



Houston Ship Channel Region Monthly Trade & Market Report

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

HOUSTON – September 22, 2026 – Trade activity across the Houston Ship Channel region showed strength across several key sectors, with energy exports driving regional tonnage growth and Port Houston seeing gains in steel and container imports.

Crude oil exports through the Houston Ship Channel are up 40% this year, contributing to a 22% increase in overall regional exports. Houston accounts for 31% of U.S. waterborne exports of crude oil and refined products and more than 21% of total U.S. waterborne exports by tonnage.

At Port Houston facilities, steel emerged as a standout in August, with total tonnage increasing 49% year over year to 529,085 tons, driven primarily by imports.

Loaded container imports increased 5% year to date, with machinery and electronics, retail consumer goods, furniture, automotive products, and apparel among the categories posting gains. The activity reflects seasonal demand and some front-loading as businesses prepare for the upcoming holiday season.

“Houston’s strength as a global trade gateway comes from the diversity of the cargo and customers we serve,” said Charlie Jenkins, CEO of Port Houston. “Just this month, we welcomed the first vessel in Crowley’s new weekly container service connecting Houston with Central America and creating additional options for shippers and strengthening our connections to key international markets.”

Key Takeaways

- Crude oil exports are up 40% this year. Houston accounts for 31% of U.S. waterborne exports of crude oil and refined products and more than 21% of total U.S. waterborne exports by tonnage.
- Steel activity was the standout in August with total tonnage increasing 49% year over year to 529,084 tons, driven primarily by imports. This was the best month for steel since August 2025.
- Loaded container activity remained positive, increasing 2% year to date to 2,449,342 TEUs, driven by a 5% increase in loaded imports.
- East Asia continued to lead import growth, increasing 12% and accounting for 57% of loaded container imports. Machinery and electronics, resins and plastics, chemicals and



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minerals, and consumer goods were among the major categories contributing to import growth.

- General cargo remained strong, increasing 22% year over year through August to 913,863 tons, led by a 27% increase in imports.

Houston Ship Channel Region – July 2026

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data released September 8, 2026

Tonnage (Short Tons)	July 2026	July 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Export	15,964,874	14,152,045	↑ 13%	125,471,196	104,039,759	↑ 21%
Import	4,543,567	4,659,145	↓ 2%	30,092,967	31,382,837	↓ 4%
Total Tonnage	20,508,441	18,811,190	↑ 10%	155,564,163	135,422,595	↑ 15%

Houston Ship Channel Vessel Call Activity – August 2026

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

Vessel Traffic	August 2026	August 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Total Deep Draft Transits	1,607	1,473	↑ 9%	12,466	11,600	↑ 7%
Total Barge Transits	19,712	17,912	↑ 10%	149,526	140,075	↑ 7%

Port Houston Public Terminals Performance – August 2026

Source: Port Houston

Cargo Category	August 2026	August 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Loaded Imports (TEUs)	176,016	169,631	↑ 4%	1,387,491	1,320,834	↑ 5%
Loaded Exports (TEUs)	136,070	138,351	↓ 2%	1,061,851	1,074,766	↓ 1%
Total Containers (TEUs)	373,756	370,430	↑ 1 %	2,973,128	2,932,936	↑ 1%
Steel Imports (Tons)	502,965	327,258	↑ 54%	2,709,021	3,031,916	↓ 11%
Steel (Tons)	529,084	355,880	↑ 49%	2,869,599	3,198,730	↓ 10%
General Cargo (Tons)	116,881	158,241	↓ 26%	913,863	748,796	↑ 22%
Total Tonnage (Tons)	4,683,813	4,687,081	0%	37,493,461	37,334,946	0%

The Houston Ship Channel region monthly trade and market report can also be found on the Port Houston [website](#).

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About Port Houston

For more than 100 years, Port Houston has owned and operated the 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 Houston Ship Channel region known as the Port of Houston, which includes more than 200 private and eight public facilities. The Port of Houston 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 approximately 1.89 million jobs in Texas and 3.53 million jobs nationwide and economic activity totaling \$538 billion in Texas and \$987 billion across the nation. For more information, visit PortHouston.com.

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