



Houston Ship Channel Trade Tonnage Climbs 16% as Exports and Vessel Traffic Grow

Latest insights on cargo activity, vessel traffic, and regional trade performance.

HOUSTON – August 20, 2026 – Trade activity across the Houston Ship Channel region remained strong, while Port Houston gained momentum with increases in imports, empties and a modest decline in exports.

“Our region remains resilient through evolving global trade conditions. Vessel activity in the nation’s busiest waterway is up, and we continue to see steady cargo movement that helps power industries like energy, manufacturing and retail, crucial to our national economy,” said Charlie Jenkins, CEO of Port Houston.

Key Takeaways

- The Houston Ship Channel region’s total trade by tonnage increased 16% year to date through June, driven by a 22% increase in exports while imports declined 4%.
- Port Houston handled nearly 2.6 million TEUs through July, up 1% year to date, with loaded container imports increasing 5%. Overall container growth remains positive but has moderated following stronger activity due to frontloading earlier in the year.
- East Asia continued to drive loaded container import growth at Port Houston, increasing 10% year to date and accounting for 57% of total import volume. Growth was supported by higher volumes of consumer and industrial goods, including apparel, resins and plastics, and machinery and electronics.
- General cargo total tonnage at Port Houston facilities increased 35% year to date, while steel volumes declined 18% year to date, reflecting changing trade flows, sourcing decisions, and market demand.

Houston Ship Channel Region – June 2026

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data released August 9, 2026

Tonnage (Short Tons)	June 2026	June 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Export	17,101,660	14,531,416	↑ 18%	109,504,610	89,886,308	↑ 22%
Import	4,178,976	4,396,108	↓ 5%	25,549,000	26,723,274	↓ 4%
Total Tonnage	21,280,637	18,927,524	↑ 12%	135,053,610	116,609,582	↑ 16%



Houston Ship Channel Vessel Call Activity – July 2026

Source: Greater Houston Port Bureau's Marine Exchange of Texas released August 3, 2026

Vessel Traffic	July 2026	July 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Total Deep Draft Transits	1,523	1,475	↑ 3%	10,859	10,127	↑ 7%
Total Barge Transits	19,552	17,539	↑ 11%	129,814	122,163	↑ 6%

Port Houston Public Terminals Performance – July 2026

Source: Port Houston

Cargo Category	July 2026	July 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Loaded Imports (TEUs)	181,808	187,367	↓ 3%	1,211,475	1,151,203	↑ 5%
Loaded Exports (TEUs)	124,814	133,137	↓ 6%	925,781	936,415	↓ 1%
Total Containers (TEUs)	369,899	392,829	↓ 6%	2,599,372	2,562,506	↑ 1%
Steel Imports (Tons)	331,271	520,309	↓ 36%	2,206,056	2,704,658	↓ 18%
Steel (Tons)	357,625	563,490	↓ 37%	2,340,515	2,842,850	↓ 18%
General Cargo (Tons)	104,048	73,290	↑ 42%	796,982	590,555	↑ 35%
Total Tonnage (Tons)	4,574,477	5,187,192	↓ 12%	32,809,648	32,647,865	0%

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About Port Houston

For more than 100 years, Port Houston has owned and operated the eight public wharves and terminals along the Houston Ship Channel, including the area's largest breakbulk facility and two of the most efficient container terminals in the country. Port Houston is the advocate and a strategic leader for the Channel. The Houston Ship Channel complex and its more than 200 private and eight public terminals is the nation's largest port for waterborne tonnage and an essential economic engine for the Houston region, the state of Texas, and the U.S. The Port of Houston supports 1.54 million jobs in Texas and 3.37 million jobs nationwide, and economic activity totaling \$439 billion in Texas – nearly 20 percent of Texas' total gross domestic product (GDP) – and \$906 billion in economic impact across the nation. For more information, visit the website at PortHouston.com.

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