

# 2024 GREAT LAKES – ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY WATERWAY TONNAGE ACTIVITY



## Introduction

This report gives a description of the tonnage volume moved within the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Waterway System during the 2024 calendar year, activity that supports hundreds of thousands of jobs on ships, in ports, and a wide range of industries dependent of marine transportation.

The Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Waterway (GLSLW) is a strategically important commercial thoroughfare in North America. This waterway connects Canada and the United States and links inland regions of North America with countries around the world. Stretching from Lake Superior to the end of the St. Lawrence River and connecting to Atlantic Canada and the Arctic, this bi-national trade corridor serves the U.S. and Canada’s most vital inland markets and facilitates billions of dollars of economic activity annually.

The commodities moved on the GLSLW are moved by either Canadian fleet, U.S. fleet, or foreign-flag vessels (also referred to as “salties”). These vessels move upbound (westward) and downbound (eastward) loading and/or unloading a wide range of commodities at ports within the system either for domestic use or destined to/originating from foreign ports.

## Data Sources

This report analyzes the tonnage activity trend of some of the system’s core commodities and the composition of this tonnage, based on the three proprietary tonnage data sources:

- Chamber of Marine Commerce: survey of tonnage data provided by seven (7) Canadian shipping companies;
- Lake Carriers Association: annual reports on tonnage data for U.S. shipping companies operating in the Great Lakes; and
- St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation: data for domestic and international tonnage that passes through, and is dependent on, the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The report excludes international tonnage volumes at St. Lawrence River and Saguenay River ports that did not pass through the St. Lawrence Seaway to or from Great Lakes ports.



## 2024 Tonnage Overview

In 2024, more than 142 million metric tonnes of cargo moved through the GLSLW shipping corridor. The Canadian fleet moved approximately 60 million metric tonnes, accounting for 42 percent of all tonnage, while the U.S. fleet ships handled the largest share of tonnage at nearly 71 million metric tonnes, representing 49 percent of total cargo volumes.

Tonnage volumes across the GLSLW system increased by 1.8% in 2024 compared to the previous year, driven by an increase in tonnage handled by foreign fleets operating

through the St. Lawrence Seaway, reaching 12.4 million metric tonnes, an increase of 12.8% over the prior year. In contrast, both Canadian (-1.8%) and U.S. fleet (-3.9%) shipments saw a decrease in their total tonnage.

Of the total 142 million metric tonnes moved through the entire system, 37 million metric tonnes (26%) transited the St. Lawrence Seaway, with approximately 24.6 million metric tonnes (67%) handled by Canadian vessels and 12.4 million metric tonnes (33%) shipped by foreign carriers.

**Table 1: 2019-2024 Tonnage Overview (Tonnage in 000s Metric Tonnes)<sup>1</sup>**

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024/2023 % Change
CANADIAN FLEET	65,264	63,964	63,209	62,058	60,681	59,556	-1.8%
U.S. FLEET	81,649	63,543	74,194	69,293	73,805	70,938	-3.9%
FOREIGN FLEET (GL-SEAWAY)	11,200	11,600	11,600	11,700	11,043	12,459	+12.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>158,113</b>	<b>139,107</b>	<b>149,003</b>	<b>143,050</b>	<b>145,529</b>	<b>142,953</b>	<b>+1.8%</b>

**Table 2: Commodity Breakdown 2024 vs. 2023 Tonnage Overview (Tonnage in 000s Metric Tonnes)**

Commodity	2023		2024	
	Tonnage	% of Total	Tonnage	% of Total
Grain	11,614	8%	13,522	9%
Iron Ore	50,289	35%	50,210	35%
Coal	11,933	8%	11,356	8%
Stone/Sand	32,108	22%	29,607	21%
Cement	5,984	4%	5,056	4%
Salt	8,751	6%	7,095	5%
Other Dry Bulk	8,442	6%	7,877	6%
Petroleum Product	11,466	8%	13,159	9%
Other Liquid	589	-	510	-
Steel	2,843	2%	3,072	2%
General Cargo	1,510	1%	1,489	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>145,529</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>142,953</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>1</sup> 2023 Canadian-fleet figures have been revised, all numbers for that year now reflect the updated dataset.

