



NITL Urges Congress to Adopt Shipping Act Reforms in Response to Unprecedented Disruption to the Ocean Shipping Network

Washington, DC, May 19, 2021 Today, The National Industrial Transportation League (NITL), the nation's oldest trade association representing industrial freight transportation shippers, is calling on Congress to modernize the Shipping Act of 1984 after months of congestion at U.S. seaports and unprecedented disruption to the ocean shipping network. The ongoing ocean shipping turmoil has wreaked havoc on US exporters and importers, costing them billions in higher shipping costs, demurrage and detention charges, and lost business, with still no clear end in sight.

The inability of US companies to timely access marine containers and chassis and secure sufficient vessel bookings to meet their business requirements has upended the ocean cargo shipping and delivery network. These unprecedented challenges have exposed gaps in the law governing ocean carrier services that warrant immediate action.

[A proposal drafted by NITL](#) recommends modifications to address these challenges. The proposal is designed to provide remedies for importers and exporters who are experiencing unprecedented shipping costs, are unable to obtain adequate ocean transportation service to meet their cargo delivery needs and are concerned about unfair business practices.

The NITL proposal provides four main recommendations to modify The Shipping Act, including:

- Establishing rules prohibiting common carriers and marine terminal operators from adopting and applying unjust and unreasonable demurrage and detention rules and practices by codifying the industry guidance issued by the Federal Maritime Commission in the Spring of 2020, and shifting the burden of proof for complaints onto the service providers to show that their practices are reasonable and comply with the rules.
- Clarifying the obligations of common carriers with respect to equipment and vessel space allocations and contract performance by requiring them to adhere to minimum service standards that meet the public interest. Ocean carriers would also be required to develop contingency service plans during periods of port congestion to mitigate supply chain disruptions.
- Modifying the prohibited acts to address unfair business practices related to the instrumentalities required to perform the transportation services, including access to, allocation of, and interchange of equipment, and any unreasonable allocations of vessel space by ocean common carriers considering foreseeable import and export demand.
- Expanding the FMC's authority to act upon complaints filed against anticompetitive agreements between ocean carriers that operate with antitrust immunity, such as alliances, and allowing third-party intervenors to participate in court proceedings initiated by the FMC against such agreements.

“While ocean transportation costs are rising to unprecedented levels, we have seen a substantial deterioration in service by the ocean carriers. The lack of timely access to marine equipment and vessel sailings has caused adverse ripple effects throughout US companies’ supply chains leading to material shortages, empty store shelves, and business interruption,” said NITL Director and Ocean Committee Chair Lori Fellmer. “NITL believes that the inability of exporters and importers to effectively address these challenges commercially means the time has come to update the Shipping Act to reflect current day circumstances.

“The NITL proposal addresses many of the problems faced by the shipping community and seeks to address gaps in the current law. While the League strongly commends the regulatory efforts in recent years initiated by the FMC, we believe the agency and shipping industry would benefit greatly from these proposed reforms that are targeted to address present day challenges,” said Fellmer. The League was instrumental in the efforts leading up to the 1998 amendments to the Shipping Act and looks forward to working with the Congress, the FMC, and all industry stakeholders to address the critical challenges faced by importers and exporters and others by updating this important federal law.

More Information:

Watch for forthcoming invitation on a NITL webinar on this topic. In the interim, [contact NITL](#) with any questions or comments.

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