



**Jock O’Connell’s Commentary:**

## U.S. West Coast Ports Struggling to Stay in the Game?

From time to time – actually, with annoying regularity – the mullahs of the maritime media seem to take delight in citing evidence of the steadily shrinking role of America’s West Coast ports in the nation’s trade in containerized goods.

As an editor at the Journal of Commerce wrote just last week: “Since 2010, the West Coast’s market share of loaded cargo has dropped from 50.45 percent, to 44.9 percent in 2017, according to PIERS. The coast’s share of Asian imports fell from 73.3 percent to 66.4 percent over the same period, the figures show.”

Meanwhile, as the article also observed, the East Coast share of Asian imports rose from 25.1% to 30.9%, while Gulf Coast ports saw their collective share of Asian imports edge up from 1.2% to 2.4%.

I can’t much quibble with the numbers.

After posting fairly respectable growth numbers in 2017, the TEU counts at U.S. West Coast (USWC) ports through May of this year hardly suggest they are making any headway in reversing the market share slide. Total container volume at the San Pedro Bay Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is up a modest but still

respectable 3.7%. But Oakland managed only a 1.8% gain over the same period last year, while the two Northwest Seaport Alliance ports (Tacoma and Seattle) saw their combined container volumes through May drop by 4.9%. Altogether, the five big USWC ports handled just 2.1% more TEUs in this year’s first five months than in the same period last year. That makes last year’s coastwide gains – an impressive 6.3% year-over-year increase in total TEUs handled – look more like an anomaly.

As loyal readers know, this newsletter has been tracking container trade through major seaports on all three coasts since its first issue in September 2016. We have also been reporting statistics on the declared weight and value of containerized imports and exports that the Foreign Trade Division of the U.S. Census Bureau publishes monthly.

By all measures – TEUs, alleged dollar value, and cargo tonnage – the major U.S. West Coast ports have seen their collective shares of the nation’s containerized trade ebb in recent years. And the diminishing market shares have been most evident with respect to the transpacific trade on which those ports long feasted. (See Exhibits 1 and 2 on the next page.)



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Jock O'Connell's Commentary Continued

Exhibit 1 USWC Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Import Tonnage From East Asia: 2003-2017

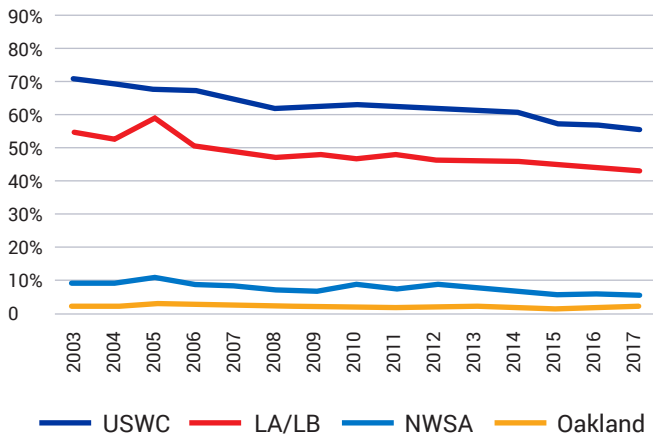
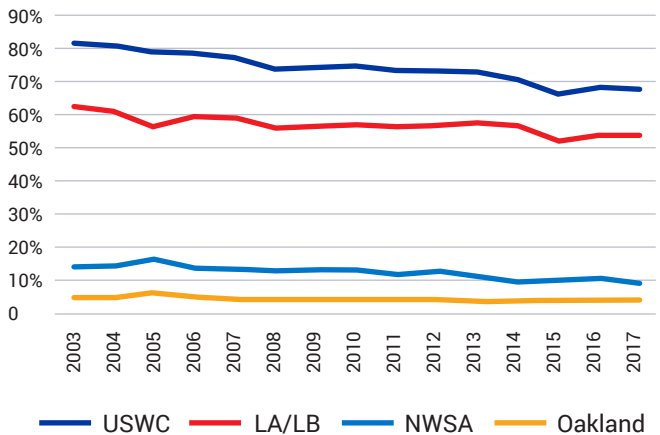


