

As war rages, multimodal demand surges on Asia-Europe landbridge



Ocean carriers are deploying trucking options across the Middle East as Persian Gulf ports remain out of bounds due to the war. Photo credit: MSC.

[Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe](#) | Mar 12, 2026, 9:15 AM EDT

Major ocean carriers are offering land-based solutions for cargo going to and from the war-hit Persian Gulf, with the only ocean entry point via the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed to shipping.

Maersk is delivering Gulf-bound cargo to ports in the region for onward transport by another mode.

“We are using Salalah (Oman) and Khor Fakkan (UAE) for cargo that comes from the east and are securing trucking capacity to take it into the Gulf,” said Maersk CCO Karsten Kildahl. “For cargo that comes from Europe, we focus mainly on Jeddah (on

the Red Sea) and are deploying trucks to take the cargo 1,500 km across the Arabian Peninsula through the desert.”

Mediterranean Shipping Co. (MSC) is using its Asia-Mediterranean Dragon and Jade services to move cargo inland to the Persian Gulf via King Abdullah and Jeddah ports in Saudi Arabia. Key inland destinations in the Gulf include Damman, Riyadh, Jubail, Bahrain, Kuwait, Hamad, Jebel Ali and Abu Dhabi.

CMA CGM has reopened its export bookings with immediate effect from Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and is deploying multimodal solutions around feeder ships and trucking.

Options include carrier haulage from Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain via bonded landbridge to Sohar in Oman. From the UAE, solutions are CMA CGM land bridge to Sohar and trucks from Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Dammam via bonded landbridge across Saudi Arabia to Jeddah.

DHL Global Forwarding launched DHL Truckair in January, which involves trucking from Asia to Uzbekistan and an onward flight to Turkey from where the goods are shipped, trucked or flown to Europe.

“This isn’t a direct response to recent developments (in the Middle East), but it is an example of Asia-Europe services that utilize road freight,” the DHL spokesperson said.

He noted that road freight was being used to move cargo between transport hubs in the Middle East as an alternative to air on some intra-regional routes with the Persian Gulf still largely out of bounds.

In general for Asia-Europe needs, DHL Global Forwarding said customer enquiries for both road and rail solutions “have risen notably” as reliability improves and shippers look for alternatives to higher cost air freight.

“To address these needs, DHL Global Forwarding is working continuously on more alternative and multimodal transport concepts that further strengthen connectivity between Asia and Europe,” a DHL spokesperson said, declining to provide volume figures.

Rising demand for Asia-Europe land transport

Forwarders are reporting rising demand for road and rail transport from Asia to Europe as transit times and reliability improve and cross-border procedures become more predictable.

Truck-air solutions are also taking off with both CEVA Logistics and DHL Global Forwarding seeing accelerating interest, particularly with the Middle East war removing the popular sea-air services via Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates as a viable option.

“We are seeing clear and sustained growth in demand for road and multimodal freight services between Asia and Europe, driven by improving infrastructure, more predictable border procedures and shippers’ need for faster, flexible alternatives to traditional routings,” said Kelvin Tang, vice president of ground and rail for Asia Pacific at CEVA Logistics.

“In the Asia–Europe market overall, combined rail and cross-border trucking volumes are up around 15% year on year, reflecting this shift in shipper behavior,” Tang told the *Journal of Commerce*. CEVA did not provide specific volume figures.

Transit times for road from China to Europe are between 12 and 19 days, while rail freight transits are 10 to 25 days. Rates from Chinese terminals to European terminals are volatile and vary from week to week, influenced by demand, bottlenecks on the Poland-Belarus border, and disruption in ocean shipping.

An automotive shipper based in Europe said trucking solutions out of Asia had matured and currently offered better pricing than in the past.

"The main advantage is that 66 pallets can be loaded into a truck, but rail containers can hold a maximum of 44 pallets," the source told the *Journal of Commerce*. "The last time I benchmarked pricing in January, the price per pallet by truck to southeast Europe was lower than by train via Russia. For central Europe the cost per pallet would probably be very similar."

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