

# YOUR END-TO-END IMPORT/EXPORT FREIGHT CHECKLIST



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#### **EVERY PROVIDER SAYS THEY CAN HANDLE IT. MOST CAN'T.**

If you've ever moved oversize, non-containerized, or complex international breakbulk cargo, you know the stakes:







Tight Timelines

Tight Tolerances

Zero Margin for Error

Whether you're importing machinery from overseas or exporting project cargo to a cross-border site, your logistics provider isn't just a service vendor — they're the linchpin of your supply chain.

One missed permit. One poorly-timed dray. One piece of equipment too big for a carrier's fleet. **That's all it takes for your project schedule to unravel.** 

That's why you're here.

#### You Don't Need More Providers. You Need the Right One.

Many shippers build networks by stringing together multiple freight providers: One for drayage, one for border crossings, another for bonded storage, another still for transloading.

But every handoff adds complexity — and complexity is the enemy of reliability.

The best results come from working with a provider that can do it all — and do it all well.



But how can you tell if a logistics provider is truly up to the task?

ATS International, sister company of Anderson Trucking Service (ATS) and global logistics provider, has been helping importers, exporters, and project freight shippers navigate complicated freight moves for decades.

We know what it takes to be a logistics provider shippers can truly count on to deliver comprehensive, seamless service. Spoiler alert: **most providers just don't measure up.** 

While lots of carriers do some things exceptionally well, few have the **experience**, **equipment**, **and infrastructure** to do everything you need at the highest possible service level.

But finding that needle-in-a-haystack provider isn't impossible. You just need to know what you're looking for.



### This checklist is designed to help you:

Vet potential new providers before you sign on

Audit your existing freight network for hidden gaps and inefficiencies

Clarify what "end-to-end" service really looks like for international and out-of-gauge freight

Inside, you'll find the critical capabilities a comprehensive import/export logistics provider should offer, from customs documentation to heavy lift cargo handling to final-mile coordination.

Along the way, you'll find key questions to ask, red flags to watch for, and insights you can use to separate the reliable from the risky.

Because when it comes to your import/export logistics, good enough . . . isn't.

Let's get started.



#### **PRE-SHIPMENT PLANNING & PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

- Specialized expertise in cross-border/ international shipping and project freight
- Single point of contact for multimodal coordination
- Customer portal for tracking, documentation, and communication
- Route optimization and feasibility analysis for oversize freight
- Coordination of permits and escort vehicles
- Timeline and milestone-based project planning
- Risk mitigation planning (Weather, congestion, compliance, etc.)

The pre-shipment phase is often the most stressful and complex part of an international project freight move — which makes sense, as it's also the most critical. Before a single piece of cargo moves, the success of its shipment is already being determined.

At this early stage, you're navigating a web of competing priorities: conducting route surveys, securing permits, coordinating timelines, booking specialized equipment, managing regulatory compliance and anticipating every potential disruption from port congestion to weather delays.

And no matter how diligently you prepare, even the bestlaid plans can unravel if you're relying on providers that only offer partial solutions or lack the infrastructure to handle the complexities of border crossings, out-of-gauge cargo, or breakbulk freight.

Getting this part right is vital, and you're no doubt feeling the pressure. But the right logistics provider can transform this stage from an anxiety-ridden guessing game into a seamless, strategic launching pad for a successful shipment.

When your freight provider acts like a true project manager — not just a carrier — you gain **visibility**, **control**, **and peace of mind** before the first lift ever happens.

Your best-fit providers will leverage their deep experience and industry knowledge to **build** a **start-to-finish plan** that will keep your freight moving across jurisdictions without delays.



They'll also demonstrate **proactivity** throughout the preshipment phase. Even before a single piece of freight moves, expect your provider to be working to minimize border risks, streamline customs, and protect your timelines at every critical checkpoint.

To that end, weather disruptions, port congestion, customs inspections, and cross-border bottlenecks shouldn't come as a surprise to seasoned import/export providers — they should be **anticipated with built-in contingencies.** 



Great providers will help you get onboarded to their customer portal (if they have one) so you can access self-service load tracking, documents, and communication with your point of contact all from one digital hub.

Ultimately, your provider should be continually looking out for your shipment's best interests from the start.

Choosing the right partner at this early stage doesn't just move freight: it moves your entire project forward with fewer surprises and greater confidence.

The providers who check all the boxes in this section are the ones you can trust to eliminate uncertainties and keep your cargo, costs, and commitments firmly under control.

