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GLOBAL APERTURE

As 2026 begins, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) [warns that overlapping global risks this year could hit air cargo](#) through fragmented customs and carbon regimes, climate-driven disruption that strains cold-chain and other temperature-sensitive shipments, and escalating cyber threats that can ripple across handlers, airports, and customs systems. The report also notes oil-market shifts may help near-term margins through lower fuel costs, but longer-term uncertainty around fossil fuel supply complicates freighter planning and capacity decisions.

According to the latest report from maritime analytics firm Sea-Intelligence, global liner schedule reliability [improved by 2.8 percentage points in November 2025](#) to 64.1%—the second-highest November level on record, with average vessel arrival delays also declining month over month. The improvement signals more predictable sailing schedules for shippers in the new year, alongside broader trade activity expected to exceed \$35 trillion in 2025 per the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Ahead of the Chinese New Year holiday beginning February 17, [mainline carriers are adding Asia–North Europe capacity](#) to accommodate strong export demand from China and Southeast Asia, with additional sailings planned through the coming weeks. Despite the added capacity, ongoing voyage delays and persistent port congestion—following disruptions seen throughout 2025—are expected to continue affecting schedule reliability on the trade lane.

REGIONAL FOCUS – AMERICAS

United States / Canada: The U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian Coast Guard [began intensified icebreaking operations](#) in early January 2026 after severe winter conditions disrupted Great Lakes shipping and delayed vessel movements. Ongoing ice buildup has slowed traffic and affected scheduled closures along the St. Lawrence Seaway, with shippers reporting congestion and risks to bulk cargo deliveries ahead of the Soo Locks closure planned for January 15.

Mexico: As of January 1, [Mexico has introduced new import tariffs](#) of up to 35% on most goods from countries without free trade agreements, including China, India, South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia. The measures apply to thousands of products such as automobiles, auto parts, textiles, clothing, plastics, and steel, and are intended to support domestic production and employment as Mexico prepares for the upcoming review of the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA).

REGIONAL FOCUS – ASIA-PACIFIC

According to new data from the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines, international air cargo demand among Asia Pacific carriers [rose 6.2% year on year](#) in November 2025, driven by stronger exports from Southeast Asia and India. Capacity growth slightly outpaced demand, leading to a modest dip in load factors, while inventory restocking and e-commerce activity supported resilient airfreight volumes heading into year end.

India: On December 24, India announced reforms [to simplify import quality checks](#), including reduced paperwork, shorter timelines, and fewer inspections, as part of efforts to cut red tape and speed cargo clearance. The changes come as India continues trade discussions with the United States, addressing long-standing concerns about complex import compliance requirements that affect cross-border supply chains.

Mumbai International Airport Ltd has notified users of plans [to suspend dedicated freighter operations](#) at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport between August 2026 and May 2027 to allow for major cargo apron and runway infrastructure upgrades. During the 10-month period, freighter movements will not be relocated elsewhere at the airport due to space constraints, prompting concerns from the cargo community about potential impacts on export flows and operational planning.

Korea: On January 6, Korean officials confirmed plans for a September 2026 [trial container voyage from Busan to Rotterdam via Arctic waters](#), deploying a 3,000-TEU vessel as part of efforts to explore a shorter Asia–Europe shipping route. The government said the pilot, which will require coordination with Russia for transit permits, is intended to assess the operational feasibility of Arctic shipping and support longer-term development of Busan as a global maritime hub.

REGIONAL FOCUS – EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

Severe winter weather [disrupted port and inland operations](#) in Northern Europe on January 5–6, temporarily halting container handling and rail access at the Port of Hamburg and parts of the Port of Rotterdam as snow, frozen switches, and overhead line failures impacted terminals. While some operations resumed, ongoing rail outages and recovery delays are expected to affect cargo flows in the near term, particularly for rail-connected hinterland movements.

On January 1, 2026, the European Union's [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism \(CBAM\)](#) came into force, requiring importers of high-carbon goods such as steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers, and electricity to demonstrate compliance with EU carbon rules or face penalties. The new framework is designed to prevent carbon leakage and level the playing field for EU producers, with implications for exporters' customs documentation, emissions reporting, and supply chain planning when shipping into the bloc.

Belgium: As of January 4, 2026, [Liège Airport has ceased regular commercial passenger flights](#) following the withdrawal of TUI fly Belgium, which operated its final service after more than 30 years due to ongoing profitability challenges. The airport will continue to focus on its core role as one of Europe's largest air cargo hubs, with passenger traffic having become marginal relative to freight operations.