The 2026 State of Shipping and Logistics Report

Shipping Trends for 2026

WWEX GROUP™

About WWEX Group

The WWEX Group family of brands, which includes Worldwide Express, GlobalTranz, Unishippers, JEAR Logistics and BLX Logistics, offers full-service logistics expertise to more than 113,000 customers across the country. With access to industry leading small package, truckload, less-than-truckload and managed transportation solutions, customers benefit from enhanced visibility and value for their supply chains. The company is the second largest privately held freight brokerage and largest non-retail UPS® Authorized Reseller in the U.S., with an annual systemwide revenue of $4.4 billion. To learn more about WWEX Group, visit **wwexgroup.com**.

What trends are shaping shipping and logistics in 2026?

Disruption is no longer an exception in shipping and logistics: it's the operating environment. In 2026, that reality becomes even clearer as disruption shapes every corner of the industry. Some of that disruption brings real challenges: regulatory shifts, capacity risks, rising parcel costs and new compliance hurdles that directly impact shippers. Other disruptions unlock innovation, efficiency and smarter logistics than ever before. Together, they form a "perpetual disruption" cycle that rewards agile, **technology-driven shippers and 3PLs** and places new pressure on those relying on outdated processes. In this report, we break down eight core trends, a set of emerging "watch list" trends and look back at 2025 forces that will continue to shape shippers' strategies in 2026.

This report explores the following shipping and logistics trends:

- **A fragile freight shipper's market:** Soft demand and ample freight capacity create a shipper-friendly market, but it rests on shaky economic and policy fundamentals.
- **A CDL crackdown risk:** A potential crackdown on non-domiciled CDLs could reduce available drivers and tighten truckload capacity in key regions.
- **The logistics AI revolution:** AI is moving into every stage of the customer journey, from quoting and routing to tracking, exception management and post-shipment analytics.
- **Election-driven policy uncertainty:** The 2026 midterms introduce new uncertainty around regulations, labor policy and trade, forcing shippers to plan for multiple outcomes.
- **Mexico's emerging logistics edge:** Mexico's nearshoring shift and evolving tariffs are driving more cross-border freight and elevating the country's role as a key logistics hub for North America.
- **A new parcel cost equation:** Parcel carriers are investing in automation and network upgrades while still passing through higher rates to shippers.
- **Import volatility under tariff review:** Court scrutiny of Trump-era tariffs is adding legal uncertainty to already volatile import volumes and landed costs.
- **Resilience as a core strategy:** Shippers are doubling down on resilience — multi-sourcing, regionalization, buffers and stronger 3PL partnerships — to withstand ongoing disruption.
- **Emerging trends on the watch list:** Emerging technologies such as RFID, biometrics, advanced cargo security and sustainability tech are gaining momentum and could reshape how shippers track, protect and manage freight.
- **Lessons carried over from 2025:** Persistent forces like freight class changes, labor shortages and cargo theft **from the 2025 report** still shape shipper strategy in 2026.

"Logistics lives in perpetual *disruption*. Every season brings its own capacity swings — winter storms, produce surges, summer lulls, peak retail. That's the expected *chaos*. But the real market shifts come from the *unexpected* — COVID shutting down the country, hurricanes and polar vortexes. Capacity is always entering and exiting. It's a *nonstop cycle*, year after year."

JJ LEWIS, *WWEX Group SVP of Truckload*

01 A Freight Shipper's Market … Again (But Built On Fragile Ground)

Freight shipping enters 2026 in one of the softest demand environments the industry has seen in more than a decade. Shipment volumes remain depressed, carriers continue to compete aggressively for limited freight and no meaningful economic stimulus has emerged to spark a turnaround. High interest rates, tariff volatility, elevated inventories and inconsistent consumer spending all weighed heavily on 2025 performance — and those pressures carry into 2026. The result: a market where shippers hold the leverage.

In fact, **a recent Cass Freight Index® Report**, with the headline "A New Breaking Point," revealed some somber numbers for freight carriers. **As reported in FreightWaves**, the Cass "multimodal shipments index fell 4.3% from September (down 2.1% seasonally adjusted) to the worst October reading since 2009."

Cass Freight Index By the Numbers	*Cass Freight Index – **Shipments***	*Cass Freight Index – **Expenditures***	*Truckload Linehaul Index*
October 2025	0.997	3.169	142.1
Year-over-year Change	–7.8%	–0.2%	3.0%
2-year Stacked Change	–10.0%	–6.1%	0.7%
Month-to-month Change	–4.3%	–3.9%	1.1%
*Month-to-month Change**	–2.1%	–2.1%	NA

*Seasonally adjusted. Source: Cass Freight Index Report

What is causing soft demand in 2026?

