US Tariffs to Keep Ocean Freight Rates Elevated Through October, Wan Hai Executive Says

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By the Numbers

This story reports a measured change such as 10%. Figures like this show direction and scale, so it helps to keep them separate from the surrounding commentary.

> **Change / rate:** 10% Ocean freight rates on key trade lanes are expected to stay high at least through October, buoyed by a surge in cargo bookings as Asian shippers race to beat the expiry of…

Ocean freight rates on key trade lanes are expected to stay high at least through October, buoyed by a surge in cargo bookings as Asian shippers race to beat the expiry of a 10% US tariff on imports, a senior executive at Taiwanese container line Wan Hai Lines said.

Tariff-Driven Front-Loading Boosts Demand

Freight Images (13)

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Tommy Hsieh, the General Manager of Wan Hai Lines, told the company’s annual general meeting that the 10% levy imposed on a broad range of US imports had triggered a wave of front-loading among Asian exporters. With the tariff slated to lapse within weeks, shippers are accelerating orders to clear customs before the deadline, injecting unusually strong demand into the ocean freight market.

The front-loading phenomenon is directly supporting vessel utilisation and keeping capacity tight on Trans-Pacific routes. Logistics providers and freight forwarders note that such demand spikes often compress available space, giving carriers the leverage to maintain elevated spot rates even as the traditional peak shipping season draws to a close.

Rates Sustained Beyond Seasonal Norms

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Typically, container shipping rates soften after the August-to-October peak window, but Hsieh’s outlook suggests an extension of the high-rate environment. The tariff expiration date acts as a hard deadline for many importers, deprioritising cost concerns in favour of speed. This dynamic has cushioned any anticipated seasonal decline in freight volumes.

Market participants have observed that carriers are already adjusting their networks to accommodate the extra volume. While no official forecasts were disclosed, the Wan Hai assessment aligns with broader industry chatter about resilient demand on the

eastbound Asia-US trade.

Wan Hai Lines’ Prudent Positioning

Wan Hai, which operates one of the largest intra-Asia networks and a growing long-haul presence, benefits from the rate environment. However, Hsieh stopped short of providing quantitative guidance, instead framing the commentary as a reflection of near-term market dynamics. The company has steadily expanded its fleet in recent years, a capacity that helps capture sudden cargo surges without completely upending schedules.

Other carriers have similarly reported healthy booking levels for the coming weeks, though some caution that the fickle nature of tariff policy makes longer-term predictions difficult. If the US administration extends or replaces the tariff with alternative measures, the front-loading pattern could shift, potentially easing pressure on rates.

Still, for now, the combination of a looming deadline and resilient consumer demand in the United States creates a favourable landscape for ocean carriers, even as macroeconomic uncertainties persist.

Why This Matters

The observation highlights how trade policy can disrupt typical shipping cycles, creating artificial demand peaks that temporarily benefit carriers but complicate supply chain planning. If the tariff is extended or replaced, shipping demand patterns could shift again, underscoring the industry's sensitivity to political decisions.

FAQ

Why are ocean freight rates expected to stay high in October?

Asian shippers are front-loading cargo before a 10% US import tariff expires, tightening vessel capacity and allowing carriers to maintain elevated spot rates beyond the usual peak season.

How does front-loading affect container shipping?

Front-loading boosts short-term demand, absorbing available shipping space. This gives carriers pricing power and can delay the typical post-peak rate decline, leading to sustained higher freight costs.

When does the current US tariff on imports expire?

According to remarks by Wan Hai Lines’ GM Tommy Hsieh, the specific tariff is set to expire next month, though the exact date was not disclosed at the company's annual general meeting.

What impact do US tariffs have on global shipping demand?

Tariffs often spur importers to accelerate shipments before a deadline, causing temporary spikes in demand. This was seen when the 10% US tariff prompted Asian shippers to front-load, supporting ocean freight volumes and rates.

Sources

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Source: The Loadstar (https://theloadstar.com/us-tariffs-will-support-ocean-demand-and-keep-rates-high-says-wan-hai/)