North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Size & Share Analysis - Growth Trends and Forecast (2026 - 2031)

> **Industry:** Maritime, Port & Container Operations (Logistics & Supply Chain)

> **Source:** https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/north-america-containerized-rail-freight-transport-market
> **Scraped Date:** 2026-09-17

Executive Market Summary

Market Metric	Details
Base Market Size	USD 19.21 billion
Projected Forecast (2031)	USD 19.21 billion
Growth Rate (CAGR)	4.56 %
Largest Market Region	N/A
Fastest-Growing Region	N/A

Market Visualizations & Infographics

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![Major players in North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport industry](images/chart_2.png)

![North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Size](images/chart_3.png)

![North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Share by Container Size, 2025](images/chart_4.png)

![North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Share by Shipment Flow, 2025](images/chart_5.png)

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![GPTW](images/chart_19.png)
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Comprehensive Research Analysis

Overview Points List Flex 49 Share Feature End

Market Overview

Study Period | 2020 - 2031 |

Forecast Data Period	2026 - 2031
Base Year Market Size (2025)	USD 18.33 Billion
Market Size (2026)	USD 19.21 Billion
Market Size (2031)	USD 24.01 Billion
Growth Rate (2026 - 2031)	4.56 %
Market Concentration	High

Major Players*Disclaimer: Major Players sorted in no particular order

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Market Overview

North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Analysis by Mordor IntelligenceThe North America containerized rail freight transport market was valued at USD 18.33 billion in 2025, and is estimated to grow from USD 19.21 billion in 2026 to reach USD 24.01 billion by 2031, at a CAGR of 4.56% during the forecast period (2026-2031).

The North America containerized rail freight transport market is supported by manufacturing activity moving closer to North American end markets. Rail carriers and logistics providers are concentrating their plans on routes that connect Mexican industrial centers with the United States demand centers. The North America containerized rail freight transport market also benefits when long-haul rail costs remain below truck costs on dense lanes. Investments in double-stack clearances and terminals can increase capacity without building a completely new rail route. Border operations, chassis availability, and congestion will determine how much of the opportunity turns into reliable service.

Key Report Takeaways

* By container size, 40-foot containers held 55.56% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market share in 2025 and are forecast to grow at a 6.55% CAGR through 2031.
* By container type, general containers held 84.53% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market size in 2025, while refrigerated containers are forecast to grow at a 7.69% CAGR through 2031.
* By shipment flow, domestic freight represented 80.28% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market share in 2025, while international/cross-border freight is forecast to grow at an 8.25% CAGR through 2031.
* By shipment type, full container load shipments represented 87.39% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market size in 2025, while less-than-container load shipments are forecast to grow at a 5.93% CAGR through 2031.
* By cargo type, manufacturing and automotive freight held 29.68% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market share in 2025, while healthcare and pharmaceuticals are forecast to grow at a 7.57% CAGR through 2031.
* By geography, the United States held 82.47% of the North America containerized rail freight transport market share in 2025, while Mexico is forecast to grow at a 5.22% CAGR through 2031.

Key Market Trends

North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Trends and InsightsDrivers Impact Analysis*

Driver	% Impact on CAGR Forecast	Geographic Relevance	Impact Timeline
Cross-Border Nearshoring and North American Manufacturing Integration	+1.1%	United States-Mexico border corridors: Monterrey, Bajio, San Luis Potosi industrial zones	Medium term (2–4 years)
E-Commerce Replenishment Through Inland Intermodal Hubs	+0.8%	United States Midwest, Southeast, West Coast; Canada logistics corridors	Short term (≤ 2 yea

rs) |
Double-Stack Corridor and Terminal-Capacity Expansion | +0.7% | National (United States); East Coast, Midwest, Southern California, Texas gateways | Medium term (2–4 years) |
Rail Economics on Dense Long-Haul Lanes | +0.6% | Transcontinental United States lanes (Los Angeles–Chicago–Northeast); Mexico–United States corridors | Short term (≤ 2 years) |
Cold-Chain and Temperature-Controlled Intermodal Adoption | +0.5% | CPKC corridor (Mexico–Kansas City–Canada); California pharma and produce lanes | Long term (≥ 4 years) |
Single-Line Canada-United States-Mexico Connectivity | +0.4% | Canada–United States–Mexico via CPKC's approximately 20,000-route-mile network | Medium term (2–4 years) |
Source: Mordor Intelligence |

Competitive Landscape

Competitive Landscape

The North America containerized rail freight transport market is concentrated at the network-carrier level. Six Class I railroads control much of the physical rail infrastructure. The provider landscape is more fragmented among intermodal marketing companies and third-party logistics providers. This difference matters because railroads control network capacity while intermediaries shape customer access. The proposed Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern transaction remains an important source of competitive uncertainty. Its outcome could affect carrier relationships and service planning across long-haul routes.