## Canadian Fleet – Cargo Tonnage

Canadian carriers handled roughly 60 million metric tonnes during 2024.

**Table 3: Canadian Fleet Tonnage by Commodity (Tonnage in 000s Metric Tonnes)**

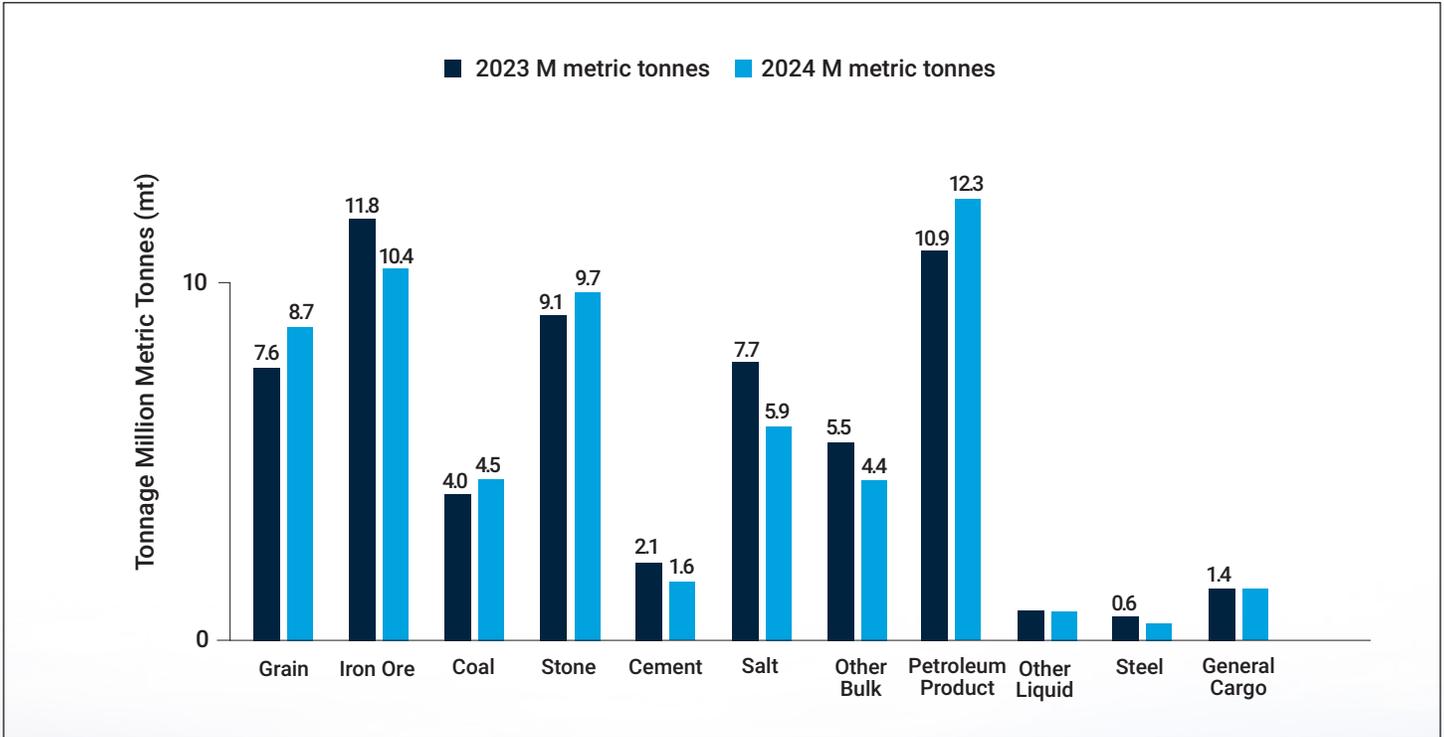
Commodity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% Change 2024/2023	5-Yr. Avg. 2019-23
Grain	7,601	9,006	8,078	7,713	7,575	8,721	+15.1%	7,995
Iron Ore	12,401	12,272	11,778	11,251	11,754	10,358	-11.9%	11,891
Coal	5,122	4,544	4,128	4,204	4,028	4,450	+10.5%	4,405
Stone	9,373	9,202	9,347	9,606	9,062	9,698	+7%	9,318
Cement	2,807	2,814	2,903	2,619	2,116	1,565	-26.0%	2,652
Salt	8,885	9,094	8,657	8,632	7,700	5,922	-23.1%	8,594
Other Dry Bulk	5,322	4,164	5,574	4,458	5,509	4,419	-19.8%	5,005
Petroleum Products	11,982	11,198	10,560	11,530	10,877	12,509	+15.0%	11,229
Other Liquid Bulk	115	95	92	73	78	74	-5.1%	91
Steel	557	411	717	718	587	427	-27.3%	598
General Cargo	1,099	1,164	1,375	1,254	1,395	1,413	+1.3%	1,257
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,264</b>	<b>63,964</b>	<b>63,209</b>	<b>62,058</b>	<b>60,681</b>	<b>59,556</b>	<b>-1.8%</b>	<b>63,035</b>

