

# Wave of Asian boxes to hit congested North Europe ports in August–September



*It is shaping up to be a long, hot summer for overloaded North Europe import gateways. Photo credit: T.W. van Urk / Shutterstock.com.*

**Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe | Jul 25, 2025, 9:50 AM EDT**

Shippers in North Europe are being warned to expect further delays and disrupted services during August and September when a wave of inbound containers from Asia arrive at already-congested gateway ports.

Strong import demand in Europe over the past few months has kept ships full and volume growing in double digits; that demand is expected to continue through the third quarter, piling more pressure on the overstretched terminals.

“The peak will be August and September, and we also expect a peak in congestion until it gets better in the fourth quarter,” said Michael Amri, global sea freight business development manager at Hellmann Worldwide Logistics.

Hutchison Port Holdings Trust, the Singapore-listed port operator that controls Hutchison's Hong Kong and mainland China port interests, said China's exports to Europe in the second half of the year are set to continue the double-digit growth seen in the first half.

"Growth in China's exports to the European Union is expected to follow the same trajectory as seen in the first half of 2025, with exports to the EU in Q2 growing by 13% year on year," the port operator said.

Should the double-digit growth in volume materialize, the combined volume arriving in North Europe in August and September will top 2 million TEUs.

"In terms of seasonality, July is typically the month wherein the most cargo is loaded from Far East to Europe, which means arrival into European ports in August and September," Lars Jensen, CEO of Vespucci Maritime and a *Journal of Commerce* analyst, wrote [in a LinkedIn post](#) this week.

"The lack of progress in removing port congestion in Europe is worrying seen in the light of this coming peak load of cargo," Jensen added.

North Europe's gateway terminals have been struggling to get on top of often severe congestion for much of the year, with ships arriving outside scheduled windows causing berthing delays and full container yards delaying the offloading of cargo.

## Terminals heading for 'code red' summer

Stefan Verberckmoes, senior shipping analyst at Alphaliner, said he was not optimistic that congestion would improve over the summer months, which was shaping up to be a "hot summer with code red for European container terminals."

Verberckmoes said most of the ports in North Europe that had reserve capacity were now fully operational, with the main problem at terminals being the long dwell times caused by late vessel arrivals.

"The fact that some carriers compete by granting longer free time [for containers] of course only makes the problem of the terminal operators worse," he said.

A spokesperson for Hapag-Lloyd said none of its hub terminals in Europe were congested at the moment but acknowledged there could be knock-on effects in the coming months.

Still, Destine Ozuygur, chief analyst at ocean visibility provider eeSea, said she did not see an imminent congestion crisis across North Europe and emphasized that not all

terminals were affected.

“London Gateway has been the most extreme, followed by Antwerp, then Hamburg and then Rotterdam,” Ozuygur told the *Journal of Commerce*.

“While vessels and services are being impacted, it hasn’t put turnover across Europe in a chokehold,” she added. “Even a port like Rotterdam that has seen stubborn congestion is reporting healthy throughput in Q2 and has seen steady reliability improvement since January.”

