



December 2023

November 2023 – Partial Container Tallies

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As we're aiming to get the year's last *West Coast Trade Report* to our readers before you take off for the holidays, some ports have sensed the need for urgency so we have most, but not all, of November's container trade numbers. At the same time, we are obliged to forego coverage of one port we have historically monitored. Officials at the Port of Miami have lately stopped responding to our requests for their latest TEU counts.

As we go to press, we note that the National Retail Federation's collaboration with Global Port Tracker (NRF/GPT) yielded a December 8 press release stating that the thirteen major U.S. ports it monitors would see the arrival of 1.96 million TEUs in November. That, according to NRF/GPT metrics, would represent a robust 10.5% year-over-year bump in containerized import traffic. (A month earlier, in a November 8 press release, the NRF/GPT forecast for November anticipated the arrival of 1.88 million TEUs.)

But here's what we know from our sources about how things went in November down at the docks.

We start, as we normally do, in Southern California, where the nation's two busiest container ports announced huge year-over-year increases in November, albeit over the slowest month for inbound loads in 2022. At the **Port of Los Angeles**, inbound loads last month (384,619) were up 25.3% over a year earlier, but were only 3.6% ahead of pre-

pandemic November of 2019. Outbound loads (111,755) were up 24.0% from a year ago, but down 19.3% from November 2019. Year-to-date, total container traffic through the port amounted to 7,887,162 loads and empties, down 14.1% from this point last year and down 8.2% from the first eleven months of 2019.

Next door, the **Port of Long Beach** posted even more impressive gains in November. Its 355,339 inbound loads represented a 37.0% year-over-year jump, even though last November was one of the port's two slowest months for inbound loads in 2022. Still, this November's tally did represent a remarkable 21.1% leap over November 2019. Outbound loads in November (108,798) fell by 13.0% from a year earlier and by 12.1% from November 2019. Total container moves through the port YTD (7,308,848) were off by 14.9% from last year but were nonetheless 6.5% higher than during the same period four years ago before COVID-19 became a household word.

In Northern California, the **Port of Oakland** handled 71,258 inbound loads in November, up 3.8% from a year earlier, but 7.9% fewer than in November 2019. Indeed, apart from last November and November 2014 (when a work slowdown stymied trade through all U.S. West Coast ports), this November saw the fewest inbound loads arrive in any previous November since 2013. Outbound loads this November (61,390) were the fewest to leave the San



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Port of **LONG BEACH**
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November Tallies *Continued*

Francisco Bay gateway in any November since 60,099 loads were shipped from Oakland back in 2001. Total container moves through the port YTD (1,889,697) were down 13.1% from the previous year and down 18.1% from 2019. With the exception of 2009, when the nation was struggling with the Great Recession, 2023 has so far been the slowest year for total container traffic at the Port of Oakland since 2004.

In Washington State, the **Northwest Seaport Alliance Ports of Tacoma and Seattle** handled 87,295 import loads in November, up a slender 0.7% year-over-year but down 8.1% from November 2019. Export loads (51,537) rose by 5.3% from a year earlier but were down 30.0% from November 2019. Total container traffic YTD through the two ports (2,711,245) was off by 14.0% from this point last year and down 22.3% from the first eleven months of 2019.

In British Columbia, the **Port of Vancouver** handled 147,684 inbound loads in November, a 5.7% year-over-year gain and a strong 19.2% increase over November 2019. Outbound loads (65,757) were off by 0.6% from the previous November and down 28.3% from November 2019. Total container traffic YTD (2,852,236) was not only down by 14.9% from last year and off by 8.8% from 2019, but it was also the lowest number of containers the port has moved in the first eleven months of any year since 2016.

The other Canadian port of **Prince Rupert** continued to struggle. Inbound loads in November (31,328) were down 15.4% from a year earlier and by 46.2% from November 2019. Outbound loads (10,351) did increase by 11.7% from last November but were still down 32.1% from November 2019. YTD, total container traffic through the British Columbia port (646,222) was off by 31.9% from 2022 and by 41.2% from November 2019.

And, while the Conley Terminal at Massport's **Port of Boston** is hardly a bellwether for the nation's container trade, it was the first significant port to post its November tallies – so here they are: inbound loads in the year's eleventh month at the New England port totaled 11,636, up 17.6% from a year earlier and slightly more than the 11,538 inbound loads the port handled in November 2019. Outbound loads (6,313) were up 87.7% year-over-year and 3.0% over November

2019. Total year-to-date container traffic (216,337 loads and empties) was up 39.1% over last year but down 22.0% from this point in 2019.

On the Mid-Atlantic Coast, the **Port of Virginia** reported 128,419 inbound loads in November, up 4.3% from a year earlier and a full 24.2% more than in November 2019. Outbound loads (104,628) were up 9.3% from November 2022 and 31.6% from November 2019. Total container traffic YTD (3,019,439) was down 12.0% from last year but up 11.3% from the same period in 2019.

Along the southern Atlantic Coast, the **Port of Charleston** saw a slight year-over-year fall-off in inbound loads to 98,115 this November, while outbound loads (59,397) were up 5.5% over the previous November. Compared with November 2019, inbound loads were up 18.5%, while outbound loads had declined by 5.5%. Total YTD container traffic through the South Carolina port (2,272,586) was down 11.7% from a year earlier. Perhaps most remarkably given the hue and cry about increased volumes of container trade moving through East and Gulf Coast ports during the pandemic and port-congestion crises, total container moves through Charleston has edged up just 1.1% from the first eleven months of 2019.

Georgia's **Port of Savannah** handled 211,056 inbound loads in November, a year-over-year decline of 3.7%. Still, that volume represented a 21.4% jump in the number of inbound loads the port had processed in November 2019. Outbound loads this November (107,623) were off 0.9% from a year earlier and down 9.7% from November 2019. Total container traffic YTD (4,505,367) was down 17.4% from this point last year but was up 6.3% from the first eleven months of 2019.

Down along the Gulf Coast, **Port Houston** reported 137,631 inbound loads, a 16.4% fall-off from the same month a year earlier. Still, that was a 35.6% increase over the inbound loads the Texas port had handled in November 2019. Outbound loads this November (116,396) were off by 1.5% from a year ago but up 7.8% from November 2019. Altogether, the volume of loaded and empty containers the port has handled so far this year (3,499,580) was 5.0% lower than last year but up 27.9% over the first eleven months of 2019.



For the Record: Complete October 2023 TEU Numbers

Exhibits 1-3 provide the details on inbound and outbound loads as well as total container traffic (loads plus empties) through the North American ports this newsletter surveys. All of the container numbers are in TEUs.

