

Backlog beginning to ease at Chinese container ports



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The backlog of cargoes at Chinese container ports has been easing as workers gradually return to work after the easing of coronavirus travel curbs. This has caused massive port congestion due to labour shortages both at ports and the delivery of containers to and from the ports. China processes some 30% of global traffic, equal to 715,000 containers a day in 2019.



The average wait time for container vessels at Zhoushan in southern China – which is the third-largest container port in the world by annual handling capacity – rose to more than 60 hours during the week of February 11th to 17th, Reuters reported. That was up from 45 hours during the week before the Lunar New Year holiday, and nearly 20 hours more than the average in early January, according to Shanghai International Shipping Institute (SISI) data.

Xu Kai, director of the Shipping Information Research Institute at SISI, said that “the turning point has arrived... We are seeing that port congestion has eased and logistics start to revive”.

For example there are 24,000 registered container truck drivers in Ningbo, which includes Zhoushan, 95% of whom come from other regions and all but 800 of whom were not working in the week to February 12th, according to the Ningbo-Zhoushan port authority.

Port authorities have offered food and accommodation support for returning drivers, as well as chartered buses to bring them back. That saw 7,000 truckers back at work in Ningbo by February 21st.

Processing rates at Zhoushan surged as a result, with up to 13,235 teus clearing the port on February 22nd, up from five teus on February 16th, according to SISI data. However, processing rates remain well below the port’s daily average of just over 75,000 teus per day in 2019.

Shanghai's port of Yangshan, the biggest deepwater container port in China, cleared 59,800 teus on February 20th, exceeding the average daily volume in 2019 of 54,200 teus, the port said.

Chinese ports are also seeing fewer vessels divert to other destinations because of the backlog. There were 61 container vessels redirected from China last week, down from a peak of 144 vessels in early February.

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