up the rates, and I do believe that signals healthy demand," Ozuygur said.

Carriers slow to blank sailings through October amid uncertain outlook

North Europe to US East and Gulf coasts container capacity planned and blanked, measured in TEUs



Source: eeSea

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6M

2Y

YTD

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Michael Britton, head of ocean products for North America at Maersk, noted that the underlying health of the US economy and imports through September appeared to be

strong.

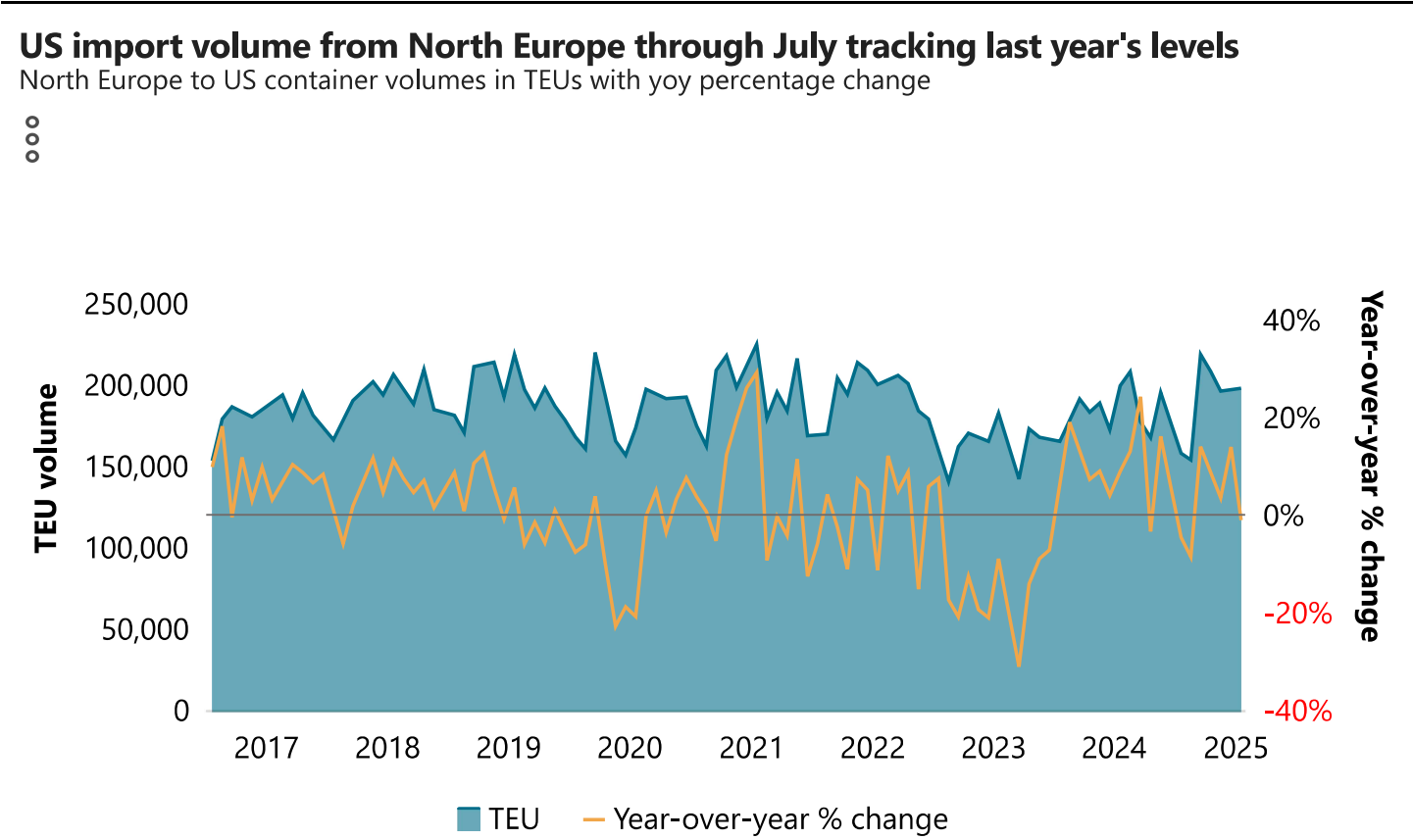
”We’re seeing pretty positive reports coming out of some of the sectors here in the US, including the retail sector,” he told the webinar. “We maintain cautious optimism that the market will continue to grow, and demand will remain positive.”

Volumes from January through July are up 2% year over year, according to the latest available data from PIERS, a sister company of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global.

