

October 2026 Market Update: The Rearview & the Road Ahead

Demand Levels & Outlook

Load-board activity remains above 2025, while manufacturing and LTL growth is concentrated in specific segments.

DOMESTIC FREIGHT VOLUME REMAINS SOFT

-28%

August shipment count in the U.S. Bank/DAT freight-payment sample, year over year

The decline in paid-for shipments underscores the lack of a broad-based truckload recovery. This index covers participating freight transactions rather than all U.S. truckload moves.

MANUFACTURING: NARROW JOB GAINS

+9,000

September manufacturing jobs, month over month

Machinery and plastics/rubber accounted for most of the increase. Employment remained 21,000 below January 2025; weakness in autos, food and wood products offsets gains elsewhere.

DATA CENTERS SUPPORT INDUSTRIAL LOADS

+73%

Real data-center construction spending, August year over year

Inflation-adjusted construction activity was 6.2 times its 2022 level. August wholesale sales also grew in electrical goods (+23.6%), professional/commercial equipment (+14.7%) and machinery/equipment (+9.8%).

The buildout supports select manufacturing and distribution lanes, but its concentration leaves those volumes sensitive to a slowdown in capital spending.

REGIONAL LTL IS A BRIGHT SPOT

Estes reported Q3 next-day regional shipments up 13% year over year versus 2.5% for the rest of its network. This is a carrier-specific signal of strength, not a national LTL growth rate.

INVENTORIES REMAIN FURTHER UPSTREAM

58.9

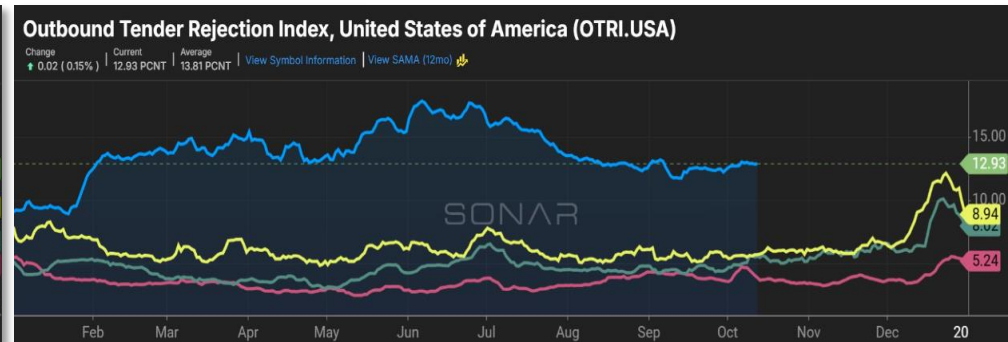
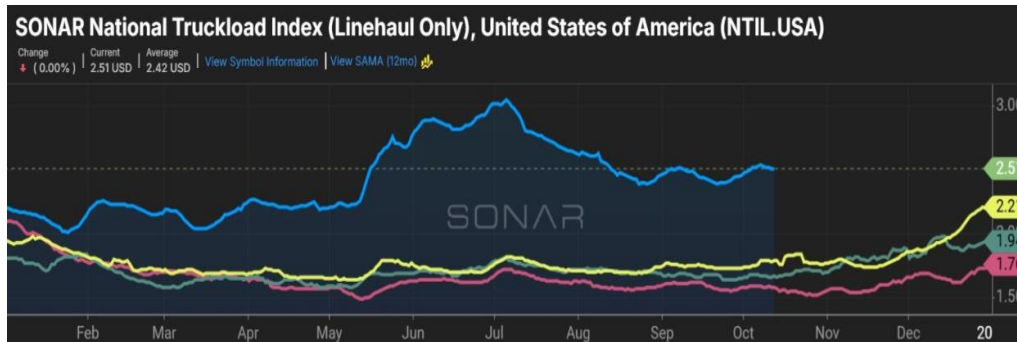
September inventory index from the Logistics Managers' Index survey

Inventory location	Sept. index
Manufacturers / wholesalers	61.4
Retailers	53.8

Inventories grew faster upstream than at retail. Delayed transfers to retail could support pockets of Q4 replenishment activity.