Exhibit 2 USWC Shares of the Dollar Value of U.S. Mainland Containerized Imports from East Asia: 2003-2017



For USWC ports, the importance of the transpacific trade cannot be overstated. Last year, the five ports handled 110,501 million metric tons of international containerized cargo, 84.5% of which involved a string of Asian economies stretching from Japan to Singapore. By sharp contrast, just under 4.4% of USWC containerized shipments involved the European Union, the world's second largest economy with a GDP larger than those of China and Japan combined. Trade with Central and South America, South Asia, and Africa accounted for even tinier shares.

Remarkably, though, U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicate that the declared weight of containerized imports from East Asia arriving at USWC ports actually declined from pre-recession levels by 1.0%, slipping from 54,726,008 metric tons in 2007 to 54,193,984 metric tons last year. Over the same period, East Asian shipments of containerized goods to East Coast ports jumped by 66.5%, from 19,188,848 metric tons to 31,941,603 metric tons. East Asian shipments to Gulf Coast ports were meanwhile up 38.4%, from 4,095,983 metric tons to 5,667,247 metric tons.

The drop in East Asian containerized import tonnage at USWC ports was due to a 11.7% fall-off in trade through the NWSA ports of Seattle and Tacoma. Oakland fared

fairly well with a 9.2% increase, while the San Pedro Bay ports only saw a 3.8% increase in East Asian import tonnage between 2007 and 2017.

And yet, the container forecast guiding current planning at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach anticipates throughput to grow by approximately 4.0% annually through to 2030, when total volume is expected to be 41.1 million TEUs. By way of reference, the two ports handled 16.9 million TEUs last year, an increase of 8.3% over the year before. Through the first five months of this year, though, container traffic is up 3.7%.

Of course, the San Pedro Bay ports have seen previous forecasts go wickedly awry. The one published in December 2007 expected that the two ports would be handling 27.6 million TEUs by 2015. But then the Great Recession hit, and an update issued eighteen months later reduced that expectation sharply to 17.0 million TEUs. Still, even that proved well above the 15.4 million TEUs that actually passed through San Pedro Bay in 2015.

What's troubling is what seems to be the prevailing assumption at the San Pedro Bay ports about cargo diversions. In a November 2017 Clean Air Action Plan report, port officials comforted themselves by noting: "East and Gulf Coast ports have also seen some small



## Jock O'Connell's Commentary *Continued*

benefit from the widened Panama Canal lowering transportation costs on all-water service when compared with shipping to the West Coast; however, diversion has been limited because low-value and time-insensitive goods that would most benefit from a reduction in transportation costs are already using all-water routings to East and Gulf Coast gateways. It is not clear if further cost reduction from Panama Canal expansion is significant enough to attract high-value or time-sensitive cargo that prefers speed to market."

Port officials may want to revisit that supposition, which appears based on data from 2015, and which seriously underestimates the alacrity with which shipping lines proceeded to deploy more capacious neopanamax vessels on all-water routes to East and Gulf Coast ports via the larger set of locks at Panama that opened in late June 2016. Canal Authority statistics show that 769 neopanamax container ships have transited the isthmus so far in the current fiscal year (October 2017 through

May 2018). Just two years ago, of course, that number was zero.

As for the assumption that high-value imports would continue to transit the two big Southern California ports, U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that the average dollar value per kilo of containerized East Asian imports through the San Pedro Bay ports was actually higher in the years 2011-2014 than it was last year. And while the SPB ports saw the inflation-adjusted dollar value of containerized imports from East Asia increase by 3.9% between 2007 and 2017, Savannah enjoyed a 15.4% jump. Evidently it's just not lawn chairs and athletic socks that are making their way east through that bigger ditch in Panama.