WWEX Group leaders are watching freight conditions closely, and the signals are consistent across the network. Their on-the-ground expertise and ongoing market analysis reveal clear patterns to why the industry will continue to face prolonged soft demand and excess freight capacity heading into 2026. Here are the most serious culprits:

1. Freight Demand Remains Flat with No Clear Catalyst

Freight demand never stabilized in 2025, as the recession endured longer than expected. Consumer spending stayed cautious, manufacturers kept production conservative and retailers avoided large inventory resets. With no major demand engine emerging, the market largely moved sideways, setting the same muted tone as we enter 2026.

2. Housing Market Slowdown Continues to Pressure Freight

High interest rates suppressed home sales, construction and renovation — all major drivers of freight volume. With fewer moves and fewer homes changing hands, the usual flow of appliances, fixtures, building materials and home goods never materialized. Until interest rates fall, demand tied to housing will remain subdued across freight networks.

3. Tariffs Created Stop-start Shipping Cycles

Tariff volatility contributed to an uneven shipping rhythm throughout 2025. Many shippers pulled forward freight (moved up their shipping or inventory schedule) early in the year to get ahead of policy changes, then paused as demand stayed muted, and inventories sat longer than expected. That stop-start pattern left few opportunities for a sustained rebound heading into 2026.

4. Shippers Locked in Low Contract Rates

With excess capacity outpacing demand, 2026 bids strongly favored shippers. Many secured top contract rates in late 2025, taking advantage of carriers eager to maintain stability. These agreements reflect one of the strongest pricing environments for shippers in years. However, it could create financial woes for carriers in 2026, especially if volumes remain soft.

Source: WWEX Group

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Even in a shipper-friendly market, navigating large inventory, unpredictable tariffs and soft demand requires strategy — not luck. When looking to **optimize your freight shipping**, a third-party logistics (3PL) provider can help you:

- Secure consistent capacity across vetted carriers despite market conditions.
- Optimize modes and routing by shifting freight between TL and LTL.
- Strengthen forecasting and planning using market data, lane insights and historical trends.
- Navigate tariff and regulatory changes with expert guidance.
- Protect budgets by auditing invoices, flagging overcharges and identifying hidden cost drivers.

"There's no real demand catalyst right now. Demand is still *tepid* and there's too much capacity in the market. Home buying typically drives a significant amount of freight — everything that goes into a house has to move. But with the slowdown, that freight isn't *materializing*. And when you look at the Cass Freight Index Report, truckload shipments are sitting at levels we haven't seen since 2009 — essentially post-financial-crisis territory."

JOHN PAVLICK, *WWEX Group VP of Truckload*

02 The CDL Crackdown That Could Reshape Freight Capacity

Our Trend #1 highlighted the excess freight capacity that's expected in 2026. However, potential trucking regulation changes this year could significantly tighten freight capacity, potentially reversing that trend and creating new challenges for the marketplace.

In September 2025, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) emergency rule on non-U.S.-domiciled Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs) triggered immediate industry concern because it would prohibit states from issuing licenses to applicants who reside outside the United States — typically in Mexico or Canada — even when those applicants meet all federal training, testing and safety requirements.

According to FreightWaves, the "rule took effect the moment it was published. No advance notice, no comment period before implementation, no state consultation. Approximately 200,000 drivers lost eligibility to renew their CDLs overnight."

Fewer drivers in fewer trucks would certainly mean less capacity to move freight. However, **as reported in Trucking Dive**, a federal appeals court responded with an administrative stay, pausing the rule while litigation continues. The court did not judge the validity of the CDL rule, only providing the stay for sufficient time to consider it. For now, states may keep issuing non-domiciled CDLs.

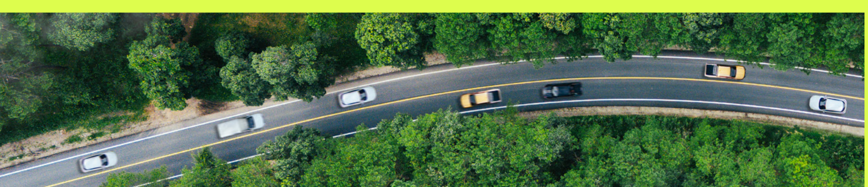
As the legal process continues, the decision leaves fleets, drivers and state agencies in a holding pattern — operating under the old rules while they wait to see whether the emergency restrictions return, are revised or are struck down entirely.