The seventeen U.S. ports we track reported 2,102,167 inbound loads in October 2023, a year-over-year increase of 3.0% and an 8.4% gain over the 1,939,847 inbound loads the same ports had handled in pre-pandemic October 2019. Comparing this October with that month four years ago, inbound loads through U.S. West Coast ports were down 2.3%, while U.S. East Coast ports recorded a 13.8% increase. The two U.S. Gulf Coast ports we follow registered a whopping 52.2% jump in inbound loads over the past four years.

So where do things stand now with respect to where they stood just prior to the pandemic? Analysts at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis calculate that U.S. Gross Domestic Product has grown by an inflation-adjusted 8.1% between the third quarter of pre-pandemic 2019 and this year's third quarter. Our containerized import figures, as shown in **Exhibit 1**, indicate an almost identical 8.4% increase in the number of inbound loaded containers from October 2019 to October 2023.

What would have happened had there been no global pandemic? According to an October 26 statement from the U.S. Department of the Treasury: "The United States has seen a particularly strong GDP recovery and is on track this year to reach the level that would have been predicted by the pre-pandemic trend."

As one might expect, while we survey four more ports than does the NRF/GPT, our numbers for the month of October are roughly consistent with those of the National Retail Federation's Global Port Tracker. In a December 8 press release, the NRF/GPT observed that the thirteen major U.S. ports

Exhibit 1	October 2023 - Inbound Loaded TEUs at Selected Ports				
	Oct 2023	Oct 2022	Oct 2021	Oct 2020	Oct 2019
Los Angeles	372,455	336,307	467,287	506,613	392,769
Long Beach	363,300	293,924	385,000	402,408	354,919
San Pedro Bay Totals	735,755	630,231	852,287	909,021	747,688
Oakland	73,281	79,459	74,434	86,753	78,583
NWSA	100,501	95,637	123,328	114,569	109,469
Hueneme	9,420	11,940	10,176	4,829	5,180
San Diego	5,454	7,210	7,512	5,216	5,284
USWC Totals	924,411	824,477	1,067,737	1,120,388	946,204
Boston	10,520	11,559	6,083	11,653	15,091
NYNJ	381,756	382,453	398,535	403,103	339,443
Maryland	54,415	42,058	35,333	47,148	44,150
Virginia	146,199	144,043	148,212	131,770	124,142
S. Carolina	121,155	121,305	107,773	96,563	95,302
Georgia	220,298	263,828	259,314	233,215	199,483
Jaxport	29,431	29,228	20,809	31,229	30,893
P. Everglades	28,600	31,189	29,940	26,882	23,304
USEC Totals	992,374	1,025,663	1,005,999	981,563	871,808
New Orleans	10,453	10,415	11,455	11,495	11,250
Houston	174,929	181,292	151,395	135,175	110,585
USGC Totals	185,382	191,707	162,850	146,670	121,835
Vancouver	139,127	149,174	171,215	193,219	136,138
Prince Rupert	24,168	45,592	57,891	67,607	57,644
British Columbia Totals	163,295	194,766	229,106	260,826	193,782
U.S. Totals	2,102,167	2,041,847	2,236,586	2,248,621	1,939,847

Source Individual Ports



October 2023 TEU Numbers *Continued*

	Oct 2023	Oct 2022	Oct 2021	Oct 2020	Oct 2019
Los Angeles	121,277	89,722	98,251	143,936	140,332
Long Beach	90,073	119,761	122,214	114,679	123,215
San Pedro Bay Totals	211,350	209,483	220,465	258,615	263,547
Oakland	68,974	66,408	63,338	86,942	87,393
NWSA	54,886	41,693	58,102	64,282	79,321
Hueneme	1,886	3,316	4,134	1,207	1,294
San Diego	3,028	900	791	272	202
USWC Totals	340,124	321,800	346,830	411,318	431,757
Boston	5,050	4,414	4,011	8,047	7,888
NYNJ	111,024	112,325	120,250	118,281	127,256
Maryland	20,349	19,634	20,705	21,032	20,134
Virginia	92,589	89,574	88,710	83,705	83,557
S. Carolina	60,519	62,965	67,595	69,093	69,952
Georgia	111,774	116,297	112,907	117,148	127,971
Jaxport	44,494	50,458	48,543	50,594	44,848
Port Everglades	34,286	37,133	37,646	33,368	38,158
USEC Totals	480,085	492,800	500,367	501,268	519,764
New Orleans	20,275	21,880	18,474	23,662	26,358
Houston	126,011	118,781	94,933	97,185	109,362
USGC Totals	146,286	140,661	113,407	120,847	135,720
Vancouver	66,389	63,516	69,185	89,933	87,362
Prince Rupert	9,726	9,672	16,565	15,322	13,917
British Columbia Totals	76,115	73,188	85,750	105,255	101,279
U.S. Totals	966,495	955,261	960,604	1,033,433	1,087,241

Source Individual Ports

	Oct 2023	Oct 2022	Oct 2021	Oct 2020	Oct 2019
Los Angeles	7,123,900	8,542,944	9,079,560	7,444,464	7,861,966
Long Beach	6,577,815	8,000,811	7,884,566	6,513,909	6,262,322
NYNJ	6,531,687	8,157,584	7,455,786	6,137,859	6,286,762
Georgia	4,088,223	4,986,489	4,652,464	3,769,927	3,875,380
Houston	3,201,958	3,333,924	2,835,486	2,461,791	2,490,607
Virginia	2,743,434	3,143,322	2,906,546	2,273,146	2,486,079
Vancouver	2,569,021	3,074,680	3,183,752	2,830,500	2,869,050
NWSA	2,480,459	2,905,183	3,156,500	2,716,632	3,219,673
South Carolina	2,071,274	2,359,891	2,254,586	1,893,324	2,063,377
Oakland	1,723,319	1,989,492	2,089,475	2,056,229	2,109,136
Montreal	1,273,518	1,464,582	1,430,210	1,315,830	1,462,597
JaxPort	1,081,838	1,099,921	1,160,832	1,068,615	1,124,779
Maryland	941,397	980,181	854,249	96,199	909,243
Port Everglades	837,387	921,165	882,897	768,103	856,101
Philadelphia	621,694	648,986	620,477	537,698	512,923
Prince Rupert	591,497	876,487	884,716	935,533	998,133
New Orleans	403,409	367,663	416,706	476,507	536,793
Hueneme	200,369	221,803	180,168	140,340	100,622
Boston	193,507	135,471	164,282	224,002	255,073
San Diego	127,772	135,755	133,765	122,351	118,234
Portland, Oregon	101,344	140,975	83,627	43,557	26



October 2023 TEU Numbers *Continued*

it monitors reported “a higher-than-expected 2.05 million Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units in October”. That was said to be up 2.5% from October 2022 according to NRF/GPT metrics.