Grain movements advanced by 1 million metric tonnes, up 15%, capitalizing on robust prairie yields and advantageous export timing, while petroleum products increased by 2 million metric tonnes beyond 2023 levels as refineries maintained consistent output and regional fuel distribution held firm throughout the year. Shipments coal, stone and general cargo saw more modest gains in 2024 versus volumes in 2023.

However, iron-ore and steel loadings retreated by 1 million and 160,000 metric tonnes, respectively, reflecting softer demand. Weather-dependent commodities also pulled back with road-salt shipments decreasing by close to 2 million metric tonnes following another unseasonably mild winter. Other dry bulk and cement volumes dropped by 1 million metric tonnes and 551,000 metric tonnes, respectively, in 2024 versus 2023 levels.



**Figure 1: Canadian Fleet – 2024/2023 Cargo Volumes**



# U.S. Fleet Cargo Tonnage

U.S. carriers transported approximately 71 million metric tonnes of dry-bulk cargo in 2024.

**Table 4: U.S. Fleet Tonnage by Commodity (Tonnage in 000s Metric Tonnes)**

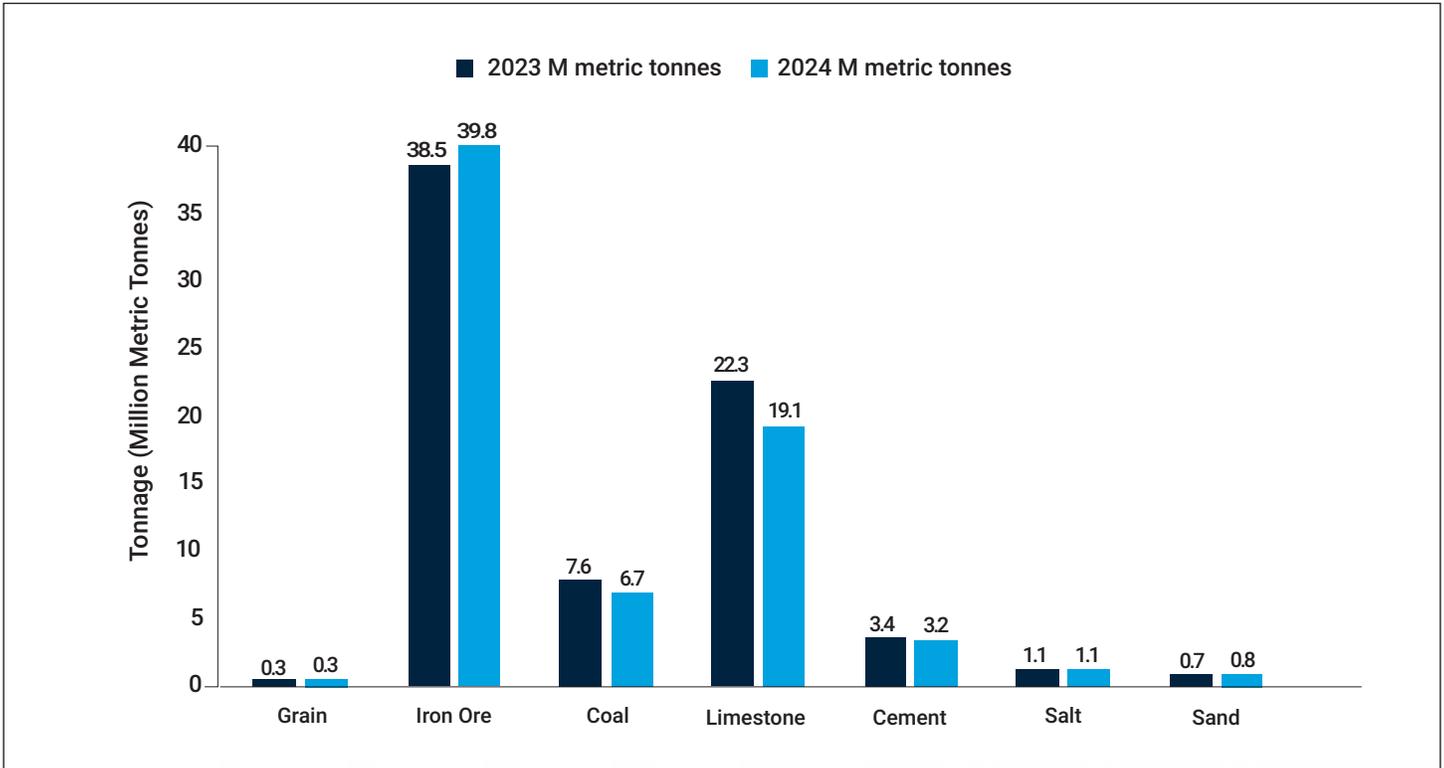
Commodity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% Change 2024/2023	5-Yr. Avg. 2019-23
Grain	262	285	332	323	285	283	-0.7%	298
Iron Ore	45,072	33,620	33,620	33,917	38,450	39,841	3.6%	36,935
Coal	10,325	6,582	9,391	8,437	7,620	6,654	-12.7%	8470
Limestone	21,850	18,773	21,900	21,504	22,345	19,107	-14.5%	20,912
Cement	2,928	3,122	3,277	3,400	3,386	3,172	-6.3%	3,222
Salt	837	786	1,054	1,116	1,051	1,111	5.7%	968
Sand	375	373	454	592	666	767	15.2%	492
<b>Total</b>	<b>81,649</b>	<b>63,543</b>	<b>74,194</b>	<b>69,293</b>	<b>73,805</b>	<b>70,938</b>	<b>-3.9%</b>	<b>72,134</b>

Iron ore drove much of the year’s activity, rising to 39.8 million metric tonnes, a 1.4 million metric tonnes gain over 2023, an increase linked to a longer ice-free start and steadier blast-furnace scheduling. Conversely, coal volumes declined to 6.7 million metric tonnes, a 0.9 million metric tonnes drop from the prior year. Limestone shipments fell sharply to 19.1 million metric tonnes, down 3.2 million metric tonnes year-over-year, while cement shipments eased to 3.2 million metric tonnes, down 0.2 million metric tonnes.

Among smaller flows, salt reached 1.1 million metric tonnes, up slightly from 2023, supported by early-winter highway restocking. Grain volumes held steady at 0.3 million metric tonnes while sand shipments rose to 0.8 million metric tonnes, a gain of 15% over the previous year.



