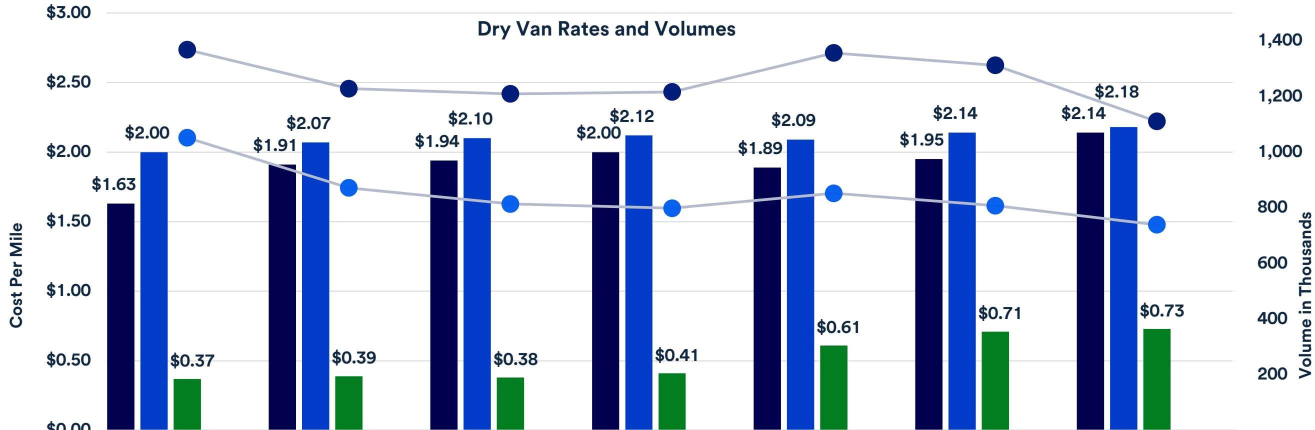
U.S. Bank Freight Payment Index™

THE RATES EDITION

Dry van rates and volumes



	May 2025	Dec 2025	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Apr 2026	May 2026
Spot	$1.63	$1.91	$1.94	$2.00	$1.89	$1.95	$2.14
Contract	$2.00	$2.07	$2.10	$2.12	$2.09	$2.14	$2.18
Fuel	$0.37	$0.39	$0.38	$0.41	$0.61	$0.71	$0.73
Spot Chg %	3.16%	15.06%	1.57%	3.09%	-5.50%	3.17%	9.74%
Cont Chg%	0.50%	2.99%	1.45%	0.95%	-1.42%	2.39%	1.87%
Spot YoY%	2.52%	9.77%	10.86%	22.70%	17.39%	23.42%	31.29%
Cont YoY%	0.50%	1.97%	3.96%	4.95%	4.50%	7.54%	9.00%
Spot Volume	1,368,122	1,228,104	1,209,468	1,216,395	1,356,438	1,312,218	1,110,784
Contract Volume	1,051,696	871,665	813,757	798,592	852,196	807,867	739,184

Data is through respective month-end.

Spot Contract Fuel Spot Volume Contract Volume

U.S. Bank and DAT Freight & Analytics have collaborated to produce new quarterly research on U.S. truck freight rates. The exclusive data and analysis provides freight shippers and carriers with a composite view of truck freight costs, including average-per-mile contract, spot and fuel rates.

> "Freight volumes may appear stable, but costs are telling a different story. As contract rates catch up to spot pricing, shippers face growing exposure to higher transportation spend."
>
> *– Alex Terry*
> *Director, Transportation*
> *Veritiv*

Pricing trends continue to diverge

The U.S. truck freight market continues to show uneven conditions across modes. Less than truckload (LTL) pricing remains comparatively firm, while truckload (TL) pricing is still working through a softer, more fluid market. The most important distinction is that rates have begun to move higher in parts of truckload before a broad recovery in activity has clearly taken hold.