SPOT LOAD POSTS ABOVE A YEAR AGO

Equipment	Early Oct. YoY
Dry van	+23.2%
Reefer	+20.1%
Flatbed	+7.1%



Source: FreightWaves, Institute for Supply Management, U.S. Census Bureau and BEA, Logistics Managers' Index

Supply, Capacity & Carrier Operating Costs

Capacity remains constrained even after the quarter-end volume pullback; high diesel costs and barriers to fleet expansion limit relief.

REJECTIONS SIGNAL LITTLE SPARE CAPACITY

13.9%

National tender rejection rate, compared with under 6% a year earlier

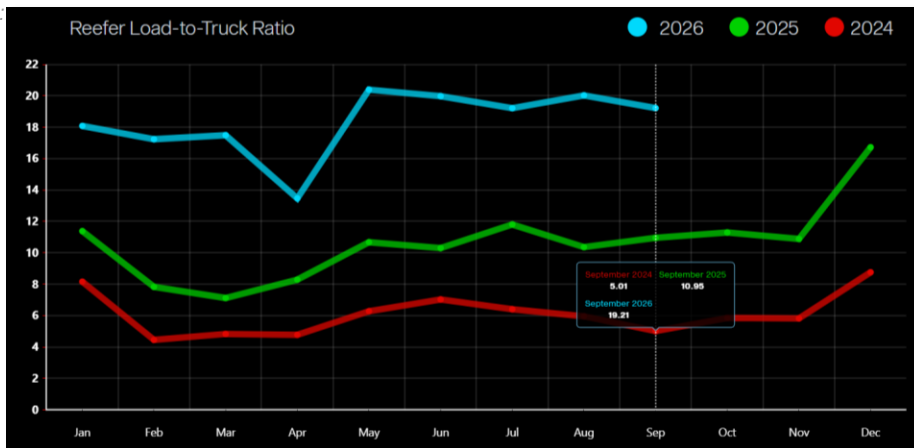
FreightWaves reported accepted tenders down more than 4% over four weeks, to an index of 9,518. Rejections remained elevated even as fewer loads were accepted.

LOAD-TO-TRUCK RATIOS REMAIN HIGH

DAT Board	Early Oct.	Year Ago
Dry van	10.50	6.29
Reefer	16.75	10.71

Ratios eased after quarter-end, but reefer remained 56.5% above last year. The charts below show the 2026 trend versus prior years.

Source:
DAT



TEN MONTHS OF CAPACITY CONTRACTION

34.4

September transportation capacity index; below 50 indicates contraction

The Logistics Managers' Index fell 5.6 points in September. Its 12-month outlook was 37.9, suggesting respondents expect constrained availability to persist.

Additional Indicators	September
Transportation utilization	66.1
Transportation price pressure	92.7

DIESEL COSTS REMAIN ELEVATED

\$6.20

U.S. on-highway diesel per gallon, October 5

Down from \$6.38 the prior week and a recent high above \$6.50; weekly fuel-surge resets can lag carrier fuel purchases.

WHY CAPACITY IS SLOW TO REBUILD

Higher financing costs, driver qualification enforcement and a reluctance to expand after prolonged weak margins are limiting fleet growth. Order activity does not immediately translate into operating trucks.

POSTED TRUCK AVAILABILITY

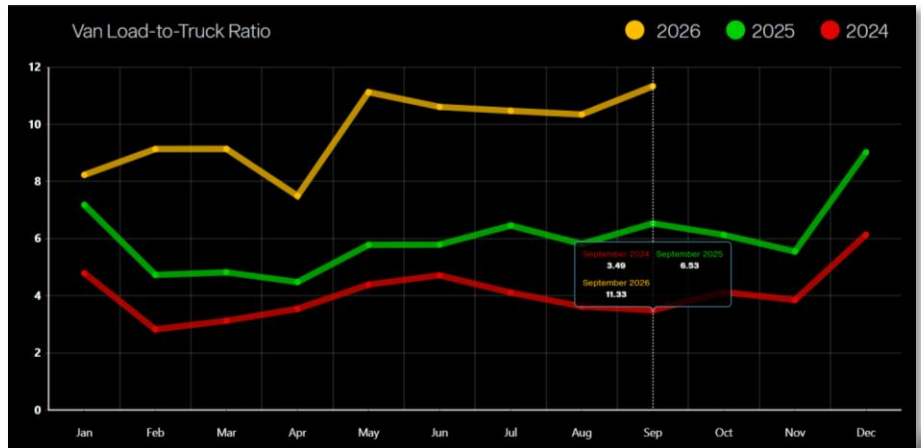
>20%

Fewer DAT truck postings than a year ago in early October

Even with some week-over-week returns to the load board, fewer posted trucks are available to absorb freight. Board counts are not a census of all active tractors.