**Figure 2: U.S. Fleet – 2024/2023 Cargo Volumes**



## St. Lawrence Seaway Cargo Tonnage

This section presents a summary of the cargo moving exclusively through the St. Lawrence Seaway, a bi-national system of 15 locks (13 Canadian and 2 U.S.) which connects the Great Lakes to the lower St. Lawrence River and beyond. Seaway tonnage does not include trades occurring exclusively in the upper four Great Lakes (Superior, Erie, Huron and Michigan) and shipments exclusively in the lower St. Lawrence River from Montréal and beyond.

St. Lawrence Seaway traffic totaled 37 million metric tonnes in 2024, and there was a significant year over year reshuffling in the make up of the tonnage activity: grain shipments surged to 11.8 million metric tonnes, adding 1.3 million metric tonnes to the previous year's number, while liquid-bulk movements expanded to 4 million metric tonnes, gaining 0.4 million metric tonnes.

These upward trajectories largely offset weakness in traditional mineral trades, where iron-ore volumes declined 1.2 million

metric tonnes to 5.1 million metric tonnes; coal slipped 0.1 million metric tonnes to 1.9 million metric tonnes; and the overall dry-bulk segment contracted 1.3 million metric tonnes to 11.1 million metric tonnes.

The result was a cargo composition more heavily weighted toward agricultural exports, general cargo, and refined products, with traditional raw-material flows claiming a smaller portion of the system's capacity compared to the preceding year.

Of the 37 million metric tonnes of cargo transiting the St. Lawrence Seaway in 2024, approximately 12.4 million metric tonnes (33%) was shipped on foreign flag vessels either originating from, or destined to, ports primarily outside of the North America. The balance of cargo shipments transiting the system – 24.6 million metric tonnes (67%) – was handled primarily by the Canadian fleet of vessels engaged in domestic trade between Canadian ports and cross-border trade between Canada and the U.S.

**Table 5: St. Lawrence Seaway Tonnage by Commodity (Tonnage in 000's Metric Tonnes)**

Commodity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% CHANGE 2024/2023	5-YR. AVG. 2019-23
Grain	10,463	13,302	10,609	9,996	10,496	11,810	12.5%	10,973
Iron Ore	6,910	6,080	6,872	6,201	6,321	5,076	-19.7%	6,477
Coal	2,391	2,439	2,116	1,771	2,018	1,890	-6.3%	2,147
Dry bulk	11,631	10,534	11,378	11,686	12,321	11,051	-10.3%	11,510
Liquid Bulk	4,693	3,077	3,233	3,516	3,634	3,995	9.9%	3,631
General Cargo	2,193	2,257	3,909	3,058	1,899	2,193	15.5%	2,822
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,375</b>	<b>37,762</b>	<b>38,193</b>	<b>36,336</b>	<b>37,561</b>	<b>36,966</b>	<b>-1.6%</b>	<b>37,645</b>