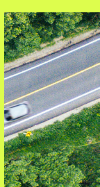
Federal Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy is enforcing compliance by administratively pressuring states, including threats to withhold federal highway funds from those like New York and California that issued improper non-domiciled CDLs. Agencies are revoking existing licenses in certain states, with California having revoked thousands. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, have paused their non-domiciled CDL programs voluntarily or due to federal and audit pressures.

~200,000 drivers

lost their eligibility overnight before CDL rule stay.

Source: FreightWaves





What are the key takeaways from the non-domiciled CDL rule?

Issue Area	What's Known
Who's Affected	Non-U.S.-domiciled CDL applicants (various humanitarian statuses included)
What the Rule Does	Restricts states from issuing or renewing non-domiciled CDLs under expanded definitions
Industry Concern	Loss of legally authorized drivers and tighter capacity
FMCSA Rationale	Identity verification + safety standardization
Current Status	Temporarily paused by federal appeals court (administrative stay)
What States Must Do	Continue using the prior CDL rules until litigation concludes

Source: **Transport Topics**

"One of the ***biggest*** issues to watch heading into 2026 is the impact of non-domiciled CDLs. If those drivers come off the road, it will take a major chunk out of truckload capacity — right as carrier bankruptcies are already ***rising***, and fraud is knocking carriers out of the market. Even if demand stays muted, fewer drivers will ***tighten*** supply fast, and if demand turns even slightly, routing guides and rates could shift aggressively almost overnight."

BRIAN ANDALMAN, *WWEX Group VP of Carrier Procurement*

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In 2026, working with a top 3PL like WWEX Group gives shippers access to a **broad network of vetted and reliable freight carriers**. That scale helps secure lanes and freight capacity even when driver shortages make the market more difficult to navigate.

03 Logistics AI Will Power the Entire Customer Lifecycle

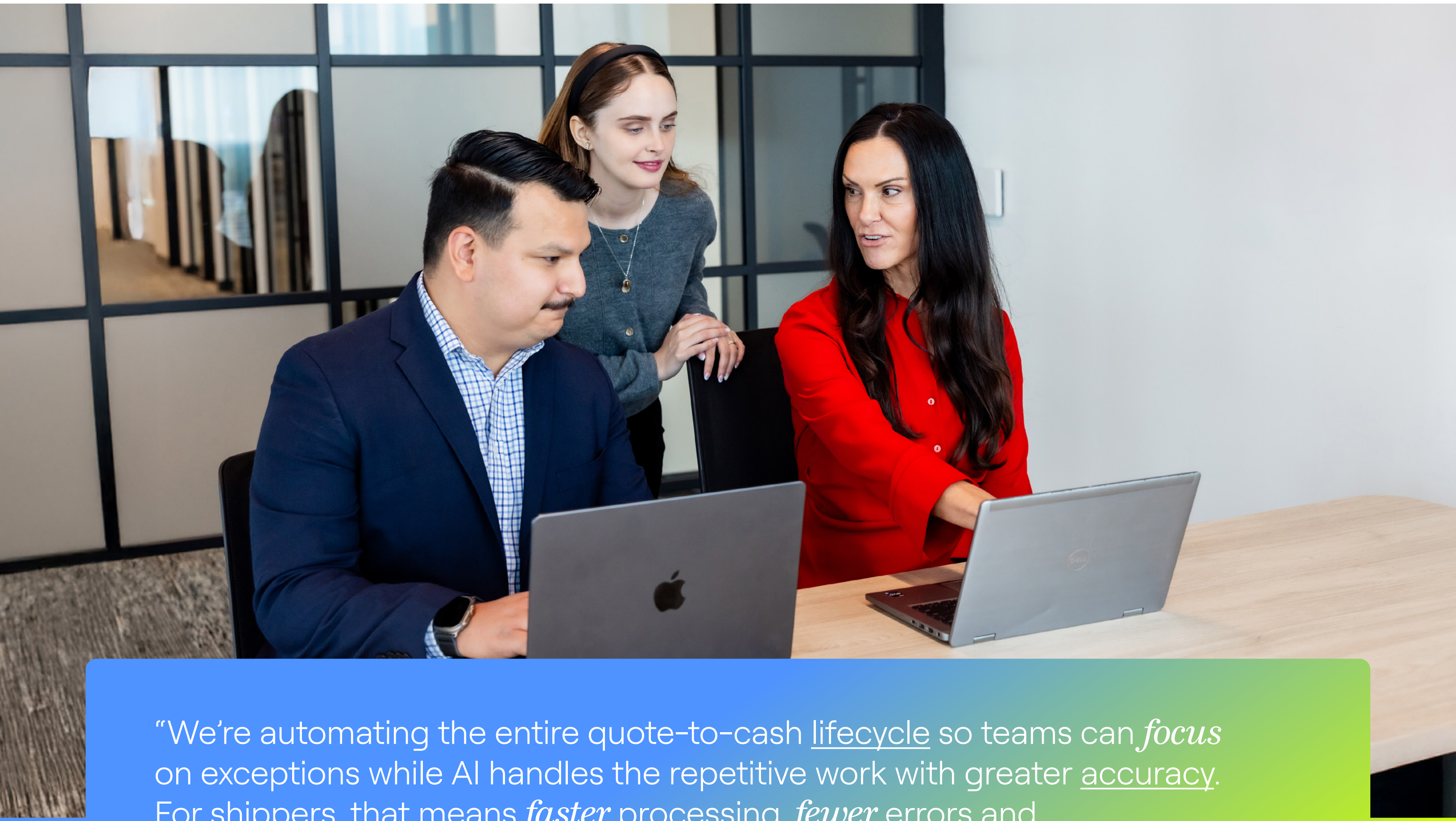
AI in logistics has moved from “future trend” to everyday infrastructure. In 2026, it’s shortening workflows, reducing manual errors and giving shippers clearer visibility across both freight and parcel networks. What used to take hours now takes seconds — and what used to be reactive can now be predicted before it becomes a disruption.