We do note a certain volatility in the NRF/GPT outlooks. Just a month earlier, in a November 8 press release, NRF/GPT projected that October would see the arrival of 1.92 million inbound loads for what would have been a 4.2% year-over-year fall-off.

Container Contents Weights and Values

The figures in **Exhibits 4 and 5** represent the USWC shares

of the nation’s box trade at mainland U.S. ports. We have tweaked the exhibits to provide a broader historical context by showing how the numbers this October compared with the same month last year as well as in pre-pandemic October 2019 and a decade earlier in October 2013.

Although West Coast ports will surely tout the most recent year-over-year gains in market share, a closer look at the latest monthly data indicates that the return of containerized import volumes to USWC ports may be stalling. Although a 33.6% share of all inbound containerized import tonnage entering U.S. mainland ports in October was greater than the 31.2% share a year

Exhibit 4 Major USWC Ports Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Worldwide Container Trade, October 2023

	Oct 2023	Oct 2022	Oct 2019	Oct 2013
Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Tonnage				
USWC	33.6%	31.2%	36.7%	43.4%
LA/LB	24.7%	22.5%	26.8%	31.9%
Oakland	3.0%	3.0%	3.7%	3.9%
NWSA	4.2%	3.9%	5.0%	6.0%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Value				
USWC	39.2%	36.7%	45.0%	52.2%
LA/LB	30.7%	28.4%	34.4%	40.6%
Oakland	2.7%	2.7%	3.5%	3.6%
NWSA	5.1%	4.5%	6.5%	7.3%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Tonnage				
USWC	32.3%	32.4%	37.3%	41.5%
LA/LB	18.6%	18.9%	21.2%	23.7%
Oakland	6.1%	6.0%	6.5%	6.4%
NWSA	6.9%	6.3%	8.2%	10.0%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Value				
USWC	27.7%	27.1%	32.5%	37.0%
LA/LB	17.4%	17.2%	20.1%	24.7%
Oakland	6.3%	5.8%	40.0%	6.1%
NWSA	3.4%	3.4%	4.5%	5.5%

Source: U.S. Commerce Department.

Exhibit 5 Major USWC Ports Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Trade with East Asia, October 2023

	Oct 2023	Oct 2022	Oct 2019	Oct 2013
Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Tonnage				
USWC	49.7%	49.9%	54.7%	67.0%
LA/LB	39.0%	38.4%	42.4%	48.7%
Oakland	3.4%	3.6%	4.4%	4.3%
NWSA	6.2%	6.4%	7.4%	9.7%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Ports Containerized Import Value				
USWC	57.7%	54.9%	64.1%	72.8%
LA/LB	46.2%	43.5%	50.0%	57.4%
Oakland	3.2%	3.3%	4.1%	4.1%
NWSA	7.6%	6.8%	9.4%	10.5%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Tonnage				
USWC	52.2%	55.2%	58.7%	66.8%
LA/LB	30.9%	33.1%	36.0%	50.3%
Oakland	8.5%	9.1%	9.2%	9.7%
NWSA	11.7%	11.4%	13.4%	10.5%
Shares of U.S. Mainland Containerized Export Value				
USWC	54.1%	55.0%	62.7%	71.4%
LA/LB	34.6%	35.7%	41.4%	48.7%
Oakland	10.7%	10.6%	11.8%	50.3%
NWSA	7.7%	7.5%	9.0%	10.5%

Source: U.S. Commerce Department.



October 2023 TEU Numbers *Continued*

earlier, October marked a fall-off in USWC market share from 36.8% in September and a 35.7% share in August. The San Pedro Bay ports, in particular, saw their combined share of containerized import tonnage decline to 24.7% in October from 26.7% in September and 26.6% in August. It's a worrisome trend we'll continue to monitor.

Year-over-year USWC shares of inbound container tonnage emanating from the Asia Pacific region slipped only slightly, from 49.9% last October to 49.7% in the same month this year, and the value of those shares rose. But, putting those figures in the broader context yields greater concern, as the overall USWC share of containerized import tonnage in the transpacific trade has slipped as the year has progressed, with October 2023's 49.7% share down from a 54.4% share in September and a 53.1% share in August. At the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, their combined 39.0% share in October 2023 was below their 42.4% share a month earlier and a 42.8% share in August.

What's a Containerized Import Kilo Worth These Days?

Fluctuations in currency exchange rates along with inflation rates that vary among the world's economies make comparing the value of containerized imports from year to year more difficult than had been in more stable times. Still, it's interesting (while perhaps not intellectually exhilarating) to point out the significant variations in the value of containerized goods being imported through the nation's leading seaports.

So, we took the U.S. Commerce Department's numbers for the declared value and weight of containerized imports through the first ten months of this year. (We remind readers that the value of imported merchandise declared to U.S. Customs should not be confused with retail value.) Nationally, as it turns out, the average value of each kilo of containerized goods imported through U.S. mainland ports through October of this year was \$5.25.

As it also turns out, the declared value of containerized goods that arrived through the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach through October of this year was \$6.52 per kilo. That was the highest per kilo value of the nation's biggest ports. The lowest was recorded at Port Houston, where the average value per kilo so far this year was \$4.54. **Exhibit 6** shows how the ports ranked.

Exhibit 6

Per Kilo Value of Containerized Imports and Leading Ports: October 2023 YTD

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

Port	\$ Value per Kilo
Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach	\$6.52
Northwest Seaport Alliance	\$6.46
Port of Charleston	\$6.39
Port of Norfolk	\$6.08
Port of Savannah	\$5.39
Port of New York/New Jersey	\$4.99
Port of Oakland	\$4.55
Port Houston	\$4.54

Diversion of Nuts

There's been talk over the last couple of years about whether California tree nut exporters should be sending higher volumes to overseas markets via ports on the Gulf and East Coasts. So, we thought it might be useful to check the latest trade statistics from the U.S. Commerce Department to see where almonds, in particular, have been going.

Exhibit 7 displays the almond export tonnage shares of the four U.S. ports that account for virtually all almond exports by sea.