Perhaps yet another cargo forecast update is warranted. ■

*Jock's comments are his own and do not necessarily represent the views of PMSA.*



Photo courtesy of the Port of Long Beach



# Parsing the April 2018 Loaded TEU Numbers

Exhibit 1	April 2018 - Inbound Loaded TEUs at Selected Ports					
	Apr 2018	Apr 2017	% Change	Apr 2018 YTD	Apr 2017 YTD	% Change
Los Angeles	361,108	372,041	-2.9%	1,431,490	1,459,988	-2.0%
Long Beach	312,376	288,207	8.4%	1,247,103	1,086,490	14.8%
<b>San Pedro Bay Totals</b>	<b>673,484</b>	<b>660,248</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>2,678,593</b>	<b>2,546,478</b>	<b>5.2%</b>
Oakland	75,369	74,991	0.5%	290,473	287,135	1.2%
NWSA	101,067	110,821	-8.8%	416,635	461,772	-9.8%
<b>USWC Totals</b>	<b>849,920</b>	<b>846,060</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>3,385,701</b>	<b>3,295,385</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
Boston	9,113	10,560	-13.7%	43,650	39,837	9.6%
NYNJ	272,903	278,868	-2.1%	1,145,006	1,052,256	8.8%
Maryland	39,605	36,982	7.1%	165,283	143,980	14.8%
Virginia	97,607	101,114	-3.5%	415,248	399,002	4.1%
South Carolina	78,275	82,897	-5.6%	315,324	320,987	-1.8%
Georgia	161,691	149,258	8.3%	650,038	589,387	10.3%
Jaxport	18,812	22,111	-14.9%	97,060	94,142	3.1%
Port Everglades	34,062	32,163	5.9%	127,851	131,220	-2.6%
Miami	31,485	31,403	0.3%	134,351	130,205	3.2%
<b>USEC Totals</b>	<b>743,553</b>	<b>745,356</b>	<b>-0.2%</b>	<b>3,093,811</b>	<b>2,901,016</b>	<b>6.6%</b>
New Orleans	9,405	8,940	5.2%	38,175	35,438	7.7%
Houston	89,063	84,399	5.5%	357,490	327,591	9.1%
<b>USGC Totals</b>	<b>98,468</b>	<b>93,339</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>395,665</b>	<b>363,029</b>	<b>9.0%</b>
Vancouver	130,313	136,935	-4.8%	545,773	513,972	6.2%
Prince Rupert	43,658	43,819	-0.4%	171,215	149,131	14.8%
<b>British Columbia Totals</b>	<b>173,971</b>	<b>180,754</b>	<b>-3.8%</b>	<b>716,988</b>	<b>663,103</b>	<b>8.1%</b>
Philadelphia*	23,491	21,126	11.2%	95,433	88,615	7.7%
Wilmington DE*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

\*Does not distinguish loaded from empty containers.

Source Individual Ports

We now turn to a detailed look at April's loaded container traffic.

**On the inbound side**, the Port of Long Beach was the only major U.S. West Coast maritime gateway to post a significant year-over-year gain, specifically an 8.4% (+24,169 TEUs) increase. Next door at the Port of Los Angeles, the inbound volume slipped by 2.9% (-10,933 TEUs) from a year earlier. That brought the total San Pedro Bay totals to an unassuming year-over-year gain of 2.0% (+13,236 TEUs). Up the coast, import loads at the Port of Oakland rose by just 378 TEUs (+0.5%) over April 2017. Rounding out the relatively tepid showing by USWC ports, the Northwest Seaport Alliance (NWSA) Ports of Seattle and Tacoma reported a drop of 8.8% (-9,754 TEUs) in inbound traffic. Summing up the U.S. West Coast numbers, only 3,860 (+0.5%) more TEUs entered USWC ports this April than last. Things were no better on the Canadian stretch of the Pacific Coast. At the Port of Prince Rupert, inbound loaded trade dipped by 0.4% (-161 TEUs), while at Vancouver import traffic was 4.8% (-6,622 TEUs) shy of April 2017's totals.

Meanwhile back East, the numbers from nine Atlantic Coast ports were mixed. The nine Atlantic Seaboard ports that provide us with data that distinguish loaded from empty containers collectively saw a 0.2% (-1,803 TEUs) dip in inbound loaded boxes. The two Gulf Coast ports we monitor reported a combined 5.5% (+5,129 TEUs) growth in inbound traffic.



