

Navigating Value

How the Saint Lawrence Seaway stacks up against other shipping routes



The St. Lawrence Seaway is a pivotal trade corridor that connects the heartland's farmers to markets around the world. Bulk shipping remains the primary method of agricultural export from the Great Lakes region. This well-established network enables producers across the Midwest and Great Lakes basin to access international markets directly, supporting local economies, sustaining jobs, and strengthening regional competitiveness.

The Seaway's success is built on decades of infrastructure investment, efficient port operations, and strong public-private partnerships. Recent improvements, like modernized locks and expanded port facilities, ensure that cargo moves safely, sustainably, and on schedule. As global demand for agricultural products continues to rise, the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway System remains a critical gateway for U.S. and Canadian exports. Its proven efficiency and reliability demonstrate how strategic investment in maritime infrastructure continues to deliver real economic returns for communities across the region.

Price competitiveness plays a crucial role in determining the most efficient and effective shipping routes for global trade. This one pager details averaged data to compare the cost of transporting goods through the St. Lawrence Seaway versus alternative routes as well as shows current costs of moving containers out of the Great Lakes region.



The Saint Lawrence Seaway

- Approximately thirty-seven million tons of cargo was shipped via the St. Lawrence Seaway during the 2024 season.
- Agricultural products represent roughly 40 percent of Seaway trade including wheat, corn, soybeans, barley, oats, flaxseed and more.
- In 2023, the St. Lawrence Seaway supported \$36 billion in economic activity and over 350,000 jobs across the U.S. and Canada.
- Products transported by ship reduce CO2 emissions by 17% compared to rail and 78% compared to trucks.
- From 2005 to 2022, the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation reduced carbon emissions by 69%.

Bulk Shipments



The table below details the average cost in 2025 to ship bulk agricultural commodities via the St. Lawrence Seaway compared to the next most competitive shipping route.

Origin	Destination	Average Transit Days For Seaway Route	Average Price of Seaway Shipment	Average Transit Days For Non-Seaway Route	Average Price of Non-Seaway Shipment
Toledo, OH	Antwerp, BE	15 Days	\$53/MT		
Toledo, OH	Naples, IT	16 Days	\$62/MT		
Toledo, OH	Yokohama, JP	38 Days	\$108/MT		
Toledo, OH	Morocco	14 Days	\$57/MT		
Toledo, OH	Ireland	15 Days	\$59/MT		

Container Shipments

While marine container shipping activity in the Great Lakes remains limited, most agricultural exports from the region currently move on the water in bulk. Due to the scarcity of container shipping data, this one-pager focuses on well-established bulk transport routes.

Several container port development projects are underway across the region – including initiatives at Burns Harbor, Indiana, and Monroe, Michigan. These investments reflect optimism that containerized shipping on the Great Lakes will expand.

The data to the right highlights average 2025 shipping costs for 20-foot containers moving from Great Lakes origins to their destinations via the most competitive routes, not through the Saint Lawrence Seaway.

Origin	Destination	Average Price of Non-Seaway Shipment (20 Ft. Container)
Detroit, MI	Antwerp, BE	\$1,800
Detroit, MI	Yokohama, JP	\$1,800
Chicago, IL	Antwerp, BE	\$1,534
Chicago, IL	Yokohama, JP	\$1,725

The pricing and route information above represents an average compiled from multiple anonymized sources. It is provided for informational purposes only and does not reflect all possible shipping routes or service types.