The Port of Oakland continues to dominate, but with a diminished share of the trade. In October 2019, its share was 82.2%. It then declined to a low of 72.6% in November 2022 before recovering to 76.2% this September and then spurting back up to an 81.4% share in October 2023. Historically, neither Houston nor Norfolk have been major participants in the almond trade. Port Houston has long handled a trickle of almond exports, usually amounting to less than one-half of one percent of almond export tonnage. Shipments have lately grown larger and more consistent, with the Texas port's share of the export trade peaking at 2.7% this October. As for the other supposed

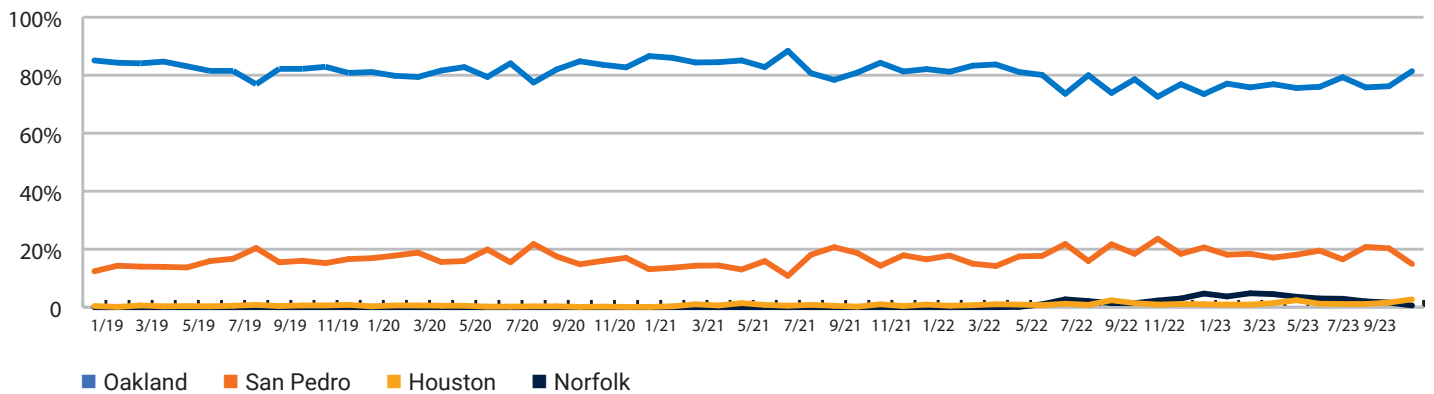


October 2023 TEU Numbers *Continued*

Exhibit 7

Port Shares of California Almond Export Tonnage: January 2019 – September 2023

Source: U.S. Commerce Department



competitor, there is no evidence of almonds leaving the country through Norfolk until May 2022. The Virginia port then saw a burst of activity with its share of the nation’s waterborne almond export trade hitting a peak of 4.8% this March. But almond shipments through Norfolk declined in each of the next seven months and sat at a meager 0.6% share in October.

The deepest inroads in Oakland’s market share have been made by the two San Pedro Bay Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Their biggest share coincided with Oakland’s poorest month, November 2022, when the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles claimed a 23.6% share. Over the past four years, they had grown their share from 16.0% in October 2019 to 18.4% last October before seeing their combined share slide to 14.9% in October 2023.

So, yes, there was a trend where almond exporters were shying away from Oakland during the pandemic, but mostly by sending higher volumes of their shipments through Southern California ports not to Gulf and East Coast ports. And the latest numbers show that these shifts may ultimately prove to be temporary.

West Coast Wine Exports

We couldn’t help but notice an upbeat article about U.S. wine exports in the Wine-Searcher, a wine industry website based in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. It noted that, as fewer Americans are “guzzling wine with as much enthusiasm as they did in previous generations...

US vintners are looking further ashore for buyers”. And it’s not just California wineries that are focusing more of their marketing efforts on the offshore market. So, too, are winemakers in Washington State and Oregon. Citing data from the Oregon Wine Board, the article noted that wine exports from Oregon increased 4 percent last year. The industry group Washington Wine reports that exports of that state’s wines has increased by 8.8% annually over the last five years.

So we wondered how that wine gets to overseas customers.

The answer is that much of that export trade goes overland. The single biggest market for U.S. wine is Canada, which last year bought 33.7% of all U.S. wine exports by value. The number two market was the United Kingdom with a 12.% share of exports, while Japan imported 7.5% of U.S. wine exports. The foreign market fragments quickly thereafter. The volumes headed across America’s northern border explains why four of the top five export gateways for U.S. wine exports are such places as Detroit, Michigan; Blaine, Washington, Port Huron, Michigan; and Sweetgrass, Montana.

The only seaport in the top five was, not surprisingly, the Port of Oakland. Last year, the port handled \$1.259 billion of the nation’s \$1.473 billion in oceanborne wine exports. By comparison, the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach combined to handle just \$30.1 million, a figure actually



October 2023 TEU Numbers *Continued*

less than the \$32.2 million in wines exported through San Francisco International Airport. Even with the rise in overseas shipments by wineries in Washington State and Oregon, the Northwest Seaport Alliance Ports of Tacoma and Seattle handled only \$11.9 million in U.S. wine exports last year.

A Christmas Tree on Every Ecke Worldwide

It is not unusual for Americans returning home from an overseas trip in December to comment on seeing Christmas trees on sale far and wide, even in countries where the Roman Catholic Feast of the Immaculate Conception every December 8 is not a national holiday, as it is in Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Philippines, and Austria. But it's not just the Christmas trees that are for sale. It's also the supporting accessories like tinsel and spray-on snow.

Just before Thanksgiving this year, the "Wirecutter" column in the *New York Times* recommended the GE Energy Smart Colorite LED Miniature Lights for decorating your home for Christmas. We're not into product endorsements here at PMSA, but we are fond of asking questions about where products are manufactured and how they get to your local Walmart, Lowe's, or even Jeff Bezos' big store in-the-cloud.

The packaging for the lights endorsed by the *New York Times* naturally features the familiar GE logo. Incidentally, it's the same one the company has been using since 1898 when it was used as a pendant dangling from a GE ceiling fan. According to the company's official history, the GE logo was submitted to the U.S. Patent Office in 1899 and was approved in 1900. Even so, the logo didn't really gain popular currency until 1923. That's when Bruce Barton of the advertising firm Batten, Barton, Durstine &

Osborne, created a magazine ad called "The Initials of a Friend" (further incidentally, early 20th-century radio star and comedian Jack Benny's wife, Mary Livingston, once quipped that the firm's name sounded like a trunk falling downstairs).

Anyway, it should not surprise anyone to learn that, while GE owns the bulbs' design, other hands are engaged in their manufacture. Following its former CEO Jack Welch's conclusion that there's little money to be made in making your own products, GE licenses others to manufacture goods bearing its logo. Not just that, in 2020, GE sold its lighting division to a company called Savant Systems. In the case of the Energy Smart Christmas lights, another GE licensed partner is Nicholas Holiday Ltd. of Hong Kong.

