

Asia-Europe ocean carriers add capacity as trade enters peak shipping period



Data from Xeneta shows capacity offered on the Asia to North Europe ocean trade is at an all-time high this week. Photo credit: asharkyu / Shutterstock.com.

[Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe](#) | Jan 5, 2026, 3:28 PM EST

The annual pre-Lunar New Year rush is underway on the Asia-North Europe ocean trade, with some market watchers reporting signs of frontloading on top of seasonal demand while others feel the volumes in January are within historical norms.

What is clear, however, is that carriers are injecting significant capacity into the trade lane this month while blanking very few sailings as shippers race to get their cargo on the water before factories across China close for up to three weeks. The Year of the Horse begins on Feb. 17.

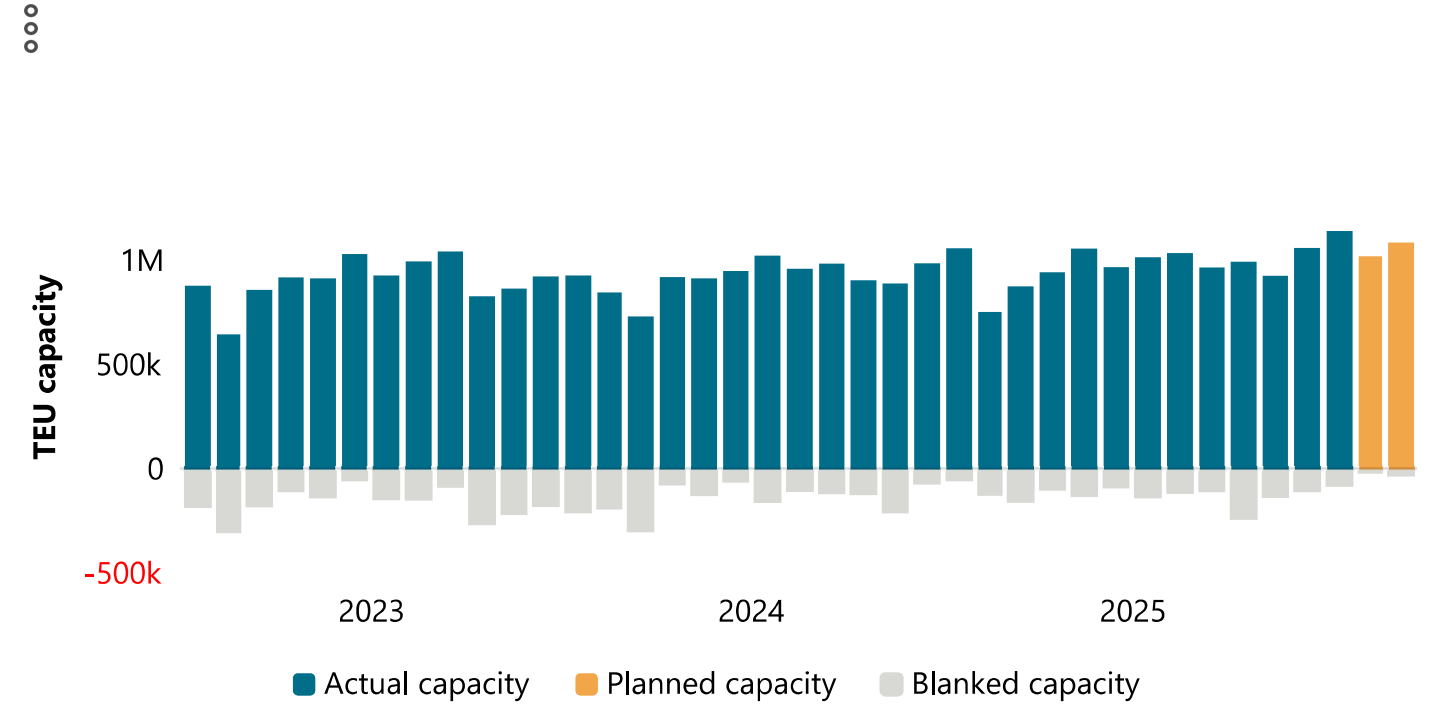
Peter Sand, chief analyst at Xeneta, said capacity offered on Asia to North Europe was at an all-time high this week with no blank sailings. Data from Xeneta's eeSea shows a

record 1.15 million TEUs in capacity is being deployed this month on the Asia-North Europe trade lane, with blank sailings removing just 25,000 TEUs. In February, the planned capacity will drop to just over 1 million TEUs.

“Demand is solid and seasonally strong ... anything of top of that could be fueled by [market] uncertainty,” Sand told the *Journal of Commerce*.

Sea-Intelligence Maritime Analysis also highlighted a significant capacity increase, pointing to current weekly capacity of 421,825 TEUs being offered on Asia-North Europe, a 49% net increase compared with a 2015–19 pre-COVID-19 historical baseline.

Asia-Europe carriers deploy record capacity in January ahead of Lunar New Year
Container ship capacity deployed from Asia to N.Europe, with historical blanked capacity, planned capacity, and blank sailings already announced.



Source: eeSea

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6M	2Y	YTD	MAX
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“This is a strong indication of a frontloading strategy where shippers are pushing massive volumes into the network much earlier than the historical figures suggest, likely a response to the current extended Asia-Europe transit times,” Sea-Intelligence wrote in the newsletter.

“By flooding the trade lane early, shippers aim to ensure that their European inventory is buffered before the planned Lunar New Year capacity withdrawal begins,” the analyst noted.

Demand following seasonal patterns

A spokesman for Hapag-Lloyd said demand on the eastbound trade routes from Asia to Europe was following seasonal patterns.

“We’re witnessing a normal peak season which started in December and is now ramping up towards Lunar New Year,” a spokesperson for Hapag-Lloyd told the *Journal of Commerce*. “We expect bookings to soften from end-January onwards as factories close.”

Michael Aldwell, executive vice president of sea logistics at Kuehne + Nagel, said most of the forwarder’s customers in Europe used a “just-in-time” approach to manage supply chains and stock levels, which was affecting the duration of peak shipping periods.

“[However], after two years of extended transit times, shippers are adjusting their plans accordingly, leading to a more stretched peak season,” Aldwell told the *Journal of Commerce*.

Rising spot rates are accompanying the strong pre-Lunar New Year demand, with all indexes showing steep increases since early October. According to Platts, a sister company of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global, Asia-North Europe rates of \$2,700 per FEU this week are more than double the Oct. 3 price. Container Trades Statistics, in its latest available data (October), shows Asia-North Europe container volume growth of almost 8% over the first 10 months of 2025 as oscillating US tariffs on Beijing saw Chinese shippers redirecting cargo to European markets.

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