## Parsing the April 2018 Numbers Continued

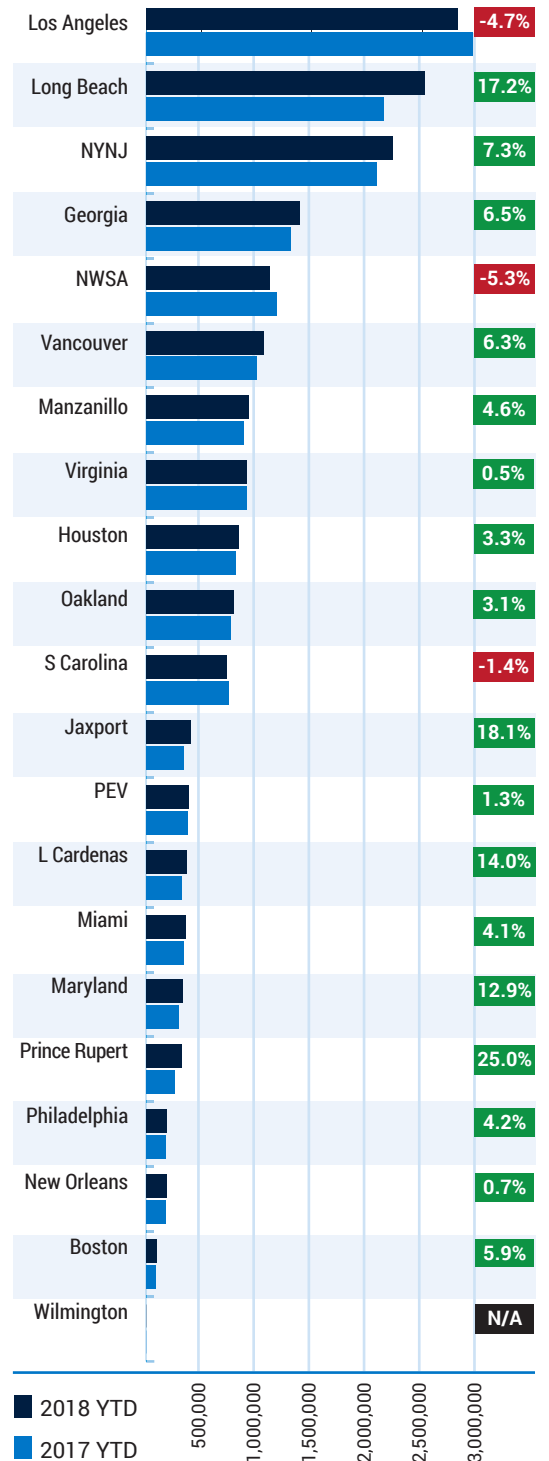
**Exhibit 2** April 2018 - Outbound Loaded TEUs at Selected Ports