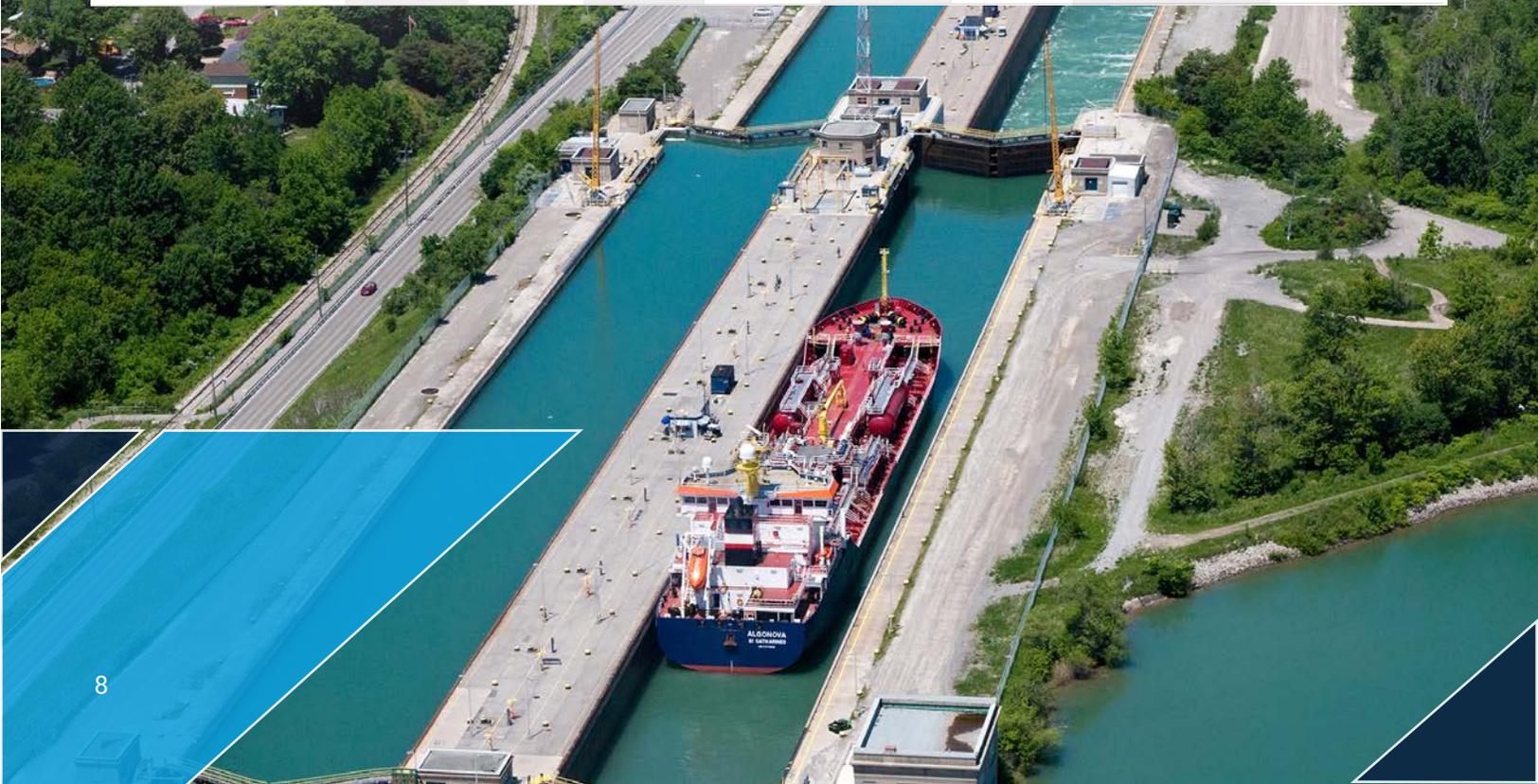
