

TRAFFIX Warns Freight Capacity Crunch Will Keep Rates Elevated Through Q3 2026

Spot rates are outpacing contract prices as carrier leverage grows. Shippers should secure capacity early and budget for sustained cost pressure.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, July 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [TRAFFIX](#), a leading North American logistics provider, released its [TRAFFIX Trends Q3 2026 Market Update](#), finding that tightening truck capacity, not diesel prices, is the primary force keeping freight rates near multi-year highs. The report also points to a rare spot-over-contract rate inversion, an early signal of further cost pressure.

"Capacity, not fuel, is what shippers need to plan around for the rest of this year. The spot-over-contract inversion of linehaul rates that we're seeing right now has historically been a leading signal for increased contract rates. Shippers will have difficulty relying on low contract rates when carriers can make more on the spot market." said Alex Fuller, Vice President, Commercial Intelligence, TRAFFIX. "Carriers have regained real leverage in this market, and shippers who don't adjust will have trouble getting their freight picked up."

TRAFFIX advises shippers to use current market costs, rather than 2025 pricing, as the starting point for their budgets. To manage this, TRAFFIX recommends three immediate actions. First, budget for higher transportation costs on spot-market, expedited, and high-demand lane shipments. Second, secure capacity early on important shipping lanes before demand increases further. Finally, build supply chain flexibility through intermodal options, LTL consolidation, and advance planning.

The TRAFFIX Q3 2026 Trends report outlines three planning scenarios for the remainder of 2026:

- Rates Remain High for the Rest of the Year: Shipping capacity remains unable to meet freight demand, so the higher rates from this imbalance stay in place through year-end. Contract rates continue rising even as spot rates plateau, with no meaningful rate reductions expected in 2026.

- Economic Slowdown Pushes Down Demand (and Rates): Slowing consumer spending and manufacturing curb freight demand, aligning it closer with reduced capacity and bringing rates down as part of a broader economic slowdown, though a muted peak season would still keep

rates above 2025 levels.

- Fuel Pushes Rates Higher: Renewed conflict in the Middle East and/or depleted oil reserves push diesel toward all-time highs, and with carrier capacity already reduced, that cost increase flows through to both spot and contract rates via fuel tables, potentially exceeding the records set in early July.

Tender rejection rates are pushing shippers toward secondary carriers and the spot market, and new trucking authorities are entering the market too slowly to close the gap. U.S. manufacturing activity has expanded for a sixth consecutive month, and rising inventory levels suggest shippers are pulling freight forward to manage tightening capacity and prepare for potential tariffs.

US spot freight rates rose above contract rates in late May and remained higher through July, reaching \$3.79 per mile in June and \$3.69 per mile in July. The FreightWaves SONAR Supply Chain Pricing Power Index has climbed to roughly 70, up from below the neutral 50 mark for most of 2023 and 2024, indicating carriers now hold more negotiating leverage than shippers.

TRAFFIX' mode-by-mode analysis projects that dry-van rates will stay elevated through 2026 on tight capacity, while flatbed rates continue climbing on construction and infrastructure demand. Intermodal shipping volumes are expected to grow more than 20% year-over-year as shippers seek alternatives to a tightening truckload market, and refrigerated capacity remains tight through the end of produce season. Cross-border conditions stay generally stable, with tighter conditions in reefer, expedited, and high-demand U.S.-Mexico corridors.

For additional information, [consult the TRAFFIX Trends Q3 2026 Market Update](#).

About TRAFFIX

TRAFFIX (www.traffix.com) is a leading third-party logistics provider serving the North American transportation industry since 1979. TRAFFIX offers a suite of customizable services including truckload, flatbed, intermodal, drayage, expedited, LTL, specialized government services, and managed transportation. TRAFFIX's team of industry experts are backed by best-in-class technology that enables them to maximize the value of their client's freight spend, offer tailored solutions, and adapt quickly to changes in supply and demand. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, TRAFFIX employs 840+ experienced logistics professionals in offices across the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

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