#### **RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

If a provider shows any of the following signs, it may be a warning that they're not equipped to handle the demands of your international freight:



Vague or incomplete pre-shipment planning services ("We'll figure it out.")



No clear point of contact assigned before the move begins.



Limited experience with permits, escorts, or regulatory compliance for project freight.



No milestone tracking or formalized project timeline beyond basic pickup and delivery dates.



No discussion of contingency planning or proactive risk management.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

When a provider can't answer these questions confidently — or brushes them aside — it's a clear sign that your shipment may be heading for preventable delays, cost overruns, or compliance headaches:

- » Do you provide full project management support, or just transportation services?
- » Can you secure all necessary permits and escorts for my project, or will I need a third party?
- » How do you conduct route feasibility assessments for oversize freight?
- » Who will be my day-to-day point of contact?
- » Do you have a customer portal or other digital tool(s) to provide visibility into shipment tracking, documentation, etc?
- » What contingency plans will you have in place for weather, equipment failure, or border/port congestion?



#### **ORIGIN HANDLING & FREIGHT CONSOLIDATION**

Access to appropriate trucks/transportation to move freight efficiently from origin facility to port or border crossing

On-terminal equipment to handle oversize or out-of-gauge freight

Heavy lift/load-out capabilities

Cross-docking and transloading capabilities

Access to bonded or FTZ storage at origin

Getting your freight to the port or across a border safely and on schedule starts long before any wheels hit the road. The origin handling and consolidation stage is where your shipment takes physical shape.

It's also the stage at which shippers face the frustrations of having siloed service providers, limited terminal capabilities, and inconsistent communication.

The truth is that many delays happen before the freight moves. Missteps here — like improper handling, damaged freight, or delays in staging — can cascade downstream, leading to missed sailings, detention fees, or even cargo rejection at the border or port.

So, what are the traits of a provider that can successfully shepard you through this phase of your shipment? Let's start with the basics. Even if a provider has strong origin handling capabilities (storage, transloading,

consolidation), getting the freight moved out of its origin facility and to the port efficiently is essential.

Especially for non-containerized or heavy haul shipments, not every provider is equipped to handle the size, weight, and permitting needed. Having access to the *right* equipment (lowboys, step-decks, extendables, multi-axles, etc.) is crucial.



If a provider can't secure the appropriate transportation quickly — or if they have to outsource it without a high degree of control — you may be exposed to delays and additional costs that can cause you to miss vessel cutoffs or rack up storage and detention charges.

Now let's talk location, location, location. The right logistics provider can minimize risk (and inconvenience) by offering secure, strategically located terminal facilities near key ports and borders.

These facilities shorten the distances the cargo must travel to reach each new stage of its journey, thereby limiting the variables that can cause delays.



With the right infrastructure, access to these terminals can also accelerate customs clearance and reduce rehandling. Many providers leverage their terminal locations to offer cross-docking, transloading, heavy lift, and storage solutions all in one place (or darn close to it).

We recommend striving to partner with a provider that can manage this leg of your shipment on their own footprint. This eliminates unnecessary handoffs and dramatically reduces the risk of rework, re-handling, or rescheduling.

At the end of the day, it's not just about preparing your freight to move — it's about setting it up to move well from the very beginning.

#### **RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

Watch for these warning signs that a provider may lack the infrastructure, equipment, or expertise to manage your freight properly at origin:



No direct access to secure terminal facilities or reliance on third-party yards for handling.



Limited/generic handling capabilities that don't account for freight size, weight, or sensitivity.



Lack of bonded or FTZ storage options near port or border areas.



No clear process for load integrity checks, documentation, or staging visibility.



Inflexibility around scheduling or changes to cargo configurations.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

To ensure your freight is handled correctly from the start, ask potential providers these critical questions about their origin handling and consolidation capabilities:

- » Do you operate secure terminals near major ports or border crossings?
- » Can your team handle oversize or breakbulk cargo at origin without third-party support?
- » What equipment do you have onsite for heavy lift, transloading, and consolidation?
- » How do you guarantee secure and weatherappropriate staging for freight awaiting transit?
- » Are bonded storage or FTZ options available if my cargo needs to pause before customs?





### TRANSPORTATION & BORDER/PORT NAVIGATION

Licensed customs brokerage services or documentation coordination

Access to overweight corridors and ports-ofentry familiar with project freight

Drayage to/from port, yard, or FTZ

Open-deck trucking capacity, including heavy haul or breakbulk transport capabilities

If you thought we were done with complexity, think again.

