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Container Routes and Alliances Rearranging for 2025



MSC is leading the shifts with its new standalone network and slot agreements (MSC)

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The container shipping sector is preparing for one of its most significant realignments due to launch in 2025 as alliances, routing, and sharing arrangements are adjusted. Carriers have begun to reveal the planned changes reacting to the end of the 2M Alliance between MSC Mediterranean Shipping Company and Maersk as well as the planned launch of the new Gemini Cooperation between Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd.

MSC will leave its alliance with Maersk in January 2025 and today the company announced what it calls its standalone East/West network and plans for 2025. CEO Soren Toft called it “an important milestone in the evolution of our global network,” saying the carrier would continue to provide “unmatched connectivity and direct corridors.”

The company has been moving aggressively to expand capacity adding to its fleet both with a long-term newbuild program as well numerous secondhand acquisitions. MSC now has over 850 vessels and a capacity of more than six million TEU. The new standalone East/West trade features five trades with 34 loops stemming from Asia to North Europe, the Mediterranean, North America West Coast, North America East Coast, and trans-Atlantic. Via the Suez MSC says it will have weekly service with more than 1,900 direct port pairs or more than 1,800 direct port pairs via the Cape of Good Hope.

While the emphasis is on the standalone capabilities, MSC is also forming new slotting arrangements. The relaunched The Alliance, to be known as the Premier Alliance consisting of Ocean Network

Express (ONE), HMM, and Yang Ming, will have a slot exchange cooperation with MSC. This will encompass nine services between Asia and Europe.

Zim and MSC are also entering into a new long-term operational cooperation on Asia–U.S. East Coast and Asia–U.S. Gulf Coast trades. Zim reports it is a three-year agreement that features slot swap and vessel sharing agreements and will include Caribbean and Mexican ports.

The Alliance loses the participation of Hapag-Lloyd but today reconfirmed its plans to continue as the Premier Alliance. ONE, HMM, and Yang Ming will launch the new cooperation in February 2025 with a five-year agreement. They highlight that it will cover the mainline services across the major East-West tradelines.

“The close network collaboration that exists between the three companies will be further strengthened and enhanced under this new collaboration starting from February 2025,” said Jeremy Nixon, CEO of ONE. “Collectively this new tripartite alliance will offer strong, reliable, and highly dependable end-to-end direct port container services to its customers on both the Transpacific and Asia-Europe trades.”

As part of the shift, ONE also reported a new wider selection of services. The carrier said it will enhance global coverage with more than 80 direct port calls. This is in addition to its cooperation with the Premier Alliance.

After a regulatory review by the U.S. Federal Maritime Commission, the Gemini Cooperation was cleared today so that it can become effective. The FMC said it will continue to closely monitor the operation of the alliance. Maersk and Hapag have not yet announced the details of the new Gemini Cooperation. The two carriers said they would align services and share slots with the aim of providing 90 percent schedule reliability.

The moves underway are significant for the industry both as it continues to expand capacity and looks to counter the impacts of disruptions due to the continued rerouting and pricing pressures. Container shipping’s profitability improved as the rerouting reduced overcapacity but long term the industry is scheduled for a dramatic influx of new capacity as the current shipbuilding orders continue to deliver tonnage. Analysts continue to speculate about the ability to absorb this capacity as the industry forms new alliances.