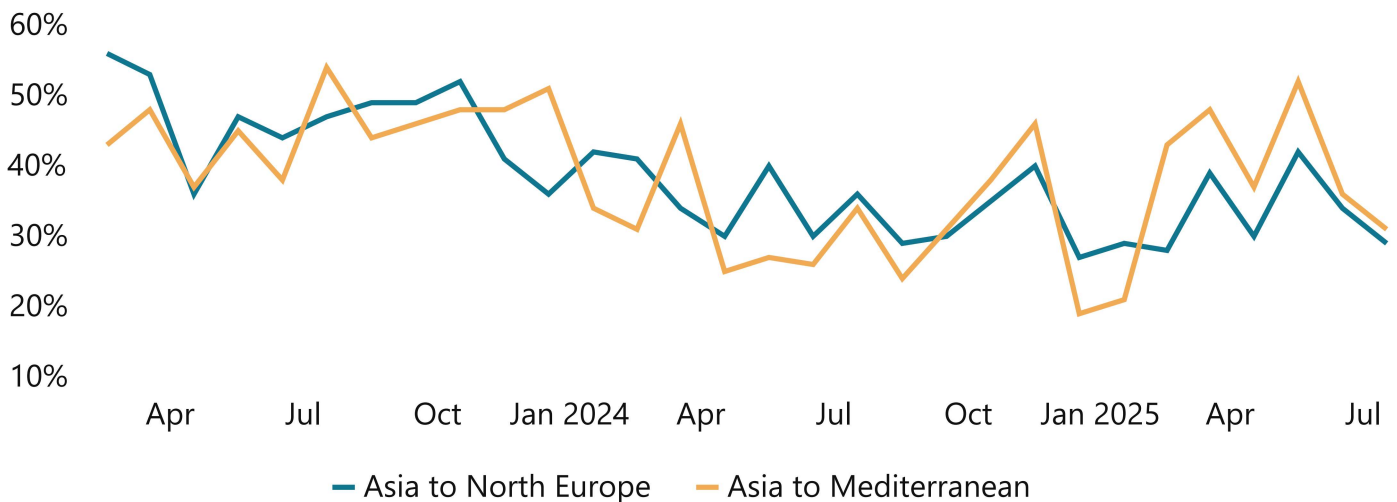
Ozuygur outlined the factors contributing to the persistent congestion in North Europe for much of the year. Ongoing vessel diversions around southern Africa have necessitated the deployment of larger-capacity vessels, she noted, which leads to longer berth stays and higher yard utilization. The longer transit times have also left room for more volatility and unpredictable delays.

Schedule reliability data from eeSea, in which ships are considered late if they arrive one calendar day or more after the scheduled time, shows Asia-North Europe on-time performance falling from 42% in May to 29% in July.

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### Asia-North Europe/Mediterranean schedule reliability falls steeply through July

Monthly on-time performance percentages of container ships on Asia-North Europe and Mediterranean, with ships considered late if they arrive one calendar day or more after the scheduled time.



**Related data for this chart**

[Click here](#) to explore related data on Gateway

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On the land side, Ozuygur said some ports, such as Antwerp and Hamburg, are impacted by both high yard density and major barge delays. One of the major causes of the barge delays has been low water levels in European waterways that cause capacity restrictions.

**Cutting transshipment moves**

Ozuygur said carriers had the most flexibility in dealing with port congestion as they could use port swaps and port omissions or adjust their rotations to avoid bottlenecks.

The Gemini Cooperation of Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd recently extended an Asia-Europe service to Denmark and Sweden, removing transshipment volume from Rotterdam and lowering overall container moves. Instead of unloading boxes in Rotterdam and transferring to a feeder ship to Aarhus in Denmark and Gothenburg in Sweden, a direct call at the ports turned three container moves into one.

Mediterranean Shipping Co. is also sailing direct from Ecuador to St. Petersburg to avoid transshipment in the Benelux ports.

Eirik Hooper, senior associate in Drewry Ports and Terminals research team, said in the Hamburg to Le Havre range there would likely be moves away from the most congested terminals to less busy terminals in the same ports, or to less heavily utilised ports such as Le Havre, Zeebrugge, Bremerhaven and Wilhelmshaven.

“While this is especially an option for the hybrid operators who control multiple terminals in that range, the carriers do prefer to use those terminals with the quay cranes, yard equipment and berths designed for the bigger vessels on the Asia-Europe loops,” he told the *Journal of Commerce*.

Another option to ease congestion is carriers transferring containers from the overloaded deep-sea terminals into inland depots to reduce dwell times and free up space in yards that are full.

But Hooper noted that the available inland terminal capacity was limited and with the current low water levels on the Rhine constraining the ability of barges to move fully laden, “this is not likely to solve the immediate problem.”

“As such, we view an increase in the current congestion issues as the most likely outcome for the remainder of the summer,” he added.

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