But Christmas lights aren't even made in Hong Kong anymore. By far the biggest source of imported Christmas tree lights sold in the United States is Cambodia, with a 66.4% share of containerized tonnage. Following far behind in second place is the Philippines (16.2%) and in third place China (15.2%). A bit more than a third of those shipments (35.1%) enter through the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Savannah (15.9%), the Northwest Seaport Alliance Ports of Tacoma and Seattle (12.3%), the Port of New York/New Jersey (10.7%), and Port Houston (7.8%) are also major ports of entry.

Typically, almost three-quarters (73.2%) of those shipments arrive in the months of August, September, and October...or about a month after Costco first mounts its earliest Christmas displays when much of the country is still sweltering in summer heat.

We Make Cargo Move



The Port
OF HUENEME



Jock O'Connell's Commentary: Roll on Columbia

I suppose, since it's December, that I could have written a commentary with a Christmas theme. You know, something about the guy hawking fir trees on the sidewalk opposite the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong or which Carrefour in Istanbul carries cans of Ocean Spray cranberry sauce. But no. This month I'm going to write about the underappreciated economic significance of a river in the Pacific Northwest.

It's not an entirely inappropriate seasonal topic since I'm finishing up this commentary in Paris, where I spent a few minutes this morning on the Quai d'Orsay following the upstream progress of a cargo-carrying *péniche* as it navigated its way past one tourist-laden bateau after another.

In truth, the inspiration for this piece initially came to me a couple of weeks ago while I was standing on the heights of Bratislava Castle watching a tug guide a loaded barge downstream on the river below. At that moment, it suddenly occurred to me that I had not commented in quite some time about the Ports of Kalama, Longview, and Vancouver on the Washington State bank of the Columbia River. The last time, I think, was when I wrote a piece titled "Calamity at Kalama?" about the increased tariffs China had imposed on U.S. soybeans in response to tariffs President Trump had raised on Chinese manufactured goods.

The storied river that flows past Bratislava is what the Slovaks call the Dunaj. About 100 miles downstream at Budapest, the Hungarians refer to the same waterway as the Duna, while upstream in Austria and even further upriver at its source in Germany, it's the Donau. To everyone else, it's the Danube, western Europe's longest river and blue only when the sun is shining brightly. Before it empties into the Black Sea, it passes through and abets commerce in Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine. By contrast, the Seine is arguably more important emotionally than commercially to the French. While much less famous around the world than the Danube or the Seine, the Columbia River also plays a large but largely unacknowledged role in world trade.

Port of Longview



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Much of the media coverage of the nation's maritime trade tends to be obsessive about containers. TV reporters can't talk about foreign trade without posing near the nearest gargantuan crane hovering over an equally gargantuan container ship. Similarly, no print article about America's ports goes to press without a helpful reminder to readers what a TEU is. One unfortunate result of this preoccupation with goods transported in metal boxes is that we tend to overlook and therefore minimize the river ports that convey so much of America's farm produce in bulk to overseas customers.

Even when rivers are seen to play an unambiguously significant role in transporting goods to market, it's often the ports at the mouth of those rivers that grab all the glory. Consider the mightiest of North America's rivers. Riverboats and barges moving down the Mississippi (failure of which to spell correctly was once cause for keeping students back a grade) have long provided access to international markets to Mid-America's farm exporters. Yet, by virtue of an odd feature in the documents used to report trade statistics to Customs and Border Protection (and its predecessor agencies), it has been the State of Louisiana and specifically the Port of New Orleans that is credited for wildly disproportionate shares of America's agricultural export trade.

That's because it's nearly impossible to determine the



Commentary Continued

true state-of-origin of such fungible commodities as wheat, soybeans, or corn. So, back about forty years ago when Congress required the Commerce Department to publish state-of-origin export statistics on a monthly basis, the government's statisticians threw up their hands and designed a workaround. Rather than asking shippers to identify where exported goods were grown, manufactured, or otherwise produced, the operative blank to be filled out was where those goods had begun their journeys into international trade. And since those journeys largely began at the Port of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana was designated as America's top farm exporting state.

The export numbers represent a grotesque distortion of agricultural reality. The commodities may exit through ports in Louisiana like New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Gramercy, but Louisiana itself is not a major farming state. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Bayou State ranks only 33rd in terms of receipts earned from agriculture.

So much for today's sermon on data integrity.

To people living in the West, rivers are chiefly seen as sources of fresh water and places for recreation. We seldom think of them as having much logistical significance. (Sometimes, like most of the citizens of Sacramento, we may have no idea there is a port in the neighborhood that is served by ocean-going vessels.)

But there's no question that the West's most important river for moving goods to market is the Columbia River. Indigenous peoples fished the river and used it to trade goods for thousands of years before Europeans first turned up in 1792 to discover the river and rechristen it. Still, the Ports of Kalama, Longview, and Vancouver (WA) are not likely viewed across the country as prominent gateways of international trade.

That, however, is a misinformed view. Consider **Exhibit A**, which shows how these three river ports compared over the past decade with the principal U.S. West Coast seaports.

Exhibit A

Top Ten U.S. West Coast Ports by Export Tonnage and Value: 2013-2022

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

Port	Weight in Short Tons	Port	Dollar Value in Millions
Long Beach	237,890,661	Los Angeles	\$332.080
Los Angeles	194,373,601	Long Beach	\$324.819
Kalama	134,708,649	Oakland	\$195.759
Portland	121,932,037	Tacoma	\$93.305
Tacoma	118,733,626	Seattle	\$70.786
Longview	104,938,145	Portland	\$46.657
Oakland	103,516,632	Kalama	\$39.089
Seattle	99,628,569	Longview	\$27.535
Vancouver (WA)	64,360,382	Vancouver (WA)	\$22.674
Richmond	41,685,443	Richmond	\$17.502

Exhibit B

Top Ten U.S. West Coast Ports by Export Weight and Value in First Three Quarters, 2023

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

Port	Weight in Short Tons	Port	Dollar Value in Millions
Long Beach	14,852,682	Los Angeles	\$23.583
Los Angeles	10,893,580	Long Beach	\$20.302
Kalama	8,944,329	Oakland	\$13.383
Oakland	5,892,253	Tacoma	\$5.183
Portland	5,026,062	Seattle	\$4.095
Longview	4,958,065	Kalama	\$3.134
Tacoma	4,780,289	Portland	\$3.044
Vancouver (WA)	3,954,952	Richmond	\$2.223
Richmond	3,869,665	Vancouver (WA)	\$1.676
Seattle	3,727,916	Longview	\$1.644



