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Volumes Soar at SoCal Ports Setting Records as Shippers Accelerate Pace



Volumes soar as Long Beach and Los Angeles record best July volumes in each port's history (Los Angeles file photo)

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Defying forecasts of a potentially slowing U.S. economy, the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach each had record volumes in July in part as imports accelerated to avoid potential disruptions due to the Red Sea as well as a possible fall port strike on the U.S. East Coast. Port executives however remain optimistic for the near-term outlook.

July was the best month in terms of volume in the history of both Los Angeles (116 years) and Long Beach (113 years). Los Angeles highlights it was only the fourth time it has exceeded the half-million mark in a month for import TEU volumes and its busiest month in over two years. While Los Angeles saw overall volume up 37 percent over last year, and 14 percent ahead of June, Long Beach reported a staggering 62.6 percent year-over-year increase. Voles were up almost five percent in Long Beach over June, which was also its busiest June on record.

“We’ve seen an influx of year-end holiday goods coming across our docks a bit earlier than usual to avoid any risk of delay later in the year,” said Gene Seroka, Executive Director for the Port of Los Angeles. “These goods – think toys, electronics, and clothing – are arriving at the same time as more typical back-to-school, fall fashion, and Halloween merchandise. An early peak season has helped to boost volumes here in Los Angeles.”

Imports were up 38 percent in July compared to 2023 topping out at 501,281 TEU in Los Angeles. The port also recorded its 14th consecutive month of increases in exports which were up 4 percent compared to 2023. In total, Los Angeles fell just short of the one million TEU mark.

Neighboring Long Beach was up 12.4 percent over its previous July record set in 2022. Imports were up 60.5 percent to over 435,000 TEU. Equally strong were exports which were up 16.3 percent.

“We’re in a strong position heading into the peak shipping season as consumers purchase back-to-school supplies and shippers move goods ahead of potential tariff increases,” said Port of Long Beach CEO Mario Cordero.

The National Retail Federation in its forecasts also pointed to retailers accelerating their imports. The NRF raised its forecasts into October before projecting a slowing of volumes as much as a month earlier than normal.

Both ports however also highlight strong volumes of empties being returned to Asia as a sign that the surge seen in July is not yet over. While it is possible that volumes peaked early this year in July, Los Angeles points to the volume for empties which was up 54 percent while in Long Beach it was up nearly 58 percent. Between the two ports, over 665,000 TEU were returned to Asia during July.

Both ports are showing strong overall growth for 2024, with Los Angeles reporting the seven-month volume is up 18 percent. Long Beach is even strong up 20 percent for 2024 after both ports had reported lackluster results earlier in the year.

The outlook is for a “robust” August Seroka reported during Los Angeles’ monthly update. He predicted that the port would be at or above 850,000 TEU for August. He told reporters that he thinks volumes will remain robust for the remainder of the year despite worries over an East Coast strike, global disruptions, the election year in the U.S., and concerns that the economy could be beginning to slow.