



GEOPOLITICAL RISK MONITORING

Panama Canal

Rapid assessment of people, assets, priority risks, decision triggers, disruption exposure, and accountability.

LOCATION / AREA OF CONCERN	WHY IT MATTERS	STATUS	LAST REVIEWED
Panama Canal, Gatun Lake and Atlantic-Pacific approaches	Draft cuts and slot reductions together lower cargo per transit and transits per day, transferring cost into freight, inventory, working capital and customer delivery without a closure. The queue peaked at 161 vessels in mid-Aug 2026 with waits past 11 days.	Critical	24 AUG 2026

PEOPLE AND ASSETS EXPOSE

PERSONNEL	FACILITIES / EQUIPMENT	SUPPLY CHAIN / DATA	CUSTOMERS / COMMITMENTS
Vessel crews, canal workforce, port and logistics personnel	Locks, Gatun Lake, terminals, vessels and intermodal capacity	US East/Gulf Coast trade, LNG, agriculture, containers, schedules and booking data	Carriers, exporters, importers, manufacturers, retailers and end customers

PRIORITY RISK AND BUSINESS EXPOSURE

#	RISK EVENT	WHO ABSORBS IMPACT	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	DISRUPTION COST	OPERATIONAL EFFECT
1	Progressive draft reductions lower Neopanamax cargo capacity	Carriers and exporters first; importers, manufacturers and consumers later	H	H	High \$250K-\$1M+	Draft falls to 48 ft on 26 Aug and 47.5 ft on 3 Sep 2026, the fourth and fifth adjustments since water measures began in Dec 2025. Less cargo moves per sailing while vessel costs remain.
2	Slot reductions cut transits per day independently of draft	Shippers, distributors, production sites, customers and Panama	H	H	Severe \$1M+	ACP states the draft change does not reduce daily transits. Capacity is cut through the booking system: daily transits down from about 36 to 32, supplementary lock auctions suspended to 2 Sep, Neopanamax slots to nine per day from 4 Sep.
3	Cargo rerouting shifts congestion to alternate ports, rail and longer routes	Ports, logistics providers, carriers, suppliers and customers	M	M-H	High \$250K-\$1M+	Diversion raises fuel and handling cost, consumes capacity and spreads delay beyond the canal corridor.
4	Auction premiums and carrier surcharges replace queue time for firms that must transit	Charterers and cargo owners first; customers through freight and pricing	H	M-H	High \$250K-\$1M+	Neopanamax auction premiums reached \$425,000 and one container ship reportedly paid about \$4M for a slot. MSC, Hapag-Lloyd and CMA CGM have imposed canal-related surcharges.

DECISION TRIGGERS

#	OBSERVABLE TRIGGER	THRESHOLD / SOURCE	REQUIRED ACTION
1	ACP announces maximum Neopanamax draft below 48 feet or an additional transit limitation	Official Panama Canal Authority advisory or navigation notice	BREACHED 5 AUG 2026, when ACP announced 47.5 ft effective 3 Sep. Escalation is live: identify affected bookings, cargo loads, contracts and customer dates, and recalculate unit freight and inventory needs.
2	Average wait exceeds 5 days, or two major carriers impose canal-related surcharge or service change	ACP transit data, carrier notices and vessel-tracking confirmation	BREACHED AUG 2026. The queue peaked at 161 vessels with waits past 11 days, and MSC, Hapag-Lloyd and CMA CGM imposed surcharges. Model 30, 60 and 90 day scenarios. Compare reduced-load transit, rerouting and alternate-port options, and communicate customer impacts.
3	Further change to ACP booking rules, slot counts or auction structure	ACP advisories to shipping and booking-system notices	Reprice affected voyages. From 21 Aug auction slots are split into four market groups with one slot per customer per day and Last-Minute service suspended. From 1 Sep a late-cancellation surcharge applies inside seven days.

ANALYST ASSESSMENT / COST BASIS / KEY GAP

Assessment: Verified fact: ACP announced on 5 Aug 2026 that Neopanamax draft falls to 48 ft on 26 Aug and 47.5 ft on 3 Sep, the fourth and fifth adjustments since water measures began in Dec 2025. ACP states these draft changes do not reduce the number of daily transits. Separately, daily transits have been cut from about 36 to 32, supplementary lock auction slots are suspended through 2 Sep, and Neopanamax slots drop to nine per day from 4 Sep. Analytical judgment: draft and slot policy are two instruments acting at once, and the queue is driven by the second. A shipper answers a slot cut differently from a draft cut, so the distinction decides which mitigation works.

Cost basis: High-to-Severe exposure (\$250K to \$1M+) assumes 30 to 90 days affecting multiple shipments. It combines freight increases, split shipments, added inland transport, inventory carrying cost, working-capital demand, demurrage, replanning and margin or revenue at risk. The tier rises above \$1M for high-volume, time-sensitive or production-critical flows and falls where cargo is flexible or contractually protected. Slot auction cost is now a separate and observable line: Neopanamax premiums reached \$425,000, with one reported transit near \$4M.

So what: A closure is not required for material loss. Reduced draft and reduced slots transfer cost from carriers and exporters into importers, manufacturers, retailers and customers. Both decision triggers on this card were breached before it was written, so the escalation actions are live rather than pending. Leadership should identify canal-dependent lanes and pass-through terms before smaller payloads and auction premiums become embedded in freight, inventory policy and customer pricing.

Key gap: Shipment volume, vessel type, cargo density, booking status, alternate routes, inventory days, customer penalties and pass-through terms are required for a company-specific estimate. Also booking position under the rules effective 21 Aug and 1 Sep 2026, and whether auction premiums and carrier surcharges are recoverable under existing contracts.

Sources: ACP notice to shipping on Neopanamax draft adjustments, 5 Aug 2026. ACP transit and booking modification advisories effective 21 Aug and 1 Sep 2026. ACP Q3 FY2026 update, 9 Jul 2026. Reuters, 5 Aug 2026. Queue counts, wait times and auction premiums are drawn from trade reporting for Aug 2026 and should be confirmed against ACP transit statistics before reuse.