NEW EQUIPMENT ORDERS

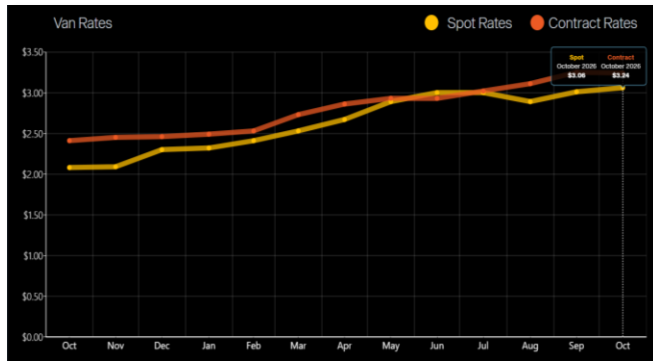
FTR reported 21,300 preliminary Class 8 orders in September: +3% year over year and +18% from August, but below the normal seasonal gain.



Contract & Spot Market Rate Trends

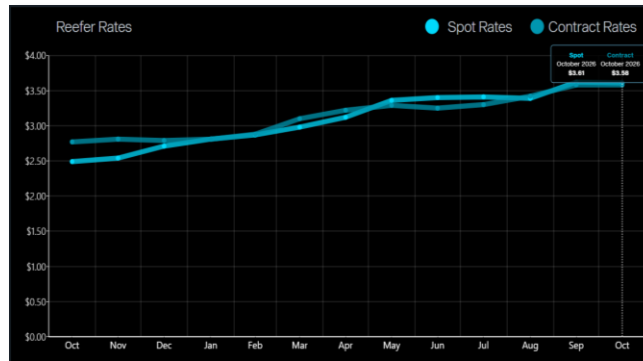
Spot linehaul remains above normal seasonal levels across equipment types, while contract price increases continue to work through the market.

DRY VAN LINEHAUL SPOT RATES



Source: DAT

REEFER LINEHAUL SPOT RATES



FLATBED LINEHAUL SPOT RATES



EARLY OCTOBER SPOT LINEHAUL

Mode	Rate/mi	WoW	YoY
Van	\$2.26	+\$0.05	+35.1%
Reefer	\$2.75	+\$0.06	+32.7%
Flatbed	\$2.65	+\$0.01	+28.8%

Seven-day DAT averages, excluding fuel. Each mode also exceeds its nine-year seasonal norm: van +23.0%, reefer +27.6% and flatbed +25.4%.

REGIONAL PRICE DIFFERENCES

Origin / mode	\$ / mi	YoY
Ohio River / van	\$2.61	+\$0.71
Upper Midwest / reefer	\$3.51	+\$0.98
Ohio River / flatbed	\$3.28	+\$0.99

CONTRACT RATES KEEP RISING

\$2.72

Early October national contract truckload linehaul; +18% year over year

FreightWaves SONAR reports this figure excluding fuel. Separately, DAT shows dry van contract rates up 14% from January through September, with a projected 19% increase over full-year 2026.

UNUSUAL CONTRACT-PRICE MOMENTUM

DAT says a typical full-year contract increase averaged about 3% since 2010. Only 2020 and 2021 saw similarly large calendar-year gains. Contract prices continue to catch up with earlier spot increases.

DAT 35-DAY SPOT RATE FORECAST

Mode	Now	35 days
Van	\$2.26	\$2.23
Reefer	\$2.75	\$2.77
Flatbed	\$2.65	\$2.59

DAT RateCast central estimates; the 70% forecast bands span \$2.16–\$2.30 (van), \$2.68–\$2.86 (reefer) and \$2.52–\$2.65 (flatbed).

2027 LINEHAUL COST SCENARIOS

- TRAFFIX central scenario: +5–8%
- Weaker demand: +2–5%
- Severe capacity constraints: +8–12% or more