Upward trend of schedule reliability

Shippers on the trade are also benefitting from significant improvement in schedule reliability on routes from both North Europe and the Mediterranean to the US East Coast, according to Ozuygur.

”We’ve seen an increase in on-time performance from 24% to 58% from North Europe since January, and the Mediterranean monthly reliability has nudged its way up from 24% to 36%,” Ozuygur said.



Source: PIERS, S&P Global

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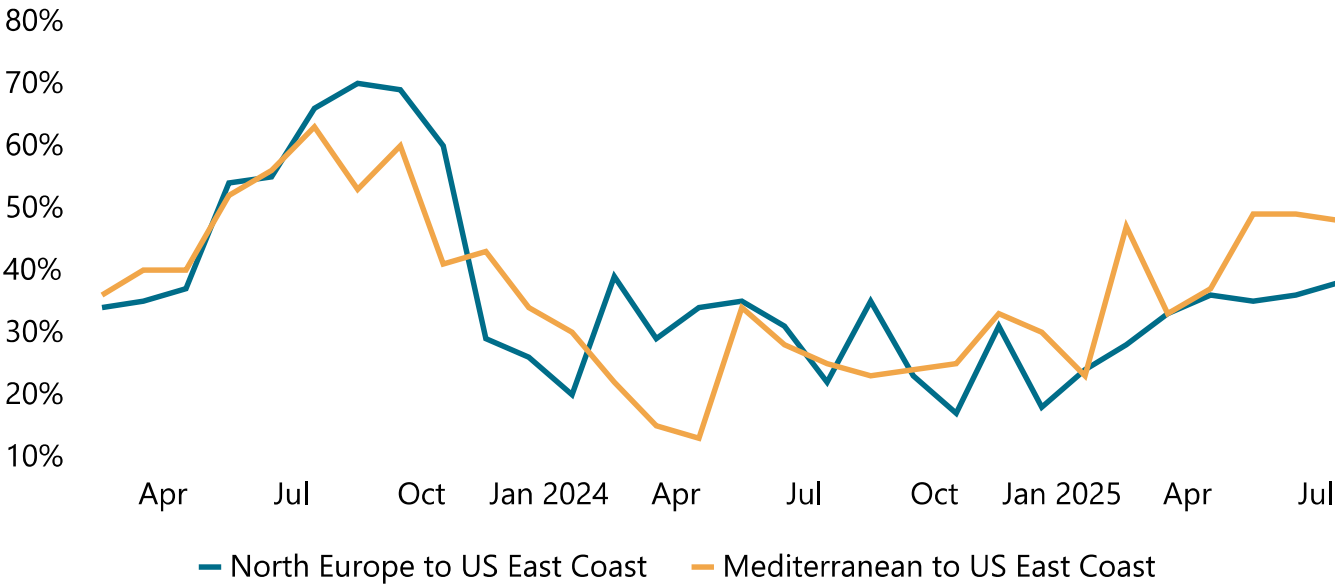
While the trans-Atlantic schedule reliability is significantly better than the major trades out of Asia and has improved steadily through the year, “50% within the grand scope of things is not amazing,” Ozuygur said.

The trans-Atlantic is the only trade lane where the Gemini Cooperation of Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd has been able to maintain its above-90% schedule reliability promise.

Xeneta data shows Gemini’s average schedule reliability on the trans-Atlantic was 92%; the next best was non-alliance services at 58% and third was Mediterranean Shipping Co. (MSC), whose standalone services averaged an on-time performance of 36%.

Sharp rise in North Europe-US on-time performance through August

North Europe and Mediterranean to US East Coast ocean reliability



Source: eeSea

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6M

1Y

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Britton said the hub-and-spoke network offered by Gemini was a structural change that underpinned the improved performance.

“What we’ve seen in the past is that the services which were calling anywhere from 12 to 15 ports on any one rotation had a much lower reliability than those that were calling six to eight ports,” he told the webinar.

“So, we came up with a network design that allows us to make every vessel sail a shorter distance, add fewer ports on every rotation, and that is done by leveraging a network of hubs that we operate around the world,” he noted.

The improvement in schedule reliability is appreciated by customers of the carriers, but Scott Dudley, head of ocean freight for North America at Rhenus Logistics, said maintaining the reliability over the long term will be Gemini’s greatest challenge.

“The big question is how Gemini is planning to keep up the high performance,” he said. “It is less about the effectiveness of it, because they have shown they can be effective, but the big question is about the efficiency of the whole system.”

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