Whether your shipment is aboard a vessel, carried on rail, or traveling via truck, there's plenty that can gum up the works of an otherwise efficient move. Crossing borders and navigating ports can cause even experienced shippers to run into costly delays, unexpected fees, or shipment holds.

What's more, actually moving your freight is only one part of the larger shipping success equation.

Compliance, documentation, and transportation restrictions are where many providers fall short — and failing to plan for these nuances effectively can cause a domino effect that may stall shipments, create storage backlogs, or even trigger fines.

Clearly, getting freight from Point A to Point B isn't enough, but extra handoffs make for extra risky moves.

That's why every element your provider can handle "in house" — whether it's customs documentation, bonded cargo handling, overweight corridor access, or port drayage — reduces your exposure to risk at a stage where mistakes are costly and time-consuming.

When a provider can confidently "check every box" at this stage, they're not just moving freight — they're **protecting** your reputation, safeguarding your investment, and keeping your commitments intact.

The right provider can minimize delays and help you avoid regulatory penalties by utilizing deep expertise across every critical checkpoint. They know what paperwork needs to be filed, what routes are permitted, and how to navigate port and customs bottlenecks without last-minute scrambling.

There's also cargo integrity to think about. Selecting a carrier that can provide specialized open-deck equipment, heavy haul routing knowledge, *and* transloading capabilities helps to ensure your freight moves safely without unnecessary re-handling or transfers.

Finally, only consider providers that have a demonstrated track record of meeting milestones reliably and with transparency.

Missing a ship date or delaying a border clearance by even a day can negatively impact downstream construction schedules, product launches, or critical site installations. (It won't make customers happy, either.)

Choosing a provider that has proven it can stick to timelines — and actively track, update, and manage your



freight throughout its transport — will free you from timeline-related anxiety and guessing at shipment status.

Ultimately, transportation and border navigation aren't just operational hurdles; they're the riskiest points in your supply chain.

Selecting a provider that treats these stages with the precision they deserve helps you move faster, comply smarter, and deliver your freight with confidence, not crossed fingers.

#### **RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

Watch for these warning signs that a provider may lack the infrastructure, equipment, or expertise to manage your freight properly at origin:



Limited or no experience with cross-border shipments, customs documentation, or bonded freight.



No clear process for managing customs, overweight permits, route restrictions, or port drayage.



Reliance on multiple third parties to manage port/terminal transitions.



Inconsistent communication or lack of real-time updates during transit and clearance stages.



No ability to flex equipment types for different freight profiles or last-minute changes.



#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

To ensure your freight is handled correctly from the start, ask potential providers these critical questions about their origin handling and consolidation capabilities:

- » Do you manage cross-border or port clearances in-house, or rely on third parties?
- » How do you ensure compliance with customs documentation and international shipping regulations?
- » Are you experienced with bonded cargo, overweight corridor routing, and specialized permitting?
- » What types of open-deck and project cargo equipment are available in your fleet or network?
- » How do you handle real-time tracking, communication, and milestone updates during transit and clearance?













### **STORAGE & IN-TRANSIT FLEXIBILITY**

- Short-term or long-term storage availability near destination port or border, including FTZs and bonded facilities
- Secure storage options for oversize, out-ofgauge, and breakbulk freight
- Flexible freight staging for phased project delivery
- Real-time inventory and location visibility

Freight moves are rarely as linear as they look on paper. Even the most carefully planned international shipments may still encounter a hitch or two that requires your team to pivot, seeking out storage options or other in-transit flexibility levers to pull.

But these services aren't just "Break Glass In Case of Emergency"-style tools in a smart shipper's toolbelt.

After all, not every importer/exporter can receive freight immediately. Many are incorporating storage at FTZs or bonded warehouses into their cost-management strategy, leveraging their unique benefits to decrease or eliminate their tariff, duty, or inventory costs.

Regardless of your "why," without access to flexible, secure storage options near ports, border crossings, bonded facilities, or FTZs, even small setbacks could create major cost overruns and operational headaches.



But you also need other services like drayage, transloading, and over-the-road trucking — and you need all these elements to work together seamlessly if you want to maintain supply chain efficiency.

That's why we recommend looking for a single provider that can manage your freight from origin to destination and all points in between. It all comes down to limiting the risk and complexity of your freight's chain of custody.

Integrated providers with flexible, compliant storage help manage congestion and reduce demurrage by transporting your freight from the vessel or border directly into storage or FTZ space without unnecessary re-handling.

