

Tariffs create frenzy in cross-border trucking

Some customers have seen an increase in wait times at the U.S.-Mexico border, while others are adjusting to avoid higher duties.

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Trucks drive across the U.S.-Mexico border on Feb. 1, 2025, in San Diego. Apu Gomes via Getty Images

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The tariff whiplash of the past week required trucking carriers and shippers to closely monitor the changing landscape surrounding import duties, which could shift again next month.

Tariffs have been suspended on all imports that are compliant with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement — but only until April 2, the White House announced Thursday. The notice also followed a tariff exemption for car imports from Mexico and Canada.

Cross-border trucking plays a large role in supply chains, and carriers have been staying in regular contact with customers to help them navigate ongoing uncertainty.

“The impact of tariffs on cross-border trade is tremendous. Many big shippers have already stopped shipping,” Justin Danks, VP of operations at Sunset Transportation, told Trucking Dive in an email Wednesday.

Here’s what trucking and logistics companies are saying about what they’re seeing, how they’re navigating cross-border disruptions, and what’s top of mind for customers as tariffs remain an uncertainty.

Estes Express Lines confronts cross-border slowdown

“One of the things that we’ve experienced is longer delays at all the border crossings across Canada, and even slowdowns into Mexico. So first thing we’re learning is things are taking longer to get across the border. And we don’t know all the reasons for that, right? Is that two countries mad at each other, and so they’re just [deciding] you’re gonna sit here for a while? Or is it an actual function of the tariffs? We don’t know, but we’ve been giving [customers] updates on that, and then we’ve had to communicate what role we play in it.

“What we’re doing is, at least weekly, sending something out to our sales team so they at least know the basics, and then they can address it specifically with the customer.” — President and COO Webb Estes

Redwood Logistics sees ‘massive unleashing’ of freight

“Now that tariffs have been paused, we saw a massive unleashing of volumes [Friday] that had been held all week in hopes that they could avoid the huge tariffs. Border crossing agents, transload facilities now have a barrage of shipments to manage going into the weekend. Available [load-to-truck] ratio spiked heavily today and spot rates shot up accordingly.

“Now all eyes will be on the first week of April to see if tariffs come back, remain paused or get eliminated altogether.” — Redwood Mexico President Jordan Dewart

C.H. Robinson reports more shippers seeking USMCA exemption

“Following the pause of tariffs on Canada and Mexico for USMCA-compliant goods, there’s been a notable trend of increasing requests for USCMA qualification. Outside of the trade community, not a lot of people know you’re not automatically included under USMCA benefits just because you’re moving products across the border. Each shipper has to go through a

qualification process.

“In the past, many avoided seeking qualification because it seemed like an extra step, especially on goods that were already duty-free. But with the new 25% IEEPA tariffs and latest announcement from the White House pausing tariffs on USMCA-compliant goods, shippers have a stronger incentive to go through the qualification process for all their products. However, it’s not as easy as flipping a switch. The process requires significant time and resources from the company and trade expert.” — Mike Short, president of global freight forwarding

Uber Freight says shippers are changing strategies

“Truckers are seeing an increase in volume at key border crossings, particularly from Mexico, as shippers push to move goods before tariff hikes. This surge can lead to longer wait times and congestion at customs. Additionally, some shippers are exploring different customs strategies, such as breaking down shipments into separate components to only pay duties on tariff-affected materials, adding another layer of complexity to cross-border logistics.” — Jose Guerrero, director of U.S. customs operations

Seko Logistics says tariff payments add complexity

“The need to manage cash for duty payments is an additional consideration for both Customs Brokers and their clients, given how long these supply chains have existed without paying duties. In addition, new tariffs mean new provisional HTS numbers which is just another component to ensure compliance in a world where nothing is getting easier for brokers or those working in import compliance.” — William Jansen, director of customs brokerage and account management for e-commerce

Editor’s note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly reported Mike Short’s name.