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OOCL posts revenue decline in muted first quarter

OOCL's volume on the Asia-Europe trade lane was up 12% in the first quarter. Photo credit: nitpicker / Shutterstock.com.

Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe | Apr 10, 2026, 12:21 PM EDT

OOCL recorded a 7.6% year-over-year drop in first-quarter revenue amid lower demand on most trades and softening rates.

The Cosco subsidiary booked revenue of $2.13 billion in the first three months, with topline sales down across all four main trade lanes as capacity increased 4.3%.

The carrier's total volume rose 1.7% to just under 2 million TEUs, while the overall load factor was 2.1% lower than during the same period in 2025.

Trans-Pacific liner revenue at OOCL fell 17% year over year to $744 million, Asia-Europe revenue was down 4.5% at $482 million, trans-Atlantic revenue fell 4.3% to $163 million, while intra-Asia/Australasia revenue rose 0.7% to $748 million.

The slight increase in first-quarter volume was largely thanks to the Asia-Europe corridor. The carrier handled 384,893 TEUs on Asia-Europe, up 12% year over year while trans-Pacific volume fell 6% to 523,385 TEUs and trans-Atlantic volume was down 1.3% at 133,910 TEUs. Intra-Asia/Australasia volume increased 3% to 954,464 TEUs.

Lagging impact of high bunker fuel price

While the oversupplied container shipping business appears to be heading for a weak first quarter largely unaffected by disruption from the Middle East war, the industry bill for a sharp increase in bunker prices will be due from the second quarter onward, according to investment bank J.P. Morgan.

"The Persian Gulf disruption remains a highly fluid situation and given the time lag in loaded rates, bunker adjustment factors for contracts, and Maersk's two-month bunker fuel inventory, we see the impact skewed to Q2 2026 onwards," the bank wrote in a note to Maersk investors Friday.

J.P. Morgan is expecting Maersk's first-quarter earnings out May 7 will also reflect a muted first quarter, given the decline in freight rates through the end of February and the effects of Persian Gulf disruption not really impacting the first quarter.

But the investment bank highlighted the impact of high bunker fuel prices that carriers are trying to recover through bunker adjustment factors (BAFs) and emergency fuel surcharges.

"We have factored into our 2026 estimates [for Maersk] our assumption that these disruptions will last at least six months, with bunker fuel cost increases post Q2 the biggest drag on earnings that will need to be recovered through firmer spot rates and BAF compliance," J.P. Morgan said.

The bank expects the 2026 bunker fuel bill for Maersk to increase by $1.2 billion to a full-year cost of $7.3 billion on the back of an average price of $693 per ton versus $539 in 2025.

"Maersk reportedly has two months of bunker fuel inventory, which shields it from the current volatility," the bank said. "The bunker fuel adjustment factor for contracts will be recovered in Q3, and therefore there is a lagged fuel cost recovery."

Reflecting this dynamic, J.P. Morgan has forecast that Maersk will report an earnings before interest and taxes loss of $2.6 billion for the year, up from a previous expectation of a $2.8 billion loss.

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