That changes the reading of the market. The current shift is less about demand returning and more about capacity tightening and pricing leverage improving. At the same time, LTL and truckload reflect different pricing mechanisms, with truckload responding more quickly to changes in capacity conditions.[1]

LTL pricing supported by structural discipline

Recent carrier performance reinforces LTL pricing resilience. Old Dominion reported first quarter LTL shipments per day declined 7.9% year over year, yet revenue per hundredweight excluding fuel increased 4.4%.[2] XPO reported a similar pattern, with North American LTL yield excluding fuel increasing 4.0% and shipments per day rising 3.0%.[3]

These results show that carriers are not responding to weaker volumes by reducing price. Instead, they are maintaining yield discipline even in a softer demand environment. That reflects a market still rewarding service quality, network efficiency, and pricing control over pure volume growth.[4]

This behavior is consistent with how LTL pricing functions structurally. LTL rates are typically driven by revenue per hundredweight frameworks, contract cycles, and freight classification rather than real time spot adjustments.[5] That structure helps explain why LTL pricing tends to adjust more gradually and remain comparatively stable even as truckload pricing moves more sharply.

Truckload rates firm as capacity tightens

Truckload remains the more dynamic pricing story. Recent data show spot rates rising materially from late 2025 lows, while contract rates increased more gradually over the same period. This reflects the typical cycle: spot pricing responds first to capacity tightening, while contract pricing follows with a lag.

The timing of the move is important. Spot rate increases accelerated late in the year, while contract rates moved more slowly. This pattern signals tightening in the transactional market rather than a broad rebound in freight demand.

The implication is that price signals in the current environment should be interpreted through a supply lens. Capacity discipline and exit driven tightening appear to be influencing pricing ahead of any sustained recovery in shipment volumes.

Contract premium compression signals a market reset

One of the most important signals in the current market is the compression of the contract premium. The spread between contract and spot pricing narrowed from approximately $0.39 per mile to about $0.11, significantly reducing the traditional buffer between contracted rates and spot exposure.

This compression changes how pricing risk is distributed. As spot rates move closer to contract levels, the margin of protection shippers typically rely on becomes smaller. That increases sensitivity to further market shifts and reduces flexibility in sourcing capacity across channels.

More importantly, the compression reflects a broader reset in pricing levels. Rates moved higher even as volumes declined, indicating that pricing is being driven by supply conditions rather than demand growth. This divergence between rising prices and soft volumes is a clear indicator of a supply led transition in the market.

What it means for shippers

The current environment is defined less by demand expansion and more by supply discipline. Linehaul pricing has increased more than fuel, reinforcing that cost pressure is being driven primarily by capacity dynamics rather than surcharge changes.

For shippers, this creates a disconnect between operational activity and cost experience. Freight may feel stable in terms of volume, but transportation spending can still increase as pricing resets upward.

Managing this environment requires a more active approach. Monitoring spot to contract relationships, aligning routing guides with actual carrier behavior, and stress testing budgets for continued upward pressure in contract pricing become critical. As contract rates continue to catch up to spot, cost exposure may increase even without a corresponding increase in shipment activity.

The bottom line: pricing power is shifting ahead of demand

The current cycle reflects a supply led pricing adjustment rather than a demand driven recovery. Spot markets led the repricing, contract rates are following, and volumes remain under pressure during the transition.

LTL continues to serve as the more stable comparison point, supported by structural pricing mechanisms and disciplined network control. Truckload, by contrast, reflects the clearest evidence of pricing power shifting ahead of a meaningful recovery in demand.[6]

For freight stakeholders, the takeaway is clear: cost per mile can continue to rise in a muted demand environment when supply discipline and capacity tightening are the primary drivers of pricing behavior.

[1,5,6] FTR Transportation Intelligence, Understanding LTL Rates; differences in pricing mechanisms between LTL and truckload.
[2,4] Old Dominion Freight Line, First Quarter 2026 Earnings Release; LTL shipments per day and revenue per hundredweight excluding fuel.
[3] XPO Inc., First Quarter 2026 Results; North American LTL yield excluding fuel and shipments per day.

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