Competition also centers on route design and operating consistency. CPKC and CSX upgraded the Southeast Mexico Express with a dedicated train in May 2026. The companies stated that the service reduced transit times on selected Southeast and Mexico lanes. Norfolk Southern’s East Edge service expanded double-stack connectivity between Chicago and New England in January 2026. These moves show how network improvements can change the available service options for shippers.

Technology and temperature-controlled operations are additional points of competition. CPKC reported year-over-year intermodal revenue growth in the second quarter of 2026. Refrigerated logistics requires specialized assets and robust operating procedures. That can favor providers with direct rail relationships and established cold-chain capabilities. The competitive field remains open for logistics companies that can combine cross-border services with transload and equipment management. The North America containerized rail freight transport market does not appear dominated by one operator across every part of the value chain.

North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Industry Leaders* BNSF Railway Company

* Union Pacific Railroad Company

* Canadian National Railway Company

* Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited

* CSX Transportation, Inc.

* *Disclaimer: Major Players sorted in no particular order

Component Component 3 Scope Of The Report Bottom

North America Containerized Rail Freight Transport Market Report ScopeBy Container Size20-Foot Containers |

40-Foot Containers |
Other Container Sizes |

Segmentation Accordion Item

By CountryCanada |
Mexico |
United States |
Rest of North America |

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the forecast growth rate for North America's containerized rail freight transport?

The sector is forecast to grow at a 4.56% CAGR from 2026 to 2031, rising from USD 18.33 billion in 2025 to USD 24.01 billion by 2031. The outlook reflects manufacturing-linked cross-border demand, long-haul rail economics, and investment in routes that can handle double-stacked containers. Actual service adoption will depend on terminal performance, local drayage, equipment availability, and border reliability.

Which container format leads rail intermodal freight in North America?

40-foot containers led with 55.56% share in 2025 and are forecast to grow at a 6.55% CAGR through 2031. They fit the operating model used for international container flows and high-density double-stack rail services. Other formats remain relevant where cargo weight, domestic cubic capacity, or specialized shipment needs are more important than international standardization.

Why is Mexico important for containerized rail freight?

Mexico is forecast to grow at a 5.22% CAGR, supported by manufacturing locations and the United States-Mexico merchandise trade of USD 872.8 billion in 2025. Manufacturing clusters in Monterrey, Saltillo, Queretaro, and San Luis Potosi create demand for reliable connections with United States factories, distribution centers, and consumers. Border processes and the quality of terminal links will influence the pace of realized growth.

Which shipment flow is growing fastest through 2031?

International/cross-border freight is forecast to grow at an 8.25% CAGR, ahead of the domestic segment. Domestic shipments nevertheless represented 80.28% of the sector in 2025 and remain essential to network scale. Faster cross-border growth reflects the role of Mexican manufacturing, although customs coordination, interchange performance, and balanced equipment positions remain necessary for dependable service.

What is driving refrigerated rail container demand?

Pharmaceutical and perishable shipments need controlled-temperature transport, which supports a 7.57% forecast CAGR for refrigerated containers. This service requires more than a refrigerated container because terminal operations, power access, inspection practices, monitoring, and border procedures need to support cargo integrity. General containers remain much larger because they serve a wider set of dry freight movements.

What are the main operational barriers for intermodal rail freight?

Terminal congestion, longer drayage, chassis shortages, service reliability, and border processing can reduce transit consistency. These challenges can interact at high-volume gateways, where a delay at one part of the journey can affect te rminal slots, local trucking, and equipment returns. Shippers therefore assess total delivery performance rather than comparing rail line-haul costs in isolation.