	Apr 2018	Apr 2017	% Change	Apr 2018 YTD	Apr 2017 YTD	% Change
Los Angeles	164,704	157,662	4.5%	636,037	667,212	-4.7%
Long Beach	141,799	116,260	22.0%	535,637	474,740	12.8%
<b>San Pedro Bay Totals</b>	<b>306,503</b>	<b>273,922</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>1,171,674</b>	<b>1,141,952</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
Oakland	77,995	78,776	-1.0%	308,738	307,086	0.5%
NWSA	78,909	77,558	1.7%	314,673	325,474	-3.3%
<b>USWC Totals</b>	<b>463,407</b>	<b>430,256</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>1,795,085</b>	<b>1,774,512</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Boston	6,353	6,813	-6.8%	26,959	28,152	-4.2%
NYNJ	134,843	119,415	12.9%	496,543	451,115	10.1%
Maryland	21,248	18,824	12.9%	80,120	77,632	3.2%
Virginia	86,251	85,623	0.7%	343,297	353,601	-2.9%
South Carolina	80,125	66,911	19.7%	282,571	270,421	4.5%
Georgia	141,353	114,554	23.4%	502,408	470,686	6.7%
Jaxport	38,554	33,985	13.4%	162,332	132,917	22.1%
Port Everglades	38,261	35,812	6.8%	150,521	141,377	6.5%
Miami	34,880	29,354	18.8%	132,577	126,251	5.0%
<b>USEC Totals</b>	<b>581,868</b>	<b>511,291</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>2,177,328</b>	<b>2,052,152</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
New Orleans	21,921	24,176	-9.3%	89,831	93,493	-3.9%
Houston	94,827	84,271	12.5%	348,210	355,453	-2.0%
<b>USGC Totals</b>	<b>116,748</b>	<b>108,447</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>438,041</b>	<b>448,946</b>	<b>-2.4%</b>
Vancouver	93,122	91,570	1.7%	350,663	372,743	-5.9%
Prince Rupert	19,881	13,263	49.9%	67,311	50,266	33.9%
<b>British Columbia Totals</b>	<b>113,003</b>	<b>104,833</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>417,974</b>	<b>423,009</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>
Philadelphia*	24,930	22,030	13.2%	91,877	91,101	0.9%
Wilmington DE*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

\*Does not distinguish loaded from empty containers.

Source Individual Ports

**Exhibit 3** April Year-to-Date Total TEUs (Loaded and Empty) Handled at Selected Ports



Source: Individual Ports



## Parsing the April 2018 Numbers Continued

All told, the U.S. mainland ports which report inbound loaded traffic data saw a 0.4% (+7,186 TEUs) increase over April of last year, to 1,691,941 TEUs from 1,684,755 TEUs.

The USWC share of inbound loaded container trade via our ports in April was 50.2%, unchanged from April of last year.

**On the outbound side, trade was more robust.** The two San Pedro Bay ports did well in April. At Long Beach, outbound moves jumped 22.0% (+25,539 TEUs) in April. Next door at the Port of LA, however, outbound trade was up by a more slender 4.5% (+7,042 TEUs). That left the San Pedro Bay gateways with a combined outbound trade that was up 11.9% (+32,581 TEUs) from April 2017. Further north, the Port of Oakland saw 781 fewer TEUs (-1.0%) sail in April than a year earlier. Even further north, the NWSA reported a 1.7% rise in outbound TEUs (+1,351). Pacific coastwide, U.S. outbound traffic exceeded April 2017's totals by 7.7% (+33,151 TEUs). British Columbia ports fared a shade better with a 7.8% (+8,170 TEUs) increase in outbound TEUs over the previous April.

Our nine East Coast ports meanwhile posted a 13.8% (+70,577 TEUs) increase in outbound traffic over last April, while our two Gulf Coast maritime gateways scored a 7.7% (+8,301 TEUs) year-over-year gain. For the month, our mainland U.S. ports handled 1,162,023 TEUs or 10.7% (+112,029 TEUs) more outbound traffic than they had in April 2017.

The USWC ports saw their share of outbound loaded containers decline to 39.9% from 41.0% a year earlier.

**Worldwide Destinations and Origins.** Tonnage-wise, China is by far the leading destination of USWC containerized exports with a 29.1% share in April. But that was well below its 34.9% share last April. In next place was Japan (11.7%, down from 12.6%); Taiwan (11.2%, up sharply from 7.7%), South Korea (9.4%, down from 10.9%); and Vietnam (6.1%, up briskly from 4.1%).

Not surprisingly, China continued to overwhelmingly dominate containerized import tonnage entering USWC ports with a 52.8% share in April, down from 55.2% a year earlier. Trailing far behind in second place was Japan

(5.0%, down from 5.5%); Vietnam (4.5%, up from 4.2%); South Korea (4.2%, down from 4.4%); and Taiwan (4.1%, down from 4.3%).

**Weights and values.** The adjacent **Exhibits 4-6** use data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau's Foreign Trade Division on the declared weight and value of containerized shipments arriving and departing at U.S. mainland ports in April to determine the trade shares held by USWC ports.