But most importantly, in 2026, AI will streamline the entire lifecycle of the shipper experience, while creating efficiencies for the 3PLs who know how to wield it. By automating quoting, booking, tracking, appointment scheduling and final settlement, shippers get faster responses, more accurate data, fewer exceptions and a smoother end-to-end experience regardless of mode or volume. This lifecycle automation is becoming a competitive advantage for shippers that rely on speed, precision and reliability.

71% of logistics and supply chain companies

offered AI-enabled solutions in 2025 (up from 50% the year before), showing how mainstream logistics AI tools have become in the industry.

Source: **Inbound Logistics**



“We’re automating the entire quote-to-cash lifecycle so teams can *focus* on exceptions while AI handles the repetitive work with greater accuracy. For shippers, that means *faster* processing, *fewer* errors and a *smoother* end-to-end shipping experience.”

ARJUN SRINIVASAN, *WWEX Group SVP, AI & Data Science*

How does logistics lifecycle automation work?

Lifecycle Stage	What's Automated	What the Customer Experiences
Quote Request	AI-powered tools generate accurate freight and parcel quotes in seconds, using live rates and business rules.	Faster, more consistent pricing without long back-and-forth email chains
Shipment Creation	Shipment details are validated, enriched and pushed into TMS/parcel systems with minimal manual entry.	Cleaner, error-reduced orders that move through systems smoothly
Appointment Scheduling	Dock appointments are requested, booked or adjusted automatically based on facility rules and capacity.	Fewer missed windows and faster confirmation of pickup and delivery times
Capacity & Truck Posting	Available loads and capacity are posted and matched automatically to preferred carriers.	More reliable coverage on key lanes without last-minute scrambling
Carrier Booking	Best-fit carriers are recommended and booked based on performance, cost and service criteria.	Better carrier alignment for both freight and parcel at the right price-service mix
Tracking & Exception Flags	Shipments are monitored in real time; AI flags delays or issues before they become service failures.	Proactive updates instead of "where's my shipment?" calls
Documents & Compliance	BOLs, PODs, invoices and customs documents are requested, organized and validated automatically.	Less paperwork chasing and faster resolution of billing or claims issues
Payment & Settlement	Carrier invoices are matched to agreed terms and processed with fewer touches.	More predictable payments for carriers and cleaner cost visibility for shippers

Source: WWEX Group

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Embrace — don't fear — AI tools and the companies that are deploying this technology to your advantage. If freight forecasting, lane sourcing or rate quoting still feels like manual hustle in 2026, a 3PL with embedded, data-driven AI can give you real-time visibility, faster decisions and the flexibility to move quickly when market conditions shift.

04 Midterm Elections Add Uncertainty to Shipping and Logistics

The **2026 midterm elections** may introduce real uncertainty into an already fragile shipping and logistics environment — or provide the stimulus it needs. Midterms are inherently unpredictable, but the current political climate — marked by sharp polarization, competing economic narratives and high-stakes national debates — could further influence voter turnout and reshape the balance of power. With all 435 House seats and roughly one-third of Senate seats on the ballot, control of Congress is far from guaranteed.