When it's time to move again, that same provider can seamlessly coordinate final-mile transportation without missing a beat — no rescheduling, no lost paperwork, and no need to reintroduce your freight requirements to a new team.

What does that mean for you? Fewer touchpoints, faster transitions between storage and transport, and tighter control over both costs and timing.



These are essential advantages when striving to keep your freight intact, your timelines on track, and your supply chain moving as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

A provider with strong storage and in-transit flexibility ensures that unexpected changes (or strategic pauses in freight movement) don't derail your supply chain or your project deadlines.

Instead of scrambling to find a solution when plans shift, you'll already have one built into the foundation of your logistics strategy.

#### **RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

Be wary of these signs that a provider may not have the flexibility or infrastructure to safely manage your freight between transit phases:



Limited or no bonded storage or FTZ access near key port or border locations.



Generic warehousing solutions not suited for oversize or project cargo.



No clear processes for weather protection, security, or cargo condition reporting during storage.



Inability to accommodate last-minute schedule changes or phased project staging.



No system for real-time inventory visibility or cargo status updates.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

To ensure your freight stays protected and your timeline stays intact, ask potential providers these key questions about their storage and in-transit management capabilities:

- » Do you have the capabilities to oversee my freight's entire lifecycle for origin to destination?
- » Do you offer bonded storage and FTZ solutions near major ports and border crossings?
- » What types of secure storage options do you provide for oversize and out-of-gauge freight?
- » Can you support flexible freight staging and phased project delivery if needed?
- » How is cargo protected from weather exposure or potential handling damage while in storage?
- » What systems do you have in place for real-time inventory visibility and shipment tracking during storage?





### FINAL MILE EXCECUTION

- Delivery coordination to project site, jobsite, or other destination
- Lift-on/lift-off support at delivery site
- Offloading coordination with cranes or rigging providers
- Post-delivery documentation and proof-of-receipt processes
- Post-delivery check-in and review of project successes and weaknesses to drive continual improvement

Your shipment isn't complete until the freight is delivered safely and efficiently — and that last leg is where poor handoffs or capacity gaps can cause major pain.

The unfortunate reality is that by the time you reach the final mile, some providers may already be mentally checked out. **You can't afford that.** 

Your shipments and projects deserve a provider who treats final delivery with the same focus and urgency as every earlier stage, ensuring that your investment, reputation, and schedule stay firmly on track.

Ideally, your final mile carrier will be the same provider you've worked with from the start, with the capabilities to provide all necessary details and services at this critical juncture. At the very least, your provider should take the lead on obtaining those services from highly-vetted vendors, rather than leave you high and dry as soon as your freight hits the laydown yard.

When your provider controls the full chain of custody, you can rest assured they understand the history, handling needs, and timeline of your freight better than any outside party ever could.

They won't be guessing about crane requirements, site access, or staging conditions — they planned for them from day one.

Integrated providers can coordinate final-mile delivery, offloading, and site handoffs with precision, ensuring that your cargo arrives safely, meets project schedules, and clears the last logistical hurdle without costly surprises.



And speaking of coordination: While freight transport and logistics management are obviously important, so is your provider's experience with site-specific deliveries to project sites, remote locations, or to ports for re-exporting.

Without the necessary experience to support their capabilities and services, you may find yourself in a pickle come delivery day. Details like delivery windows, equipment coordination, and cargo handling and security requirements can easily get missed.

Freight- or site-specific nuances can also be overlooked, leading to preventable delays just when you thought you'd be wrapping up a job well done.

So, as you ask potential import/export providers the questions listed below, listen for red flags and be wary of any "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it" -type responses.

Those are strong indicators that the provider in question doesn't have the expertise or attention to detail necessary to bring your critical freight moves to a satisfactory conclusion.

#### **RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR**

If a provider shows any of these signs, they may be unprepared for the unique demands of final mile execution:



No clear plan for coordinating delivery timing with on-site crews or equipment.



Limited experience with project site deliveries, especially for oversize, breakbulk, or complex freight.



No flexibility to adjust for site conditions (e.g., weather, access restrictions, staging limitations).



Poor or infrequent communication leading up to final delivery.