Commentary Continued

Exhibit C

Export Tonnage from Selected U.S. West Coast Ports

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

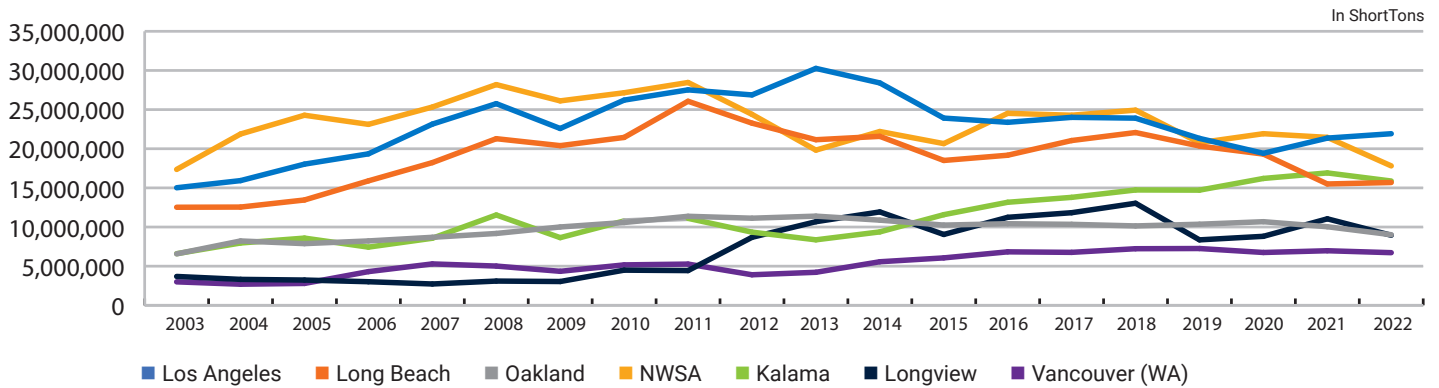


Exhibit D

Export Tonnage from Kalama, Longview, and Vancouver (WA)

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

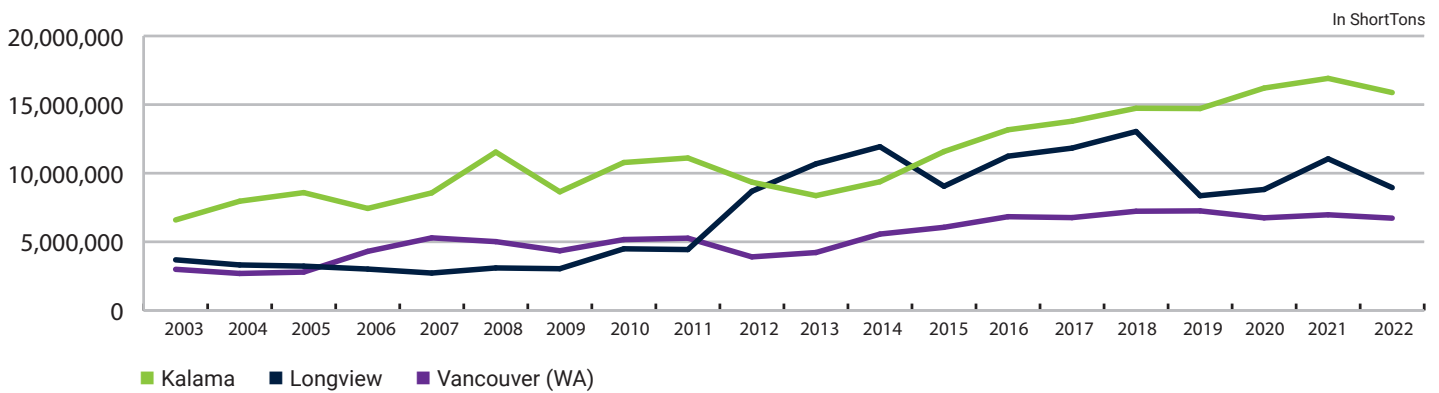


Exhibit B shows the same rankings through the first three quarters of 2023.

As Exhibit C discloses, export tonnage shipped from USWC ports has generally been declining as has the number of loaded containers leaving USWC ports for overseas markets. But there are some interesting and perhaps even counterintuitive findings to be teased from the data. For example, despite its reputation as an agricultural export gateway, the Port of Oakland regularly ships less tonnage than the Ports of Kalama and Longview. Through September of this year, Kalama’s export tonnage has totaled 8,994,329 short tons compared

to the 5,893,253 short tons shipped through Oakland.

To be sure, weight isn’t everything. Oakland’s export trade last year amounted to \$19.267 billion, according to U.S. Commerce Department statistics. Kalama’s export trade, meanwhile, totaled \$6.382 billion. Still, Vancouver (\$3.325 billion) and Longview (\$3.405 billion) ranked among the nation’s top 40 export ports by dollar value.

Few things are ever constant, though. The dollar value of exports through the three Washington State ports on the Columbia has plummeted this year. Through the first three quarters of 2023, the value of export shipments has declined by 24.3% at Kalama, 26.3% at Vancouver,



