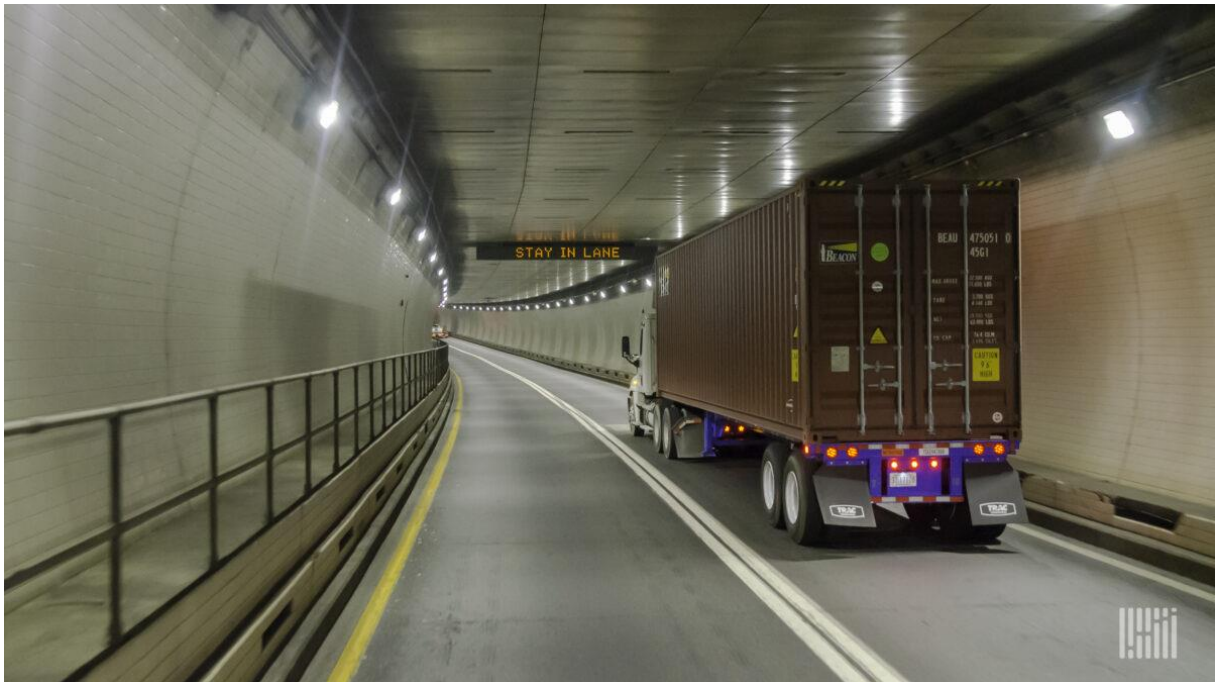


Rerouting trucks and ships away from Baltimore: What early data shows

Expected moves through tunnels for trucks, no clear picture yet on where ships are headed

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Data is starting to show some of the diversions as a result of the collapse of the Key Bridge in Baltimore. (Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

As the days add up after the March 26 collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, companies that gather data from trucks and supply chains are beginning to get an idea of where trucks are rerouting in the catastrophe's wake. Data on ship rerouting is less conclusive.

While some of that data is clear, a lot remains murky as shippers and carriers figure out how to loosen the logistical choke points the collapse created.

One of the clearest data series in the market, because it is fed by decisions that need to be made that very day, is what routes trucks making their way through the Baltimore area are using instead of the Key Bridge, which crosses the eastern mouth of the Baltimore Inner Harbor where it meets Chesapeake Bay.

Rishi Mehra, vice president of the Maps division of telematics company Trimble ([NASDAQ: TRMB](#)), has reviewed customer data on where trucks are rerouting away from the Key Bridge, which was on the eastern side of the Interstate 695 loop around Baltimore. So far, trucks are doing pretty much what everybody expected.

Mehra, in an interview with FreightWaves, said the largest diversion has seen traffic increase in the Fort McHenry Tunnel on Interstate 95 that travels under the more northern part of the Port of Baltimore. Behind that for diversions is the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel, whose route is slightly south of the Fort McHenry Tunnel but is only two lanes. Mehra said that is likely a reason why it has seen a lesser increase in truck traffic. Truckers might see the two-lane approach with walls on both sides as tight, he added.

“What we are looking for is to see increased traffic coming out of the other ports,” Mehra said. That data would be able to show how many power units have been shifted out of Baltimore and to what areas.

Trimble data has not spotted any significant pickup in other routing that might be increasing in frequency as a result of the closure. “There’s nothing out of the ordinary right now,” Mehra said.

The diversions being recorded by Trimble are for trucks that aren't pulling hazardous materials. Trucks with hazmat loads are rerouted all the way to the western side of Baltimore on I-695.

How many minutes are added?

Mehra said Trimble's data shows that the hazmat trips are adding 15 to 20 minutes compared to journeys that used the shorter route around the eastern side of the city and crossed the Key Bridge.

The data on truck trips through the tunnel shows that route is adding 9 to 10 miles compared to the bridge route, tacking on 11 minutes in travel time. Speeds through the tunnels are down about 5%, Mehra said.

While Mehra conceded Trimble's data is not yet able to pick up shifts in movements of drayage truck drivers to other ports, such as Norfolk, Virginia, he said that is because "the carriers themselves are waiting for the offloading of the freight moves they're planning."

He discussed the dilemma for drayage drivers and companies: A company can move a drayage tractor to another port, but drivers servicing the Port of Baltimore would live in the region as well. If the driver doesn't want to move while the port is closed, "do they have extra people who they might be able to hire on a temporary basis?" Mehra said. "So that is part of the decision-making process they are going through." But the data on drayage moves is not yet adequate to make any definitive statement on where the capacity is headed, Mehra added.

(An additional two hours of available service time was part of a waiver granted last week by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and it was [noted in this article](#) that the time could allow a drayage driver based in Baltimore to service Norfolk and still be home at night.)

Destination of port diversions still not clear

Gautam Jain, the CEO of India-based logistics management platform GoComet, which provides visibility into international shipments, confirmed that the data so far does not show any port picking up significant market share as a result of the closure of Baltimore.

Jain said Easter may be a part of that.

For example, since March 27, the first full day after the bridge collapse, through April 1, vessels calling at the Port of New York and New Jersey fell 25.5%, according to GoComet data. Savannah, Georgia was down 0.6%, Norfolk was up 1.5% and Charleston, South Carolina was down 22.2%.

Jain said traditionally there is heavy movement of freight just before Easter, as there is before Christmas, and that may have slowed the shift of a lot of freight away from Baltimore and to other ports.

"Easter season is over now so after a few weeks volumes will grow and then we have to see where the vessels are being diverted," Jain said.

Data supplied by GoComet on detention also has yet to suggest any new patterns arising from by the closure of the Baltimore port.

Congestion as measured in days was 3.09 in Charleston on March 27. On Thursday, it was 2.86 days, according to GoComet.

Norfolk and Savannah congestion also fell during that time. But New York went to 3.53 days from two days, according to GoComet.

Baltimore is not a significant container port, but it is a large import location for the "ro-ro" trade, or "roll-on/roll-off." That includes everything from automobiles to farm equipment.

"No one knows where this is going, and this is changing on a day-to-day basis," Jain said.

Some shippers are in the dark about what is happening with their goods that have been exported to the U.S. and were ticketed for Baltimore. "So suddenly the shippers who were expecting their shipments to arrive at an inland port have to arrange for truckers at the ports of New York, Norfolk or Savannah," Jain said. "So this is causing a lot of issues."