

Baltimore bridge collision involving Maersk-chartered ship shuts port



Baltimore has four Asia services and three trans-Atlantic services that will be affected by the port's closure. Photo Credit: Felix Mizioznikov / Shutterstock.com.

Michael Angell, Associate Editor | Mar 26, 2024, 9:33 AM EDT

Updated with statements from Ports America and the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore

The Port of Baltimore is shut to vessel traffic after a Maersk-chartered container ship collided with a suspension bridge spanning the port's lower harbor early Tuesday, causing an indeterminate number of casualties after the bridge collapsed and sent vehicles into the water.

The closing of the fifth-busiest container port on the US East Coast could put pressure on container lines as they divert vessel calls. That could challenge ocean

service reliability at other US East Coast ports and even generate congestion if there's vessel bunching at other gateways.

“This is a major disaster and will create significant problems on the US East Coast for US importers and exporters,” Lars Jensen, CEO of Vespucci Maritime and a *Journal of Commerce* analyst, said in a LinkedIn Post. “The bridge collapse will mean that for the time being it will not be possible to get to the container terminals — or a range of the other port terminals — in Baltimore.”

The US Coast Guard (USCG) said it received a report at 1:27 am Tuesday that a 948-foot container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge that spans the Patapsco River. The USCG said the bridge collapsed and there were reports of multiple people in the water. The Baltimore City Fire Department called the incident a “mass casualty event,” with reports of up to 20 cars falling into the river.

The Francis Scott Key Bridge is part of Interstate-695, an auxiliary route of the main interstate thoroughfare I-95.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), which flagged the ship, identified it as the 9,962-TEU *Dali*, which had 22 seafarers on board. Maryland Governor Wes Moore said in a statement that the *Dali* reported losing power prior to the collision.

The ship is owned and operated by Synergy Maritime. It is deployed in the 2M Alliance's TP12/Empire service between North Asia and the US East Coast. Baltimore was the last US call before heading to the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka, according to its last AIS track.

Maersk said in a statement to the *Journal of Commerce* that the *Dali* “is time chartered by Maersk and is carrying Maersk customers' cargo. No Maersk crew and personnel were on board the vessel.”

The carrier added it was “horrified by what has happened in Baltimore, and our thoughts are with all of those affected.”

Synergy Maritime said in a statement that the vessel was outbound from Baltimore under control of two local pilots at the time of the bridge collision. It said all crew members and the two pilots have been accounted for and there has been no pollution from the accident.

“The US Coast Guard and local officials have been notified, and the owners and managers are fully cooperating with federal and state government agencies under an approved plan,” Synergy said.

The MPA said in a press release that it was informed by Synergy that the *Dali* "had experienced momentary loss of propulsion" while under pilotage. The vessel dropped its anchors just prior to the collision as part of an emergency procedure, it added.

Trucks still working Seagirt terminal

The Maryland Port Administration said in a statement that due to bridge strike, "vessel traffic into and out of the Port of Baltimore is suspended until further notice." It said that trucks are still being processed at the port's main container terminal, Seagirt.

Seagirt, which handled approximately 1.12 million TEUs last year, is also home to three other Asia services along with the TP12/Empire. Those include the Ocean Alliance's Taiwan Strait/AWE3 service, Mediterranean Shipping Co.'s Santana service and Zim Shipping's ZXB service.

Ports America, which operates Seagirt and the Dundalk terminal, the port's main roll-on, roll-off cargo terminal, said in a statement to the *Journal of Commerce* that vessels will not be able to access either terminal until the main deepwater channel into the port is cleared.

"We are actively monitoring the Francis Scott Key bridge collapse in Baltimore and are providing assistance as needed to support the response efforts," Ports America said in a statement. "Our primary concern remains with all individuals involved including those directly affected by the tragedy and their families."

The 2M Alliance also operates two trans-Atlantic services that call Baltimore, with other container lines operating various services from India and South America that also call the port. It is not known how those services may be rerouted.

Baltimore is the largest US East Coast port for handling roll-on, roll-off cargo. Last year, it processed 389,096 auto units.

CSX Transportation provides Baltimore's on-dock rail service. According to Surface Transportation data compiled by the *Journal of Commerce*, the Class I railroad handled approximately 2,500 outbound container lifts from Baltimore in 2023, and another 3,000 inbound container lifts.

Ari Ashe and Keith Wallis contributed reporting to this article.

Contact Michael Angell at michael.angell@spglobal.com.

You are permitted to print or download extracts from this material for your personal use only. None of this material may be used for any commercial or public use. For more information on reprints/eprints, please visit <https://subscribe.joc.com/mediasolutions/>.