

HMM and SM Line cooperate on Transpacific lane amid alliance shuffle

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South Korean liner operators HMM and SM Line are working together on long-haul routes for the first time.

On 13 May, SM Line said that each carrier will take 300 TEU on each other's Asia-US West Coast services, starting in June.

HMM will take slots on SM Line's CPX (China Pacific Express) which calls at Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo, Busan, Incheon, Gwangyang, Los Angeles, Oakland, Long Beach, and Portland. CPX uses six 6,655 TEU ships, with a six-week turnaround.

SM Line will take slots on HMM's Pacific South Express (PSX), which calls at Shanghai, Gwangyang, Busan, Los Angeles, Oakland, Busan, Gwangyang, Incheon and Shanghai. PSX turns in seven weeks, using six ships of 8,600 to 10,000 TEUs. A seventh vessel, the new 13,800 TEU HMM Emerald, will join the service later this month.

SM Line joins other THE Alliance members, Hapag-Lloyd, ONE and Yang Ming Marine Transport in slotting on PSX.

The cooperation between South Korea's two ocean-going carriers coincides with the upheaval in container shipping alliances.

With Hapag-Lloyd leaving THE Alliance to form Gemini Cooperation with Maersk Line in February 2025, it has become increasingly necessary for THE Alliance members to attract other shipping companies as partners.

Working with SM Line shows that HMM will strengthen its sales network by actively promoting the sharing of vessels not only with overseas shipping companies but also with compatriot peers.

HMM's spokesperson told *Container News* that the company keeps an open mind towards working with other companies.

Xeneta's chief analyst Peter Sand told *Container News* that THE Alliance members are likely to step up collaborations with other box lines, rather than seeking to replace Hapag-Lloyd in the grouping.

Sand said, "I think this will be a trend that many Alliance partners will continue to make use of going forward. No Alliance is holy. Not now, not in the future. But for THE Alliance members the need to go out and find other partners to team up with on specific trades may be more pronounced due to the size of the capacity operated under the alliance structure."

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