Why does this matter for the shipping and logistics industry? **History shows that election cycles** often trigger policy shifts that ripple directly through transportation, trade and supply chain operations. In a divided and politically heated environment, regulatory direction, funding priorities and trade dynamics can swing quickly after Election Day. Here are five areas where midterm election outcomes can influence logistics trends.

1. Regulatory Uncertainty Increases During Election Cycles

Federal agencies often ease off major rulemaking around election periods to align with shifting priorities and avoid unnecessary political risk. This can delay key **trucking, safety, environmental and compliance updates** and inject real uncertainty into planning for carriers and shippers.

2. Policy Priorities Frequently Shift After Midterms

Midterm elections can **reshuffle committee leadership**, and new chairs often shift the policy focus on transportation, emissions, safety enforcement and supply chain oversight. Even without a change in the White House, these shifts can subtly change which issues receive attention and funding across the federal agencies that influence logistics.

3. Infrastructure Funding Timelines Tend to Adjust

Midterm elections can shift how Congress oversees the remaining **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding**, affecting which types of projects draw the most support or scrutiny. Over time, those shifts can change the pace and mix of port, highway and rail investments, with visible impacts on freight flows, regional congestion and overall network capacity.

4. Labor and Workforce Policies Can be Reprioritized

Changes in committee leadership can alter the pace and direction of workforce-related legislation, including apprenticeship programs, driver training standards, immigration enforcement or employment-eligibility rules. These adjustments slowly shape the availability of drivers, warehouse labor and broader logistics staffing conditions.

5. Business Investment Often Slows Ahead of Elections

Big election years **force some companies to hit pause** on big-ticket projects while they wait to see how policy and the economy shake out. When that happens, it can take a bit of steam out of freight demand in construction, manufacturing and other durable-goods sectors that normally feed significant TL and LTL volume.

"Every year the narrative ***shifts***. First, it was 'the market will change in the back half of 2024,' then it became 2025. Now people are pointing to the back half of 2026. So, we're staying ***laser-focused*** on what we can control: our KPIs, on-time performance and customer success."

JJ LEWIS, *WWEX Group SVP of Truckload*

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Once the election dust settles and new policies take shape, a leading 3PL becomes your stabilizer and strategist. Here's what the right partner can do:

- **Monitor policy changes in real time** to anticipate regulatory or compliance adjustments before they affect operations.
- **Adjust routing and mode strategies quickly** when regulatory or funding changes impact regional congestion or carrier availability.
- **Leverage diversified carrier networks** to maintain stability during periods of capacity tightening or workforce disruption.
- **Build adaptive pricing and procurement strategies** that flex with election-year volatility in demand and cost structures.

05 Mexico's Logistics Moment: Nearshoring, Tariffs and the New Cross-border Shipping Reality

Mexico is having its logistics moment in 2026 — one that could profoundly reshape global supply chains. In 2025, it widened its edge over China as the United States' top trade partner, claiming No. 1 for U.S. exports in three of the first five months, **according to Forbes**.

This doesn't overlook its 2023 breakthrough, when Mexico overtook China as the leading source of U.S. imports for the first time in two decades, propelled by tariffs on Chinese goods and nearshoring that leveraged its proximity and supply chain integration.

Together, these developments signal Mexico's rise as a global logistics powerhouse right across the U.S. border, with **investments in rail, ports and smart technologies** set to redefine North American — and potentially worldwide — trade flows.

Looking to 2026, this momentum primes the stage for explosive growth, with market projections hitting $141 billion by 2033 amid nearshoring and multimodal expansions. Shippers ignoring this shift risk missing the **next era of resilient, cost-efficient supply chains**.

Why is Mexico primed to become the next logistics giant?

Geographic Proximity

Mexico's border location slashes U.S. shipping times and costs versus distant suppliers like China, fueling rapid nearshoring momentum.

Favorable Trade Agreements

USMCA offers tariff-free access for compliant goods — unlike China's sometimes 40%+ tariffs — enabling seamless North American supply chain integration.

Rapid Infrastructure Expansion

Massive investments in rail, ports and highways boost connectivity and capacity to handle surging trade volumes.

Manufacturing Investment Surge

Nearshoring draws U.S. giants like Tesla while Chinese firms build plants in Mexico, spurring industrial parks nationwide.

Source: **DRZ Investment Advisors** | **The Nearshore Company**

How can shippers benefit from Mexico's logistics growth?