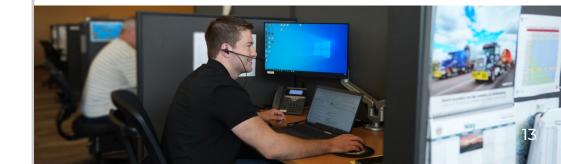


No standard process for proof-of-delivery (POD) or shipment condition reporting.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

To protect your timeline, cargo, and project success, ask potential providers these critical questions about their final mile execution capabilities:

- » How do you coordinate site-specific delivery requirements, including cranes, rigging, or laydown space?
- » Do you own the trucks that will carry my freight to its final destination?
- » What qualifications and training do your drivers have?
- » Do you have experience delivering oversize or breakbulk cargo directly to project sites or remote facilities?
- » How do you flex or troubleshoot to accommodate specific site conditions?
- » What steps do you take to ensure final-mile cargo security and condition?
- » How do you communicate arrival windows and handle unforeseen delays on delivery day?
- » Can you provide documentation or proof-of-delivery immediately upon final receipt?





### **DELIVER SUCCESS ACROSS BORDERS**

Moving complex, high-stakes freight across borders, ports, and project sites isn't easy — but with the right information, you can set your shipments (and your business) up for success.

Throughout this guide, we've outlined the critical phases of import/export project freight, from pre-shipment planning and origin handling to border navigation, storage flexibility, final mile execution, and end-to-end visibility.

We've equipped you with the questions to ask, the red flags to watch for, and the signs that separate true freight experts from risky one-off providers.

Armed with this knowledge, you're no longer at the mercy of fragmented networks, incapable providers, or guesswork logistics.

You have a clear roadmap for evaluating current and future providers, so you can ensure every piece of your supply chain is ready to support your timelines, protect your cargo, and keep your international projects moving forward without unnecessary surprises.



#### What's Next?

- Print the checklist. On the next page, you'll find a comprehensive checklist featuring every checkbox you've seen in this guide. Use it to audit your current freight network or vet new providers. Gaps you identify now are solvable problems you can avoid in the future.
- Ask the right questions. Engage in conversations with potential logistics partners who can prove they offer full-spectrum solutions, not just partial services or patchwork logistics coordination.
- Choose a provider who doesn't just move freight, but manages success. Look for partners who offer transportation, storage, project management, and international compliance expertise all in one seamless operation.

You're ready to take control of your import/export strategy and ensure success before the first load moves. We're confident that with this guide in hand, you can build an international freight network worthy of your business.

#### Questions along the way?

You can always check out the ATS Learning Hub or reach out to one of our cross-border transportation experts. We're here to help you succeed in any way we can.



## YOUR END-TO-END IMPORT/EXPORT FREIGHT CHECKLIST PROVIDERS FAIL



Use this checklist to identify whether your current or prospective freight provider can deliver every capability required for complex import/export success. When one provider can check every box, you gain tighter control, fewer delays, and a smoother experience from origin to final delivery.

TRANSPORT LOGISTICS
Access to appropriate trucks/transportation to move freight efficiently from origin facility to port or border crossing
Cross-docking and transloading capabilities
<ul> <li>Access to overweight corridors and ports-of-entry familiar with project freight</li> </ul>
☐ Drayage to/from port, yard, or FTZ
<ul> <li>Open-deck trucking capacity, including heavy haul or breakbulk transport capabilities</li> </ul>
STORAGE & DELIVERY
STORAGE & DELIVERY  Access to bonded or FTZ storage at origin
<ul><li>Access to bonded or FTZ storage at origin</li><li>Short-term or long-term storage availability near destination port or border, including FTZs and</li></ul>
<ul> <li>Access to bonded or FTZ storage at origin</li> <li>Short-term or long-term storage availability near destination port or border, including FTZs and bonded facilities</li> <li>Secure storage options for oversize, out-of-gauge, and</li> </ul>

PLANNING & COORDINATION
<ul> <li>Specialized expertise in cross-border/international shipping and project freight</li> </ul>
☐ Single point of contact for multimodal coordination
<ul><li>Customer portal for tracking, documentation, and communication</li></ul>
<ul> <li>Route optimization and feasibility analysis for oversize freight</li> </ul>
Coordination of permits and escort vehicles
☐ Timeline and milestone-based project planning
Risk mitigation planning (Weather, congestion, compliance, etc.)
Licensed customs brokerage services or documentation coordination
<ul> <li>Delivery coordination to project site, jobsite, or other destination</li> </ul>
Post-delivery check-in and review of project successes and weaknesses to drive continual improvement
EQUIDMENT & HANDLING
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☐ Offloading coordination with cranes/rigging providers
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Lift-on/lift-off support at delivery site
☐ Heavy lift/load-out capabilities