

Situation Report:  
February 24, 2026

# Winter Storm Hernando: U.S. Port and Inland Logistics Disruptions Since the February 2026 Winter Storm Cycle



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On February 15–20, 2026, severe Pacific storms affected the U.S. West Coast, especially California. **Winter Storm Hernando** then impacted the U.S. Northeast from February 22–24, 2026, triggering major stoppages across ports, airports, and inland transport.

These shocks occurred while the network operated under limited spare capacity, following **Winter Storm Fern**'s Gulf Coast and Southeast disruptions on January 24–26, 2026.

The logistics system is operational again, but the binding constraint has shifted from “port reopening” to how quickly cargo can be moved inland. Limiting factors are short-haul port trucking, container chassis availability, rail capacity, and yard congestion. Recovery will take weeks, not days.

### Planning outlook (as of February 24, 2026):

- **Northeast (Port of New York and New Jersey):** reopened in phases on February 24–25, but congestion will persist into early March.
- **Gulf Coast (Port of Houston):** longest recovery tail, expect elevated waiting times and schedule volatility into mid–late March.
- **Southeast (Savannah / Charleston / Virginia):** open, but at risk of secondary congestion waves through early to mid March, especially if diversions increase.

## **1. Current bottlenecks and constraints**

- 1. Inland evacuation is the primary bottleneck.** Even with terminals open, clearance depends on:
  - Short-haul port trucking (drayage) availability
  - Container chassis availability (wheeled frames)
  - Rail slots and inland terminal space
  - Terminal yard congestion, reduced crane productivity and slow truck turn times
- 2. Staggered reopenings create long recovery tails.** Recovery is not a single restart moment; it is a phased ramp-up that prolongs backlog clearance.
- 3. Diversion is limited and can create secondary bottlenecks.** Cargo diverted away from the Northeast concentrates into already high-utilisation Southeast ports, shifting, not eliminating, congestion.

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## 2. Maritime ports: closure/reopening dates; recovery expectations

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### Port of New York and New Jersey (largest U.S. East Coast container gateway)

- **Operational stoppage:** February 22, 2026 (blizzard conditions and safety restrictions).
  - **Reopening:** began February 24, 2026, with additional facilities resuming February 25, 2026 (phased).
  - **Recovery expectation:** congestion and schedule variability through March 3–10, 2026 (most likely).
  - **Risk case:** inland transport constraints extend normalization to mid-March 2026.
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### Port of Houston (major Gulf Coast export hub for chemicals and energy-related cargo)

- **Major closure/restriction window (Fern):** January 24–26, 2026.
  - **Current state:** open, but operating with a longer recovery tail due to high baseline utilization and channel complexity.
  - **Recovery expectation:** elevated delays and schedule volatility through March 2026.
  - **Risk case:** any additional interruption extends into late March / early April 2026.
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### Port of Savannah (Southeast gateway and diversion valve)

- **High-utilization stress window:** intensified around February 18–24, 2026 due to diversion pressure and inland constraints.
  - **Current state:** open, sensitive to diversion surges and rail/drayage availability.
  - **Recovery expectation:** congestion pockets through early March 2026.
  - **Risk case:** diversion waves extend impacts into mid-March 2026.
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### Port of Charleston (Southeast gateway and automotive-oriented flows)

- **High-utilization stress window:** February 18–24, 2026.
  - **Current state:** open; vulnerable to the diversion and inland constraints like Savannah.
  - **Recovery expectation:** congestion pockets through early March 2026.
  - **Risk case:** secondary congestion through mid-March 2026.
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### Port of Virginia (Hampton Roads / Norfolk area)

- **Current state:** open and best-positioned East Coast relief node; still exposed to spillover and rail constraints.
- **Recovery expectation:** localised congestion risk through early March 2026, longer if diversions spike.

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### 3. Airports and air-cargo hubs: disruption window and recovery tail

Winter Storm Hernando caused widespread flight cancellations during February 22–24, 2026. Even after flight schedules normalise, cargo networks typically face a 2–5 day backlog due to missed rotations and repositioning constraints.

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#### **Northeast airports affected by cargo and network spillover (Feb 22–24 impact; recovery into late Feb):**

- John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York)
  - Newark Liberty International Airport (New Jersey)
  - Boston Logan International Airport (Massachusetts)
  - Philadelphia International Airport (Pennsylvania)
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#### **National express hubs with backlog sensitivity (network effects can persist several days):**

- Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport (Kentucky) – UPS main hub
- Memphis International Airport (Tennessee) – FedEx main hub
- Indianapolis International Airport (Indiana) – major express sorting node

**Recovery expectation:** Residual air-cargo and parcel delays through February 25–28, 2026, with potential spillover into early March for time-sensitive shipments.