Overall, containerized imports through the five major U.S. West Coast ports in April were up 3.4% by weight and 5.8% in value (to \$29.40 billion) from the same month a year ago. On the export side of the ledger, containerized exports via USWC ports in April were 16.2% higher by weight and 16.4% higher by value (to \$8.18 billion).

**Exhibits 5 and 6** provide a breakdown by major USWC port region: Los Angeles/Long Beach, Oakland, and the

### Exhibit 4 USWC shares of Mainland U.S. Containerized Imports and Exports by weight and by value

	Apr 2018	Mar 2018	Apr 2017
<b>USWC Share of Mainland U.S. Containerized Imports</b>			
By Weight	39.4%	34.3%	38.6%
By Value	46.9%	42.4%	47.9%
<b>USWC Share of Mainland U.S. Containerized Exports</b>			
By Weight	37.5%	37.2%	39.7%
By Value	33.0%	33.7%	33.9%
<b>USWC Share of Mainland U.S. Containerized Imports from East Asia</b>			
By Weight	60.5%	52.7%	60.1%
By Value	69.2%	62.8%	68.4%
<b>USWC Share of Mainland U.S. Containerized Exports to East Asia</b>			
By Weight	61.2%	58.8%	62.0%
By Value	66.5%	64.9%	67.8%

Source: U.S. Commerce Department.



## Parsing the April 2018 Numbers Continued

Northwest Seaport Alliance Ports of Seattle and Tacoma. Exhibit 5 looks at USWC ports' shares of worldwide U.S. mainland container trade, while Exhibit 6 spotlights U.S.-East Asian container trade.

**NWSA Woes.** The Northwest Seaport Alliance Ports of Tacoma and Seattle finally posted some mixed numbers. Inbound traffic was off 8.8% in April, while outbound shipments edged up 1.7%. For the past year, though, Seattle has carried Tacoma in this alliance. Statistics compiled by the Pacific Maritime Association reveal widely divergent experiences at the two ports. At Seattle, PMA figures show a 14.7% (+6,567 TEUs) jump in inbound containers over April 2017 and a 4.1% (+1,689 TEUs)

increase in outbound trade. But at Tacoma, inbound traffic was down 25.2% (-19,585 TEUs) from a year earlier, while inbound trade was off 11.3% (-7,306 TEUs).

U.S. foreign trade statistics reveal a similar dichotomy in terms of the declared weight of foreign shipments moving through the two ports. Seattle's containerized imports were up 17.4% over April 2017, while its containerized export tonnage rose 18.4%. Tacoma, meanwhile, handled 23.2% less import tonnage than it had a year earlier and 4.3% less export tonnage. Container traffic at Tacoma began a pattern of year-over-year declines in both imports and exports in May of last year following a shuffling of shipping alliances. ■

### Exhibit 5 USWC Port Regions' Shares of U.S. Mainland Container Trade, April 2018

	Apr 2018	Mar 2018	Apr 2017
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Tonnage</b>			
LA/LB	29.5%	24.6%	28.0%
Oakland	4.0%	3.8%	3.9%
NWSA	5.1%	4.9%	5.5%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Value</b>			
LA/LB	36.7%	32.3%	36.8%
Oakland	3.4%	3.2%	3.5%
NWSA	6.5%	6.7%	7.2%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Tonnage</b>			
LA/LB	23.2%	23.1%	23.9%
Oakland	5.7%	5.4%	6.4%
NWSA	7.8%	8.2%	9.1%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Value</b>			
LA/LB	22.6%	23.2%	23.0%
Oakland	5.8%	6.0%	5.8%
NWSA	4.3%	4.3%	4.9%

Source: U.S. Commerce Department.