Commentary Continued

Exhibit E

Three Columbia River Ports' Shares of U.S. Soybean Export Tonnage

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

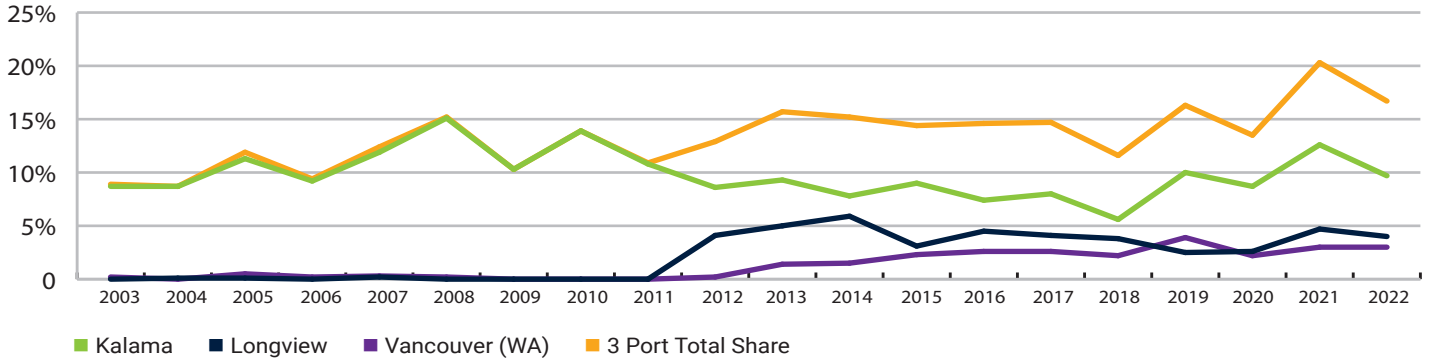


Exhibit F

Three Columbia River Ports' Shares of U.S. Corn Export Tonnage

Source: U.S. Commerce Department

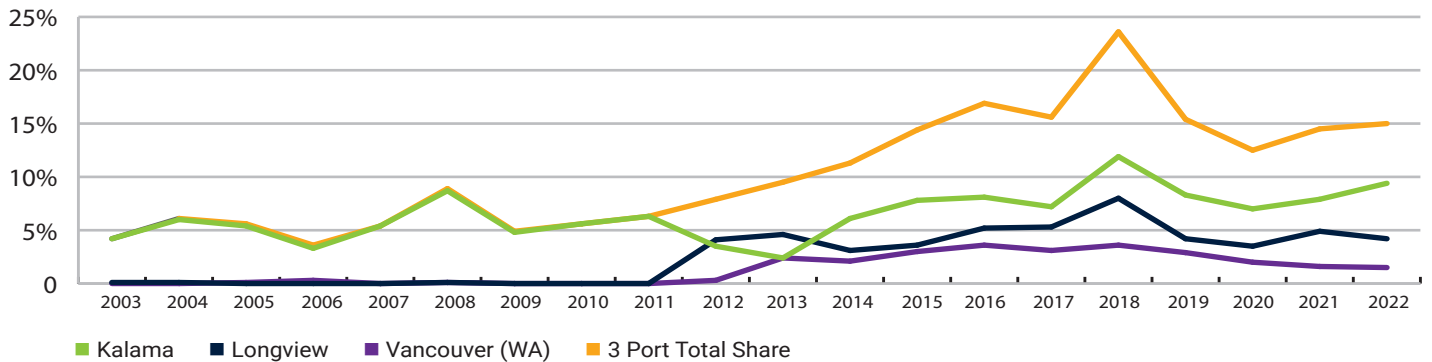
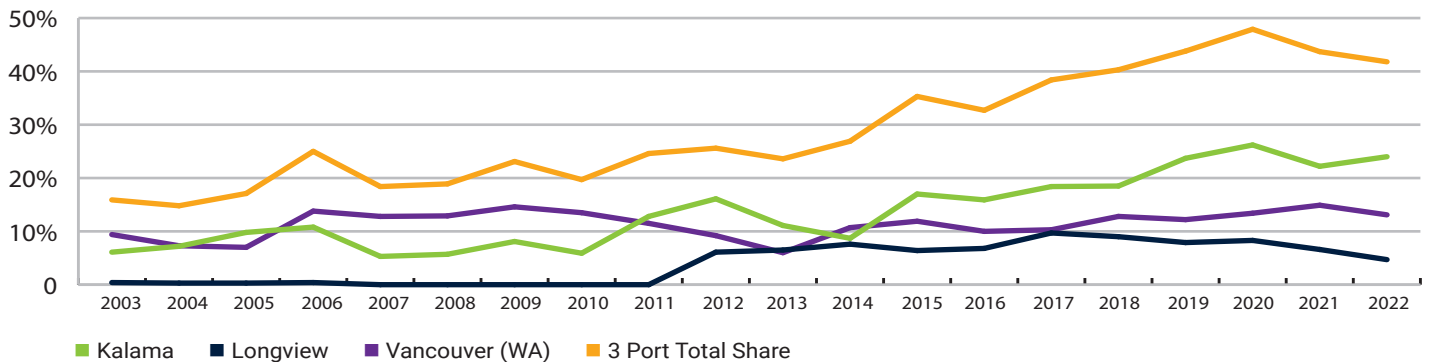


Exhibit G

Three Columbia River Ports' Shares of U.S. Wheat Export Tonnage

Source: U.S. Commerce Department





Commentary Continued

and 21.4% at Longview. Those declines reflected a nearly commensurate year-over-year fall-off in export tonnage of 22.5% at Kalama, 18.3% at Longview, and 18.2% at Vancouver.

To put West Coast export volumes in perspective, export tonnage at the Ports of Kalama, Longview, and Vancouver over the past ten years totaled 304,007,176 short tons, as opposed to the 432,264,262 short tons shipped from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. (However, if the export tonnage through the Port of Portland is added, the four Columbia River ports shipped 425,939,213 short tons, near parity with the export tonnage of the San Pedro Bay ports.)

Over the same decade, the Port of Kalama (with 134,708,649 short tons of exports) and the Port of Longview (104,938,145 short tons) topped the 103,516,632 short tons that were exported from the Port of Oakland.

What accounts for the export volumes shipped through the ports on the right bank of the Columbia? Apples from Washington State? Timber from Oregon? No, it's the volumes of wheat, corn, and soybeans being exported to Asian markets.

Collectively, the three Washington State ports on the Columbia accounted for 16.7% of the nation's soybean export tonnage last year. Kalama ranked as the country's third biggest soybean export port with a 9.7% share, while Longview's 4.0% share put it in seventh place followed in ninth place by Vancouver's 3.0% share.

Kalama last year was the third leading port for exports of corn (maize) with a 9.4% share of the traffic. To be sure, two Louisiana ports dominate the nation's corn export trade with New Orleans and Gramercy handling 39.5% and 30.6% shares, respectively, last year. Longview was the fourth leading corn export port with a 4.2% share, while Vancouver was ninth with a 1.5% share.

In tonnage terms, Kalama was the leading port for U.S. wheat exports since attaining that status in 2016. Its 24.0% share of all seaborne export tonnage of wheat and meslin last year easily topped New Orleans' 19.0% share. The third leading port was Port Houston (17.8%), but in fourth place came Vancouver with a 13.1% share. Although Longview placed sixth with a 4.7% share, we should, to be fair, observe that a port on the Oregon side of the Columbia River, Portland, ranked fifth with an 11.8% share of U.S. exports of wheat and meslin last year.