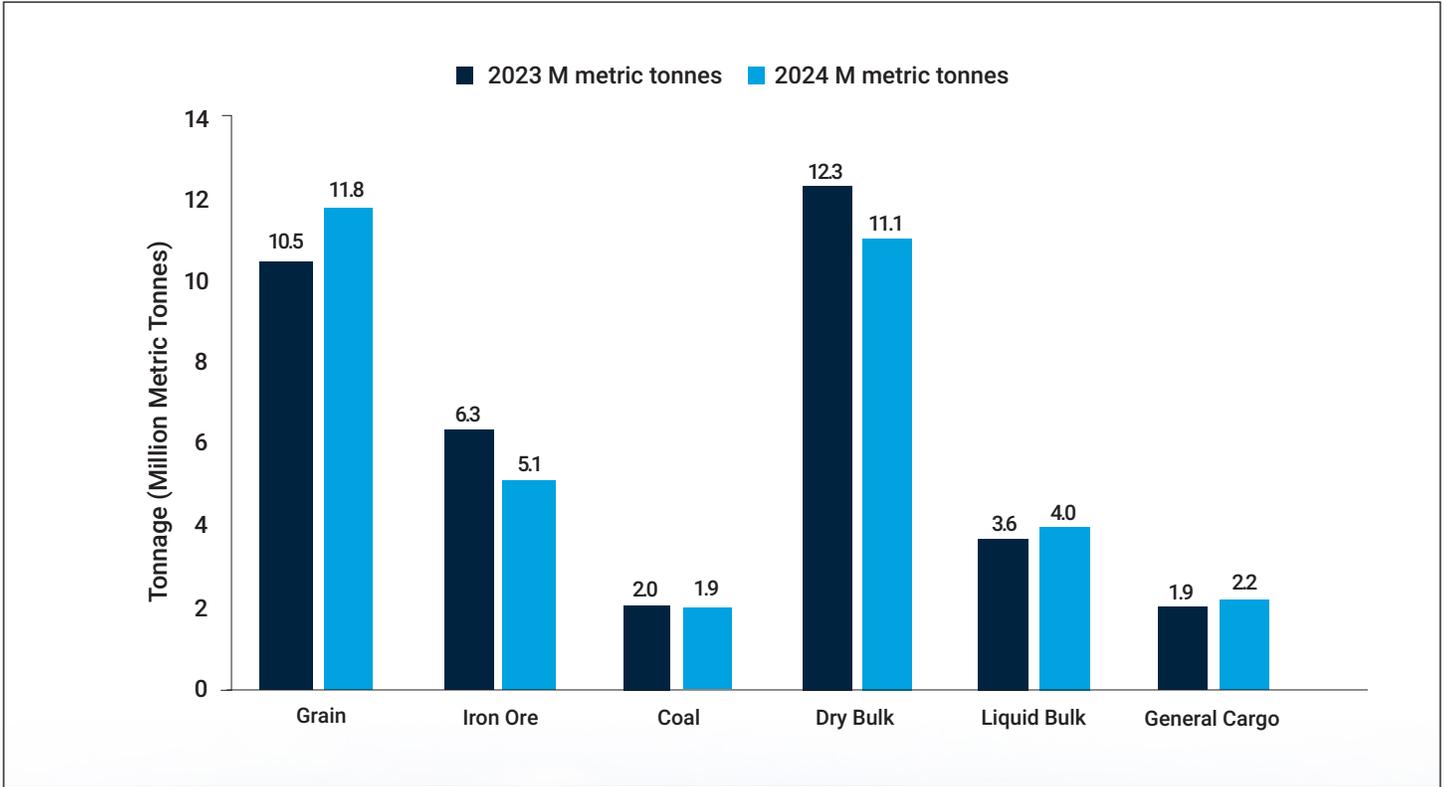