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#### 4. Roads and highways: corridors to monitor during recovery

Even after roads reopen, recovery is constrained by reduced throughput, accidents, and delayed warehouse receiving windows. Check for ongoing constraints and ripple effects.

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##### **Northeast (Feb 22–24 impact; recovery variability into late Feb / early Mar):**

- Interstate 95 (Boston–New York–Philadelphia–Baltimore–Washington)
  - New Jersey Turnpike (major access to port terminals and distribution zones)
  - Interstate 78 and Interstate 80 (Northern New Jersey freight access and inland routing)
  - Interstate 90 (Massachusetts Turnpike; Boston corridor)
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##### **South / Midwest corridors affected during Fern and relevant for network after-effects:**

- Interstate 40 (major east–west corridor across the South)
- Interstate 70 (Midwest east–west corridor; St. Louis region sensitivity)
- Interstate 75 (north–south manufacturing and distribution corridor)
- Interstate 85 (Southeast manufacturing corridor, including automotive supply chains)

**Recovery expectation:** transit time variability persists through February 28, 2026, with normalization depending on terminal appointments and warehouse receiving capacity.

## 5. Rail network: recovery constraints and affected systems

Rail is critical for draining container yards. Recovery often lags because it depends on terminal yard space and drayage availability.

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### Freight rail (container evacuation and intermodal):

- CSX Transportation
  - Norfolk Southern Railway
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### Passenger rail and metro systems (workforce access to terminals and industrial zones):

- Amtrak Northeast Corridor
- NJ Transit (New Jersey)
- Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad (New York region)

**Recovery expectation:** elevated intermodal dwell and slower evacuation into early March 2026 in the Northeast corridor.

## 6. Industries affected and scale of impact

### Most exposed industries (priority order):

1. **Retail and consumer goods (apparel, footwear, electronics):** timing-sensitive replenishment and seasonal inventory.
2. **Automotive and industrial manufacturing:** just-in-time components; vulnerability rises as buffer inventory is consumed.
3. **Chemicals and plastics supply chains:** strongest exposure to Houston export volatility and scheduling.
4. **Food and temperature-sensitive goods:** risk of cold-related damage and competition for refrigerated trucking.

### Geographic reach:

- **Regional:** highest impact in Northeast and Southeast distribution corridors (late Feb through early March).
- **National:** moderate impact via inland rail hubs and trucking imbalance (March 2026).
- **Global:** Houston export disruption, vessel schedule unreliability.

## 7. Outlook scenarios (next 7–21 days, anchored to dates)

### Scenario 1 – Base case (most likely): gradual normalization with long tail

- New York–New Jersey stabilizes March 3–10, 2026.
- Houston remains volatile through mid–late March 2026.
- Manageable congestion pockets in Savannah/Charleston/Virginia through March 2026.

### Scenario 2 – Inland transport constraint (high risk): ports open, clearance slows

Triggers: drayage shortages, chassis shortages, limited rail slots, inland terminal congestion.

- Northeast stabilization shifts to mid-March 2026.
- Southeast secondary congestion extends into mid-March 2026.
- Houston volatility extends toward late March 2026.

### Scenario 3 – Diversion surge (medium risk): Southeast becomes secondary bottleneck

Triggers: rerouting away from the Northeast and concentrated arrival waves after schedule disruptions.

- Secondary congestion most likely March 5–20, 2026 in Savannah/Charleston/Virginia.

### Scenario 4 – Houston re-shock (lower probability, high impact)

Triggers: channel restrictions, additional weather disruption, or labor disruption.

- Volatility extends into late March/early April 2026, with higher international ripple risk for chemicals and energy-linked cargo.

## Summary

The February 2026 winter storm cycle created a short-duration shock with a potential multi-week operational tail. While major ports, particularly the Port of New York and New Jersey, have reopened as of February 24–25, 2026, congestion and schedule variability will persist into early March. For Houston, this will potentially spread into mid–late March.

The primary constraint is no longer maritime access but inland evacuation capacity: specifically trucking, chassis availability, rail slots, and yard density. The greatest risk over the coming weeks is a secondary congestion wave in Southeast ports or extended volatility in Houston if inland transport or navigation constraints tighten further.

Impacts will be most visible in retail, automotive, chemicals, and time-sensitive supply chains. Regional effects are already material across the Northeast and Southeast corridors, with selective national and international spillovers—particularly through Houston’s export flows.

Operational stability is returning, but full normalization depends on sustained inland throughput. The next 7–21 days are critical for backlog clearance, cost control, and service protection.

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