Faster Transit Times and Lower Freight Costs

Proximity enables 2-5 day overland shipping from Mexico versus weeks from Asia, slashing inventory costs and enabling just-in-time delivery.

Simplified Customs via USMCA

Tariff-free access and optimized border processes reduce delays and compliance costs compared to complex China imports, streamlining cross-border flows.

Access to Expanded Near-border Capacity

New port and rail link construction boosts intermodal options, easing congestion at key crossings like Laredo and El Paso.

Resilient, Diversified Sourcing

Nearshoring reduces China exposure amid tariffs/geopolitics, offering stable capacity even during disruptions while maintaining cost competitiveness.

Source: **Vizion**

"Given the less expensive labor, lower real estate costs and the long-standing trade flow between the U.S. and Mexico, I can only see more European and Chinese companies *expanding* their manufacturing footprint there. Multiple countries are already building TVs, appliances and electronics in places like Tijuana, then moving that freight cross-border into U.S. distribution centers. In essence, Mexico is becoming a *strategic* production base to supply the United States more *efficiently*."

JJ LEWIS, *WWEX Group SVP of Truckload*

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Shippers can navigate Mexico's **cross-border shipping complexities** seamlessly with a strategic 3PL partner. Here is what the top ones offer:

- **Cross-border shipping expertise:** Teams manage customs, carriers and routing strategies to keep shipments moving without delays.
- **Local presence in Mexico:** On-the-ground teams secure capacity, solve issues quickly and maintain real-time visibility end-to-end.
- **Tariff and policy guidance:** Specialists track shifting trade rules and advise shippers to protect landed costs.
- **Document and compliance support:** Experts handle invoices, USMCA requirements and customs paperwork to prevent avoidable clearance issues.
- **Expedited border crossings:** Cross-dock carriers and streamlined programs accelerate delivery and cut border dwell time.

06 Carriers Fuel Parcel Shipping Revolution, but Cost Increases Remain

Parcel carriers like UPS® and FedEx® are aggressively deploying AI route optimization, robotic sorters and smart automation to meet exploding e-commerce demand. **These logistics technologies** deliver faster ground times, real-time visibility and peak resilience, and will keep shippers competitive in a hyper-speed 2026 market.

Faster, smarter, better always wins in an increasingly competitive parcel shipping world. Automation slashes errors, AI predicts disruptions and advanced sorters handle surging volumes — giving shippers the edge in customer satisfaction and operational efficiency that defines market leaders.

How will parcel carriers leverage logistics technology for efficiency?

Technology	What it Does
AI Route Optimization	Dynamically plans delivery paths using real-time traffic/data
Robotic Sorters	Automates high-speed parcel sorting in hubs/warehouses
Predictive Analytics	Forecasts demand/disruptions via machine learning
Smart Parcel Lockers	Secure, automated pickup points with app access
Drone Delivery	Autonomous aerial transport for last mile/light parcels
IoT Tracking	Real-time sensors monitor location/temp/condition
Autonomous Ground Vehicles	Self-driving vans/robots for neighborhood drops
Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs)	Robots move parcels within facilities
Computer Vision Scanning	AI cameras read labels/detect damage instantly
Dynamic Pricing Algorithms	Adjusts rates based on demand/capacity in real-time

Sources: How.fm | CargoFive | nVision Global

> "Parcel carriers are ***evolving*** their networks with new technology, new delivery models and new operational tools. Whether it's RFID, automation or smarter routing, the industry is in the middle of a real innovation cycle — one that fundamentally ***changes*** how carriers move and track ***millions*** of packages a day."
>
> **JOE KNIPLE,** *WWEX Group SVP of Revenue Management*

General Rate Increases (GRIs) March Ahead

However, all this technological advancement and efficiency doesn't necessarily mean you will see lower rates and surcharges. In fact, all major parcel carriers once again announced their general rate increases for 2026 — and there were no surprises.

	UPS	FedEx	DHL
2026	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%

	UPS	FedEx	DHL
2025	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%
2024	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%
2023	6.9%	6.9%	7.9%

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Shippers benefit substantially from partnering with a 3PL that maintains **strong relationships with a major parcel carrier**. These partnerships provide access to competitive rates, priority service options, dependable capacity and streamlined problem-solving. This helps businesses control costs, improve delivery performance and navigate carrier changes with confidence.

07 Import Volatility Continues as Justices Examine Trump Tariffs

Since early 2025, President Trump's broad "emergency" and "reciprocal" tariffs have reshaped the cost structure for U.S. importers, layering new duties on goods from China, Mexico, Canada and dozens of other countries. Now, moving into 2026, the legal tide is turning. The Supreme Court has taken up challenges to whether the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)** actually authorizes these tariffs, after lower courts found that several executive orders overstepped presidential authority.

