



PORT HOUSTON™

Houston Ship Channel Region Monthly Trade & Market Report

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

HOUSTON – October 21, 2026 – Trade activity across the Houston Ship Channel region continues to grow, with foreign tonnage exports increasing 24% in August and deep-draft vessel traffic rising 9% in September. Underscoring its role in connecting American businesses and industries to global markets, the Houston Ship Channel region handled 22.3 million tons of foreign cargo in August, an 18% increase year over year.

At Port Houston's public terminals, container volume increased 11% in September to 376,419 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), with loaded imports rising 16%.

Steel cargo increased 157% year over year in September to 581,035 tons, driven by a 181% surge in steel imports. This was Port Houston's biggest month for steel since May 2022, and the growth highlights the movement of materials essential to construction, manufacturing, and energy infrastructure.

"From the clothes on store shelves to the materials used in construction and energy projects, the goods moving through the Houston Ship Channel touch nearly every aspect of our daily lives," said Charlie Jenkins, CEO of Port Houston. "Behind every shipment are the people and businesses that keep our economy moving. At the end of the day, our purpose is simple: to support jobs and drive economic prosperity across our region."

Key Takeaways

- **Regional trade:** The Houston Ship Channel region handled 22.3 million tons of foreign cargo in August, up 18% year over year, with exports increasing 24%.
- **Vessel activity:** September deep-draft vessel transits increased 9%, while barge transits rose 11% compared to the same month last year.
- **Container activity:** Port Houston handled a total of 376,419 TEUs in September, up 11%, with loaded imports increasing 16%.
- **What's moving:** Through August, containerized imports of apparel and accessories rose 27%, resins and plastics increased 11%, and machinery, appliances, and electronics grew 9%.



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- **Steel cargo:** Port Houston's public terminals handled 581,035 tons of steel in September, a 157% increase over the same month last year, driven largely by a 181% increase in steel imports.

Houston Ship Channel Region – August 2026

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data released October 6, 2026

Tonnage (Short Tons)	August 2026	August 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Export	17,758,844	14,320,043	↑ 24%	143,230,189	118,359,926	↑ 21%
Import	4,553,688	4,552,671	0%	34,646,691	35,905,545	↓ 4%
Total Tonnage	22,312,532	18,872,714	↑ 18%	177,876,880	154,265,471	↑ 15%

Houston Ship Channel Vessel Call Activity – September 2026

Source: Greater Houston Port Bureau's Marine Exchange of Texas released October 7, 2026

Vessel Traffic	September 2026	September 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Total Deep Draft Transits	1,596	1,460	↑ 9%	14,062	13,060	↑ 8%
Total Barge Transits	18,819	16,970	↑ 11%	168,346	157,045	↑ 7%

Port Houston Public Terminals Performance – September 2026

Source: Port Houston

Cargo Category	September 2026	September 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Loaded Imports (TEUs)	174,189	150,526	↑ 16%	1,561,680	1,471,360	↑ 6%
Loaded Exports (TEUs)	132,009	129,067	↑ 2%	1,193,860	1,203,833	↓ 1%
Total Containers (TEUs)	376,419	337,659	↑ 11 %	3,349,547	3,270,595	↑ 2%
Steel Imports (Tons)	539,993	192,351	↑ 181%	3,248,614	3,224,267	↑ 1%
Steel (Tons)	581,035	226,474	↑ 157%	3,450,634	3,425,204	↑ 1%
Total Tonnage (Tons)	4,881,424	4,259,026	↑ 15%	42,374,885	41,593,972	↑ 2%

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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