

SEA FREIGHT

MSC confirms weekly continuation of SA-US direct sailings

27 May 2025 - by Eugene Goddard



Source: Fresh Fruit Portal

Despite uncertainty among shippers and freight forwarders about direct sailings connecting South African ports with the US East Coast, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) has confirmed that it will maintain the weekly rotations.

Fears that the Amex Express (Amex) service will become a casualty because of the dissolution in February of the 2M vessel-sharing service MSC had with Maersk, were exacerbated by the perception of conflicting statements in the market.

Maersk had confirmed that, as of October 1, its SA-US service would be as per its new alliance partnership with Hapag-Lloyd, rotating via several ports in Western Europe and the UK.

Several freight forwarders warned that transshipment would come at significant cost to South African shippers, especially given the country's current trade relationship with the administration of President Donald Trump.

However, unconfirmed indications last week that MSC was prepared to continue with direct weekly calls to the US, have since been corroborated from the line's head office in Geneva.

In an exclusive statement to *Freight News*, Ferdinando Cibelli, senior vice-president for MSC's North American services, said: "We want to reassure South African freight forwarders that MSC is committed to maintaining a robust connection on this vital trade lane.

"MSC will continue to operate a dedicated, standalone service from South Africa to the USA."

The initial statement emphasised that MSC was aware of the concerns among South African freight forwarders regarding the future of direct weekly sailings to the US.

The latest development will no doubt bring relief to local exporters who feared for the future of US shipments come October.

Cibelli said: "To ensure continued reliability and to effectively meet the needs of our customers, MSC will deploy an extra four vessels to maintain a weekly direct connection between South Africa and the United States. In total, eight vessels will be deployed for this unique service."

He added that the "adjustment is designed to ensure seamless continuity of service and uphold a stable, direct connection on the South Africa-USA trade route for the foreseeable future". "We are dedicated to supporting the trade needs of our South African partners."



Ferdinando Cibelli, senior vice-president for MSC's North American services.

WELCOME NEWS

MSC's confirmation of weekly rotations between SA and the US has been widely welcomed at home.

Dr Jacob van Rensburg, who heads up Research and Development at the South African Association of Freight Forwarders, said it was very important that direct weekly calls to the US be maintained.

“After months of uncertainty, confirmation from MSC headquarters in Geneva that the Amex service will continue, represents a vital and timely boost for South Africa’s ocean freight connectivity.

“With liner connectivity declining by 21.5% in 2023/24 (according to UNCTAD’s Liner Shipping Connectivity Index) – the second steepest drop globally after Russia – this renewed commitment helps to anchor direct maritime trade with the United States, one of South Africa’s leading export destinations and a key source of high-value imports.”

He underscored the announcement as well-timed, especially given last week’s high-level presidential visit to the Oval Office in Washington, meant to repair trade relations with the Trump administration.

“Amid rising trade complexity and escalating tariff pressures – especially under recent US policy shifts targeting SA exports (notably steel, aluminium, and automotive) – this development provides much-needed policy certainty in an otherwise volatile landscape,” said Van Rensburg.

“The impact of these tariffs is estimated at 1.3% of South Africa’s GDP. Amid this complex environment, recent high-level engagements between South African and US delegations – including last week’s Oval Office consultations – underscore the imperative of safeguarding and enhancing trade channels with one of the world’s largest economies.”

Van Rensburg furthermore pointed out that the US remained a critical trading partner, absorbing 8% of South Africa’s exports and supplying 9% of its imports in 2024, with the trade balance strongly in South Africa’s favour, according to a recent presentation by XA Global Trade Advisors.

He added: “While the recent omission of the Port of Cape Town from certain Amex rotations remains a significant concern, particularly for Western Cape agri-exporters, MSC’s renewed commitment is a clear signal of confidence.

“It underscores the importance of continued engagement between industry, government, and global carriers in maintaining South Africa’s strategic position in global trade flows.”

Terry Gale, chairperson of Exporters Western Cape and a vocal industry advocate for strengthened relations with Washington, remarked that the transshipment of exports via congested ports like Algeciras in Spain would have compromised South Africa’s trade with the US.

“It’s phenomenal news and we thank MSC for appreciating how important this trade lane is for the Western Cape in particular.”

Gale added that it was the country’s most important trade lane when it came to exports, considering the amount of goods going to the US compared with what came back.

He said it was probably why Trump felt that there was an imbalance of trade between the US and South Africa, giving rise to the threat of 30% tariffs on local exports from July 9.

He stressed that the quick transit time of direct sailings to the US gave South Africa a unique sales position in that American traders quickly cottoned on to the market benefits of transshipment-free cargo.

“It is exactly what the American industry wants. From their point of view, they felt like they were importing from sources next door, giving South Africa a huge advantage in the market.”

Gale said fruit already sent to the US, such as citrus, and South Africa’s growing wine export market, could now count on volume-driven shipping on a regular basis to the US.

Sign up to our mailing list and get daily news headlines and weekly features directly to your inbox free.

Subscribe to receive print copies of Freight News Features to your door.



0 Comments

 Login ▼

G

Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

Name



Share

Best Newest Oldest

Be the first to comment.

Subscribe

Privacy

Do Not Sell My Data

ftwOnline