Against this backdrop, importers from big-box retailers like Costco to smaller manufacturers are rushing to court, seeking to protect their right to refunds if the justices ultimately strike the tariffs down, adding another layer of volatility to an already disrupted shipping environment.

What do I need to know about tariffs in 2026?

1. **Trump's "fentanyl" and "reciprocal" tariffs**, imposed under IEEPA, extend well beyond China to a wide set of trading partners and product categories.
2. **The Supreme Court heard expedited arguments** in November 2025 on whether IEEPA actually permits these broad, across-the-board tariff hikes.
3. **Multiple courts have already ruled** that key tariff orders exceeded the president's authority, creating real risk that some duties will be declared unlawful.
4. **Importers like Costco are filing "protective" lawsuits** at the Court of International Trade (CIT) to secure full refunds if the Supreme Court ultimately sides against the government.
5. **A wave of copycat suits from other large shippers** and business owners is building as the industry waits for judgement from the Supreme Court.

Source: **BBC**

What Shippers Need to Know

In 2026, tariff policy creates a high-stakes fork in the road for shippers: if the Supreme Court upholds Trump's authority, elevated duties and cost pass-throughs could become a long-term fixture. If the Court strikes all or part of the program, some importers may recover significant refunds, while competitors that did not sue miss out, depending on how courts ultimately structure any remedy.

Shippers should act now: Audit 2025 imports for tariff exposure and consult trade counsel about whether to request liquidation extensions, file protests or bring protective U.S. Court of International Trade (CIT) complaints to keep tariff refund options open.

$150 billion

The amount the White House says new tariffs have brought in, some of which may be returned depending upon the Supreme Court ruling and potential lawsuits.

Source: **Supply Chain Dive**

“Some customers asked, ‘What do these tariffs mean for us?’ The problem was trying to *untangle* complex international supply chains and how these new tariffs applied to their business. Some product lines had multiple countries of origin, and there was so much confusion that some businesses *halted* shipping while others had no choice but to continue *business as usual*.”

JOHN PAVLICK, *WWEX Group VP of Truckload*

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In a volatile tariff environment, **a strong 3PL becomes a stabilizer**. WWEX Group can help shippers model landed-cost scenarios, benchmark carrier rates under shifting duty levels, and build flexible contracts that protect margins whether tariffs hold or fall. Our experts track trade developments daily and can flag cost impacts early and recommend mode or routing shifts, so you stay compliant, competitive and ready for any Supreme Court outcome.

08 The Necessity of Building Supply Chain Resilience

Global disruptions — from port strikes and tariffs to geopolitical tensions — have exposed vulnerabilities, **forcing shippers to rethink strategies** for uninterrupted supply flows in an increasingly volatile world.

Resilience emerges as 2026's competitive edge through accurate forecasting, risk monitoring, scenario simulation, multi-sourcing and geographic diversification to counter tariffs, demand shocks and logistical disruptions.

What are the key shipping and logistics disruption possibilities in 2026?

Challenge	Solution	How it Helps
Economic Volatility	Accurate forecasting	Rapid inventory adjustments, shock minimization
Tariffs/Trade Barriers	Multi-sourcing	Reduces single-supplier vulnerabilities
Geopolitical Instability	Geographic diversification	Maintains continuity across regions
Cyber Threats	Risk monitoring	Proactive disruption anticipation
High Logistics Costs	AI-driven planning	Network optimization, excess inventory cuts
Red Sea/Global Disruptions	Scenario simulation	Proactive rerouting/decisions
Skilled Labor Shortages	Automation/robotics	Boosts productivity, fills workforce gaps
E-Commerce Margin Pressure	Dark stores/micro-warehouses	Fast delivery with cost efficiency
Fragmented Networks	Control towers	End-to-end visibility, rapid coordination

Source: **Slimstock**

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A 3PL can help leverage **advanced logistics technology** and diversified networks to keep shipments moving smoothly despite disruptions. They can provide:

- **Multi-carrier networks:** 3PLs spread volume across a wide range of carriers to avoid strikes/congestion, ensuring capacity during peaks.
- **Predictive rerouting:** AI monitors disruptions, auto-switches lanes/carriers for seamless continuity without shipper intervention.
- **Dual sourcing integration:** Coordinates parallel suppliers via unified visibility, balancing inventory across diversified origins.
- **Risk modeling platforms:** Real-time analytics forecast carrier/port issues 7-30 days ahead for proactive contingency planning.
- **Backup capacity access:** Preferred partnerships guarantee priority slots when primary carriers fail, minimizing delays.