### Exhibit 6 USWC Port Regions' Shares of U.S. Mainland-East Asia Container Trade, April 2018

	Apr 2018	Mar 2018	Apr 2017
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports' East Asian Container Import Tonnage</b>			
LA/LB	48.0%	40.5%	45.8%
Oakland	4.5%	4.3%	4.7%
NWSA	7.8%	7.6%	8.7%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports' East Asian Container Import Value</b>			
LA/LB	55.5%	48.9%	53.5%
Oakland	3.9%	3.7%	4.1%
NWSA	9.6%	10.0%	10.4%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports' East Asian Container Export Tonnage</b>			
LA/LB	39.5%	37.9%	38.5%
Oakland	8.7%	7.6%	9.2%
NWSA	12.9%	13.1%	14.1%
<b>Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports' East Asian Container Export Value</b>			
LA/LB	47.0%	46.5%	47.3%
Oakland	10.5%	9.9%	10.6%
NWSA	8.6%	8.4%	9.5%

Source: U.S. Commerce Department.



## Transboundary Issues Target Shipping in the Pacific Northwest

**By Capt. Michael Moore**  
Vice President, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association

The Pacific Northwest is blessed with wide, deep, and protected waterways. It is no surprise that seaports in Washington State and British Columbia developed to take advantage of these natural assets. The region on both sides of the border grew around economic activity tied to maritime operations supporting imports, exports, and coastal movement of a wide range of commodities. In addition, the combined region has the most extensive ferry operations in the world.

Shipping over water is by far the most environmentally friendly transportation mode because so much less energy is needed to move each ton of cargo. And with significant improvements in marine safety over the past several decades cargo vessels have achieved a remarkable “zero” spills record while transiting from sea to or from Puget Sound ports since 1973 (since oil spill data has been officially recorded).

Today, vessel traffic management systems utilize better technology and procedures, vessel designs include more advanced critical system redundancies, and fuel tanks on new ships are protectively located to minimize oil spill risk. Canada and the United States have also fully implemented a highly successful Port State Control program to eliminate substandard vessels.

Contrary to popular belief, there are actually substantially fewer cargo and crude tanker vessels transiting Puget Sound waters today than when traffic peaked in the early 1990s. Freight cargo vessel traffic is down by 900 vessels per year. British Columbia’s vessel traffic has increased, but not enough to offset the reductions on the U.S. side. Crude oil tanker traffic is also down significantly, although there could be an increase if a proposed crude export terminal in Burnaby, B.C. is built.

In total, the U.S. and Canada have a combined 12 ships arriving from sea each day on average. To put this in perspective, the Strait of Juan de Fuca has 1,000 square miles of navigable water between the entrance buoy and the San Juan and Gulf Islands and it is 147 nautical miles

to Tacoma from sea. That means these vessel transits are spread out throughout the system with the most focus on interactions existing between the pilot stations at Victoria and Port Angeles in what is known as “the rotary”. Fortunately, the highly successful Cooperative Vessel Traffic System (CVTS), operated jointly by the U.S. and Canada, pays special attention to this area as does the Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee. The CVTS is a remarkably successful US/Canadian venture operating in joint waters without jurisdictional complications.

So why has shipping become such a political target?

Concerns about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions have led to coalitions forming to oppose virtually any marine terminal project. This dynamic has emboldened those opposing any new project or expansion including bulk terminals to move coal and grain, the transportation of crude by rail, vessel or pipeline. Also included are efforts to stop the already under construction and environmentally friendly LNG project in Tacoma designed to provide cleaner fuel to vessels.

In addition, there is the threatened status of the Southern Resident Killer Whales with a relatively new focus on noise reductions from ships.

The sky-is-falling mantra tends to avoid acknowledgment of the safety record, the full suite of risk mitigation measures with government oversight, and ongoing continuous improvements being implemented. While there is no such thing as zero risk, there is the ability to rationally and objectively manage risk within a continuous improvement climate.

Unfortunately, some activists simply see any use of carbon as something to attack regardless of the efficiencies and economy of scale realities offered by maritime shipping operations. Stopping a project, reducing or capping vessel traffic, limiting vessels transits to certain times of the day, implementing routing changes and speed restrictions are all part of a growing set of anti-maritime goals.



