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Houston Ship Channel Region Monthly Trade & Market Report

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

HOUSTON – November 24, 2026 – Trade activity across the Houston Ship Channel region continued to grow, reinforcing the waterway's role in supporting American industries, jobs, and economic activity. Foreign tonnage increased 15% year to date through September, reaching 200.2 million tons, driven by a 20% rise in exports. Deep draft vessel transits also increased 12% in October, reflecting continued maritime activity along the channel.

The Houston Ship Channel region also continues to play a significant role in U.S. energy exports. Through September, Houston accounted for 32% of U.S. crude oil exports and nearly 65% of the year-to-date increase in oil exports nationwide. The Netherlands, Mexico, and Japan were the region's three leading export destinations during the same period, highlighting Houston's connections to global markets.

Domestic cargo also accounts for a significant share of activity along the Houston Ship Channel. Based on monthly indicators and historical data published by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Port Houston estimates that 67.6 million short tons of domestic cargo moved through the region during the first nine months of 2026, up approximately 3.8% from the estimated 65.1 million short tons through September 2025.

At Port Houston's public terminals, October brought multiple container milestones. Total container volume reached 415,326 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), up 14% year over year and the highest October volume on record. Loaded imports reached an all-time monthly high of 199,302 TEUs, surpassing the previous record set in May, while loaded exports climbed to 144,334 TEUs, also setting an October record. Through the first 10 months of 2026, Port Houston handled a record 3.76 million TEUs, up 4% from the same period last year.

Growth extended beyond containers. Steel tonnage at the public terminals increased 74% to 504,010 tons year over year, while general cargo rose 170% to 217,633 tons. Shipments of steel, packaged cement, and other industrial materials support construction, manufacturing, and energy-related industries that contribute to the regional economy.

"The Houston Ship Channel is an economic engine for our region, supporting jobs and businesses across Texas and the nation," said Charlie Jenkins, CEO of Port Houston. "Every day, the industries along the channel move the goods and materials that keep our economy running.

Our job is to make sure this vital waterway can continue supporting growth, creating opportunities, and keeping American businesses competitive."

Key Takeaways

- **Regional foreign trade:** The Houston Ship Channel region handled 22.3 million tons of foreign cargo in September, up 13% year over year. Exports increased 16%, underscoring the region's role in connecting American industries to global markets.
- **Energy exports:** Houston accounted for 32% of U.S. crude oil exports and nearly 65% of the year-to-date increase in national crude oil exports through September.
- **Vessel activity:** October deep-draft vessel transits increased 12% compared to the same month last year. Year-to-date deep-draft traffic is up 8%, while barge transits have increased 7%.
- **Record-setting container activity:** October marked a record month for total container volume and loaded exports, while loaded imports reached an all-time monthly high. Year-to-date container volume also reached a record 3.76 million TEUs through October, reflecting sustained cargo activity at Port Houston's public terminals.
- **Industrial cargo:** Steel tonnage at the public terminals increased 74% in October, while general cargo rose 170%. Year-to-date general cargo volume is up 59%, reflecting increased movement of industrial and project cargo, including packaged cement.
- **What's moving:** Through October, containerized imports increased across several major commodity categories, including apparel and accessories (+19%), machinery, appliances, and electronics (+12%), resins and plastics (+11%), and hardware and construction materials (+8%).

Houston Ship Channel Region – September 2026
Source: U.S. Census Bureau data released November 4, 2026

Foreign Tonnage (Short Tons)	September 2026	September 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Export	18,086,767	15,653,664	↑ 16%	161,316,957	134,013,590	↑ 20%
Import	4,252,409	4,160,511	↑ 2%	38,899,100	40,066,057	↓ 3%
Total Tonnage	22,339,176	19,814,175	↑ 13%	200,216,057	174,079,648	↑ 15%

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Houston Ship Channel Vessel Call Activity – October 2026

Source: Greater Houston Port Bureau's Marine Exchange of Texas released November 5, 2026

Vessel Traffic	October 2026	October 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Total Deep Draft Transits	1,628	1,453	↑ 12%	15,690	14,513	↑ 8%
Total Barge Transits	19,251	18,874	↓ 2%	187,597	175,918	↑ 7%

Port Houston Public Terminals Performance – October 2026

Source: Port Houston

Cargo Category	October 2026	October 2025	Change %	2026 YTD	2025 YTD	Change %
Loaded Imports (TEUs)	199,302	164,448	↑ 21%	1,760,982	1,635,808	↑ 6%
Loaded Exports (TEUs)	144,334	140,469	↑ 3%	1,338,194	1,344,302	0%
Total Containers (TEUs)	415,326	365,773	↑ 14 %	3,764,873	3,636,368	↑ 4%
Steel Imports (Tons)	496,403	255,114	↑ 95%	3,745,017	3,479,381	↑ 8%
Steel (Tons)	504,010	289,219	↑ 74%	3,954,644	3,714,422	↑ 6%
General Cargo (Tons)	217,633	80,498	↑ 170%	1,262,427	796,301	↑ 59%
Total Tonnage (Tons)	5,179,277	4,603,295	↑ 13%	47,554,162	46,197,267	↑ 3%

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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