5 More Shipping and Logistics Trends We're Watching

Need more shipping trends? Here are additional ones we're watching — some emerging, some futuristic and others simply too interesting to ignore. Each offers a glimpse into where shipping and logistics may be headed in 2026.

09 RFID-enabled Parcel and Freight Tracking

RFID-embedded shipping labels use tiny radio chips and antennas to transmit package data wirelessly, so items can be identified and tracked without manual barcode scans. Once limited to niche use cases, these smart labels are moving into mainstream parcel and freight operations as part of the broader smart labelling market. By automating scans at each handoff, RFID technology offers near-real-time visibility without slowing drivers or terminal workflows, improving tracking accuracy, reducing disputes, and strengthening chain-of-custody assurance across multimodal networks.

10 Digital Twin Supply Chain Simulation

Digital twin platforms let shippers **recreate their transportation networks** in virtual form, testing everything from mode shifts to port disruptions before making real-world decisions. As the technology matures, AI-driven simulations help teams predict bottlenecks, optimize lane strategy, calibrate inventory and model how external shocks — weather, tariffs, demand swings — will impact service.

11 Cross-border Supply Chain Redundancy Planning

With tariffs, geopolitical shifts and nearshoring acceleration, shippers are diversifying cross-border freight flows. Companies are **designing redundant routing strategies** — Mexico plus Asia, Canada plus U.S. Gulf, dual-port entry models — to avoid overreliance on any one region. This redundancy planning helps stabilize transit times, mitigate regulatory shocks and ensure year-round capacity access.

12 Freight Wellness Programs for Drivers and Dispatchers

Carriers are experimenting with "freight wellness" initiatives to reduce burnout across driver and back-office teams. Programs include fatigue-monitoring wearables, mental-health check-ins, ergonomic cab design, flexible dispatching and predictive scheduling powered by AI. The goal: lower turnover, improve safety performance and strengthen operational reliability in a talent-scarce environment.

13 Biometric Cargo and Facility Security

Biometric cargo and facility security uses unique physical identifiers — like fingerprints or facial recognition — to control who can access freight, vehicles, and secure areas in the logistics network. Biometric authentication is starting to move from airports and passenger gates into freight yards, warehouses, and container seals, tying cargo access to verified scans instead of PINs or keys. By restricting dock doors, yard gates, and even truck or container locks to authenticated personnel, these systems cut down on fictitious pickups and cargo theft while creating a tamper-proof audit trail of who accessed freight, where and when.

2025 in Review

How did we do in our logistics trends report from last year?

Before closing, we're revisiting several key themes from our **2025 Shipping Report** to understand how they unfolded. These updates provide essential context for 2026, highlighting what changed, what persisted and what shippers should continue watching in the year ahead.

Cargo Theft

Cargo theft remains one of the most persistent threats to supply chains, and the problem continues to escalate in 2026. **According to a FreightWaves article**, U.S. cargo theft jumped 29% year-over-year in Q3 2025, with 645 recorded incidents and major spikes in California and Texas. Electronics and food-and-beverage shipments were top targets, while auto parts and pharmaceuticals saw some of the fastest growth. Criminal tactics are also evolving, with pilferage still common but full-truckload thefts and deceptive pickups increasing rapidly. As criminal methods become more sophisticated, experts warn that the industry should expect sustained, elevated theft activity in 2026.

Freight Class Changes

The **2025 NMFTA freight-class overhaul** was one of the most meaningful LTL changes in years, shifting thousands of commodities to a more density-driven model and requiring shippers to tighten packaging, measurement and documentation practices. But despite early concerns, the transition did not bring the freight industry to a standstill. Yes, shippers had to adjust — particularly around dimensions, density calculations and system updates — but the rollout came and went without major disruption. Outside of routine billing disputes and learning-curve challenges, there was little in the media to suggest widespread operational chaos. In short: the system changed, shippers adapted and freight kept moving.

Labor Shortage

Labor challenges persisted throughout 2025, just as many industry analysts expected. While not as severe as the post-pandemic peak, shortages continued across warehousing, transportation planning, customer service and over-the-road driving. Many carriers struggled to recruit and retain qualified drivers, especially as compliance requirements and background checks sidelined portions of the workforce. Warehouses also faced ongoing competition for hourly labor, pushing wages upward and tightening margins. The result was a year marked by uneven staffing, productivity gaps and rising labor costs.