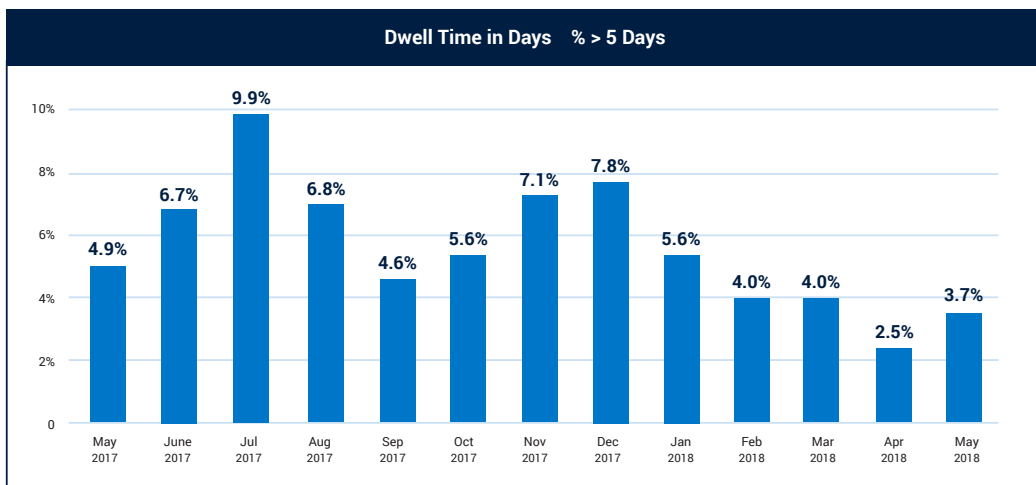
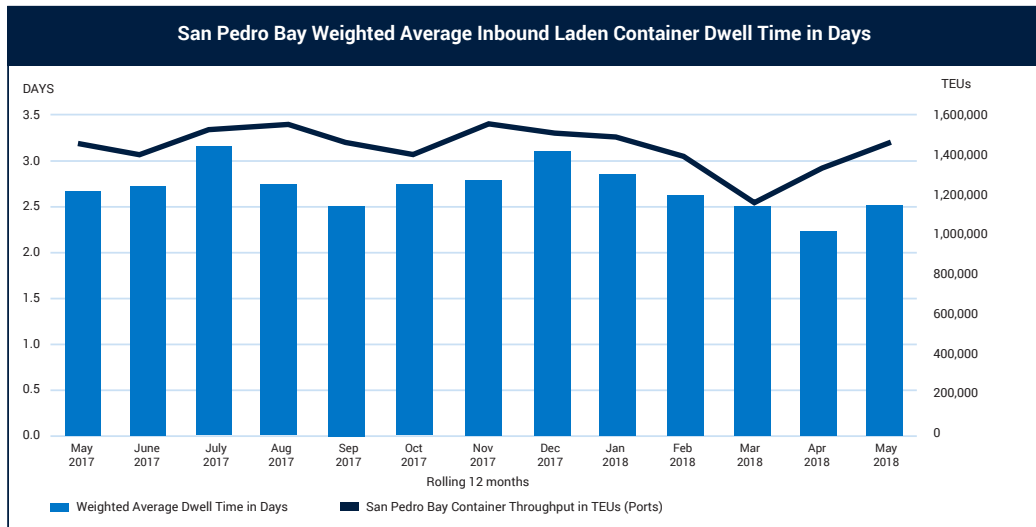


**Transboundary Issues** Continued

In addition, the assertion of Tribal treaty rights has aggressively expanded for fishing area claims with potential conflict with the order and predictability of vessel traffic lanes and the vessel traffic management system.

In the end, the maritime industry will continue to work with federal agencies and other stakeholders to implement rational, scientifically sound and continuous improvements to improve safety. However, maritime and port industries and those that depend on them must work with elected officials and government authorities to fight irrational efforts to curb maritime activities or risk losing this vital and strategic economic engine that has served our collective region so well. ■

**May Dwell Time Numbers Are Up**



**Interested in membership in PMSA?**

Contact Laura Germany for details at:  
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