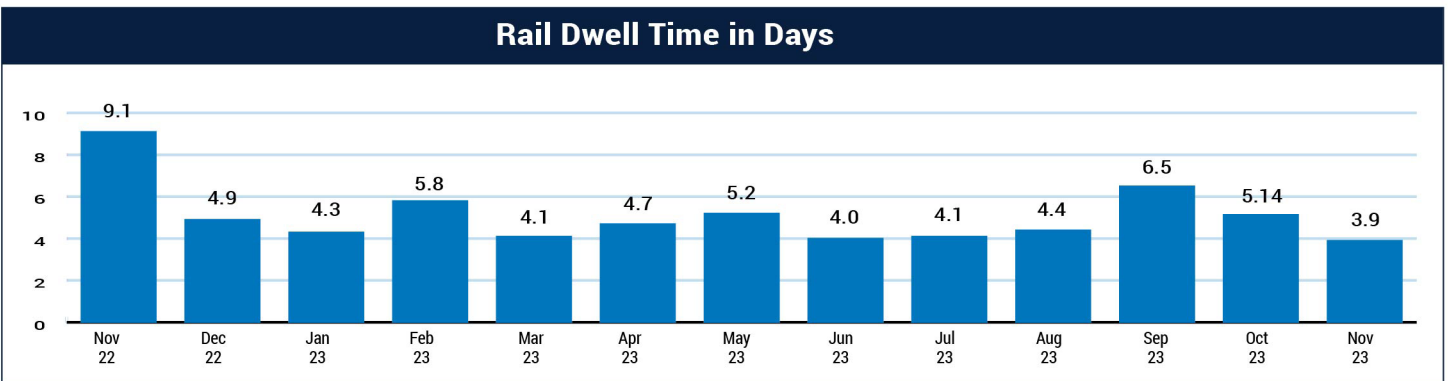
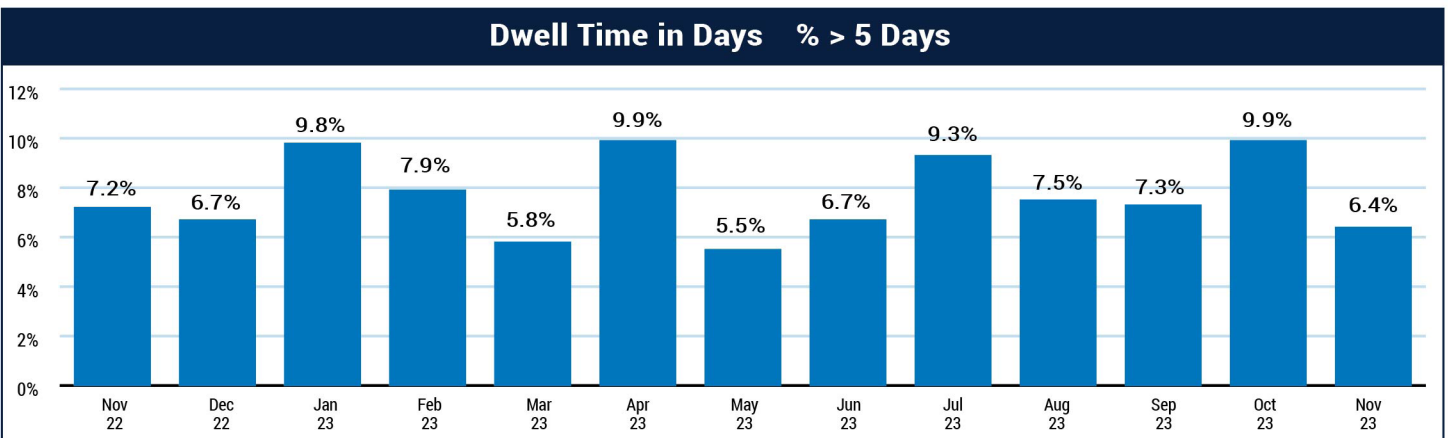
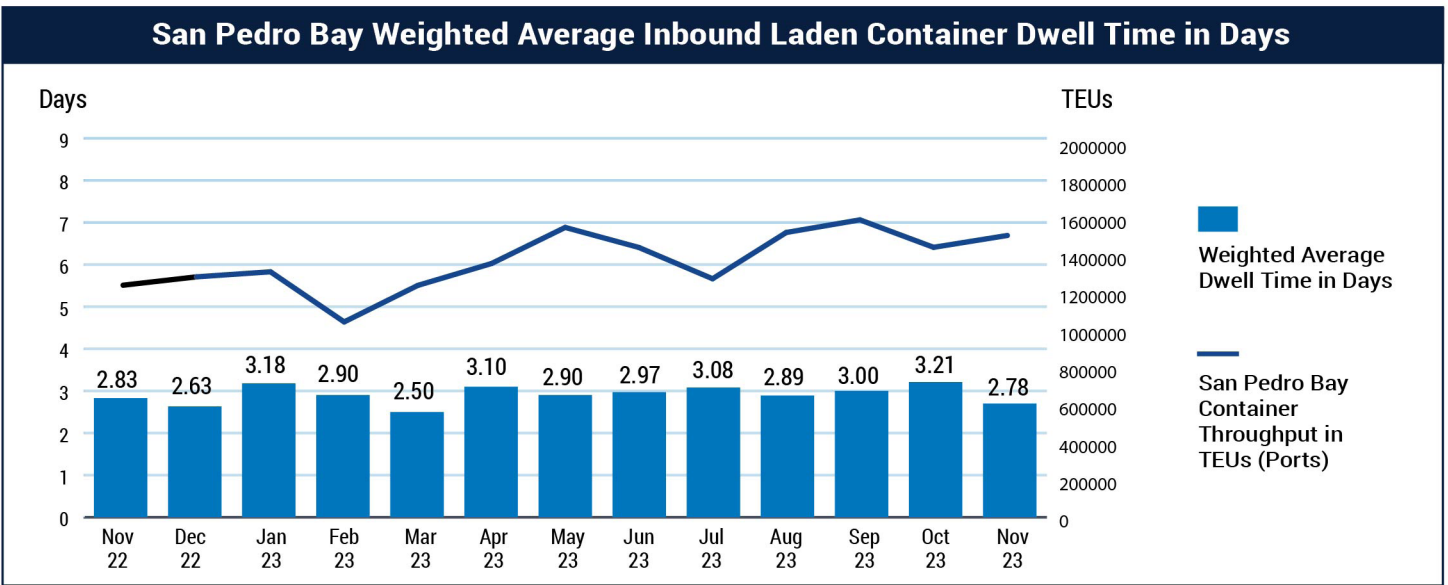
That's it for this month's commentary. As you and yours gather around to celebrate the holidays and the start of a New Year, don't limit yourself to the usual Christmas songs. Get out your old guitar or banjo and sing along to a recording of the official song of the State of Washington, Woody Guthrie's "Roll on, Columbia, Roll On."

Disclaimer: The views expressed in Jock's commentaries are his own and may not reflect the positions of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association.

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