

\$5.03 a Mile and Climbing: Why May 2026 Is Reshaping Bulk Freight

Bulk freight rates hit \$5.03/mi in May 2026, up 7.7% MoM and 23% YoY. Inside: commodities, regions, diesel, and what it means for your lanes.

SPRINGFIELD, MO, UNITED STATES, May 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The first half of May 2026 produced one of the strongest two-week stretches in the bulk freight market over the past year. Rates climbed, volume grew, and the gap between short-haul and long-haul pricing widened. Through May 15, 2026, the [BulkLoads](#) network recorded 18,220 verified bulk freight loads across 47 origin states. The data shows a market that is gaining momentum rather than peaking.

The median per-mile rate across all bulk freight reached \$5.03 in the first 15 days of May. That figure is 7.7% higher than April 2026 and 23.0% higher than May 2025. The trailing 12-month median sits at \$4.20 per mile, which means the current reading runs roughly 20% above the long-run average. For carriers, the gap signals stronger pricing power. For shippers, it signals tighter capacity in the lanes that matter most.

Volume kept pace with rates. The 18,220 loads booked through May 15 represent a 5.1% increase over the same 15-day window in April 2026, when the network moved 17,332 loads. Load volume across the full network is running 15.9% above the trailing 12-month average for the same calendar window. Demand is outpacing the seasonal trend that bulk operators typically expect in mid-May.

Corn led every product by volume with 1,713 loads, the single highest count in the network this month. Aggregates and Industrial commodities held the largest share of the mix at 32% of all loads. The top 14 products combined to account for 47% of all loads. The remaining 53% spread across dozens of smaller categories, which is the long tail that defines the bulk freight market. Three corridors stood out for concentration. Oklahoma to Oklahoma moved 1,624 loads. Kansas



to Kansas moved 1,339 loads. Indiana to Indiana moved 1,202 loads. Together those three intrastate lanes accounted for 23% of all flow this month. Short-haul, in-state moves continue to dominate the network, and the median haul across the month sat at 125 miles.

Commodity-level performance varied widely. Aggregates and Industrial commodities led with an 8.5% MoM rise in median per-mile rates. Grain rates climbed 7.8% MoM and 16% YoY. Feed Ingredients went the other direction, down 3.2% MoM. Corn rates rose 6.7% MoM and 20.8% YoY. Sand rates accelerated 20.6% MoM, the strongest single-product move of the month. Rock rates fell 5.2% MoM, the steepest single-product decline.

Regional patterns reinforced the story. South Central origins (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico) led every region this month, with median rates up 24.2% MoM and 24.5% over the trailing six months. Midwest origins, which include the corn belt states from Iowa and Illinois through the Dakotas, climbed 10.7% MoM and 8.0% over the trailing six months. The West region softened, with rates down 1.9% MoM.

Three composite gauges summarize the broader market. Volume momentum, which compares the trailing three months to the prior three, reads +17.6%. Rate momentum reads +3.3%.

Capacity tightness, which tracks the spread between short-haul and long-haul rates, reads +4.8%. When short-haul rates outpace long-haul, capacity is tight near origin markets. That is the current pattern.

Diesel offered a rare bit of stability. The U.S. average retail price for on-highway diesel sat at \$5.64 per gallon as of May 11, 2026, up just 0.6% from a month ago. The three-month change reads +52.9% and the 12-month change reads +63.4%. Fuel remains the second-largest variable cost for bulk carriers, and the flat May reading takes some pressure off rate floors that climbed sharply through March and April.

The combined picture for the second half of May favors carriers with capacity in the South Central and Midwest regions, especially those running corn, sand, and aggregate lanes. Brokers should expect continued rate pressure on intrastate corridors. Shippers with flexible pickup windows in the West may find more carrier availability than they did in April. The bulk freight market is still building momentum, not peaking, and the next two weeks will likely confirm that direction. For carriers, brokers, and shippers who want to translate these numbers into specific lane and commodity decisions, [BulkInsights](#) makes the daily detail available beyond this monthly snapshot.

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