Figure 3: St. Lawrence Seaway – 2024/2023 Cargo Volumes



## About the Chamber of Marine Commerce

The Chamber of Marine Commerce (CMC) is a marine shipping industry association comprised of U.S. and Canadian members including major shippers of key commodities, ports, terminals, and marine service providers, as well as Canadian ship owners. The Chamber advocates for safe, sustainable, harmonized and competitive policy and regulation that recognizes the marine transportation system's significant advantages and contributions in the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence, Coastal and Arctic regions.

As the safest, most efficient, and environmentally sustainable method of carrying bulk freight, it is clear that increased use of the marine shipping fleet alleviates highway congestion, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports jobs and stronger supply chains. The Chamber works with its members, governments, partners and stakeholders to ensure these benefits are fully realized.

In July of 2023, an independent study by Martin Associates was released, confirming the tremendous importance of marine shipping on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway and coastal and Arctic regions to the North American economy.

The study revealed that, in 2022, the industry:

- made a total annual contribution of \$66.1 Billion CAD (\$50.9 Billion USD) in economic activity across North Americas
- supported almost 360,000 jobs across the continent, and
- generated \$30.2 Billion CAD (\$23 Billion USD) in wages and \$12.8 billion CAD (\$9.8 Billion USD) in taxes.

**For more information, visit [www.marinedelivers.com](http://www.marinedelivers.com)**

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