

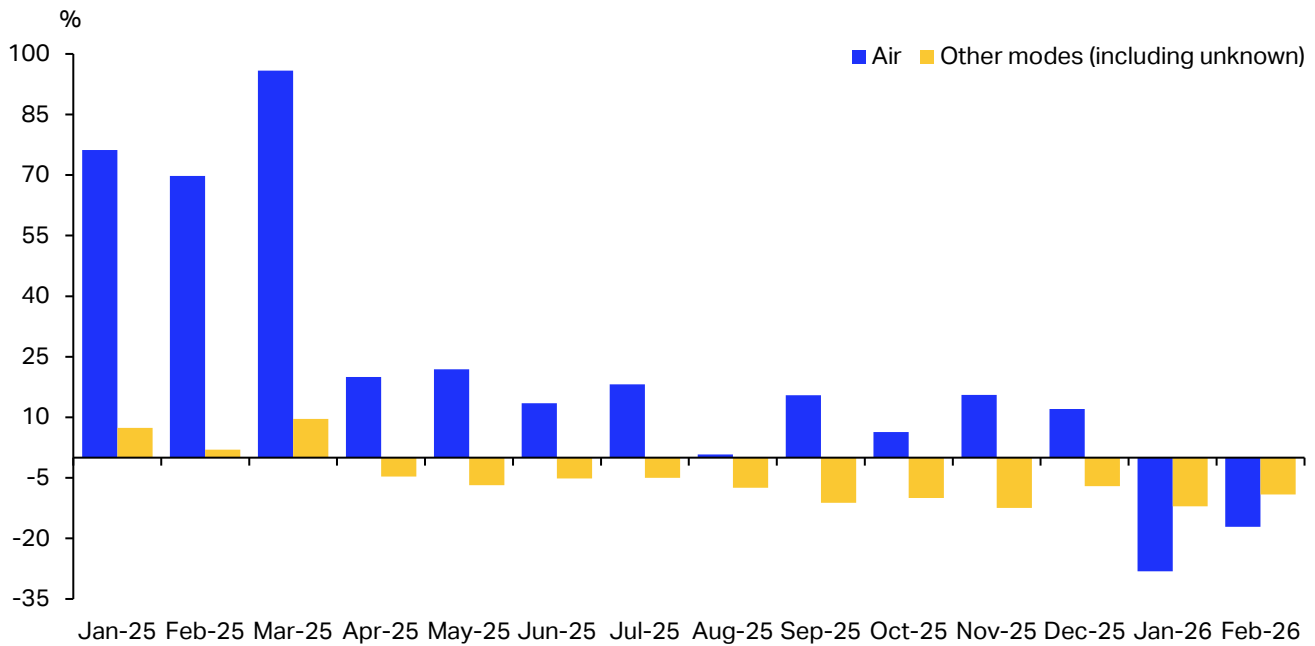


## Chart of the Week

17 April 2026

### Air Cargo and US Imports: Frontloading and Beyond

#### US value of imports from all partners by mode of transport, YoY



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, based on Global Trade Tracker.

- Air cargo was central to enabling frontloading in early 2025 and continues to play an important role in US imports in 2026, notably in comparison to US imports by other modes of transport.
- US imports surged in the first quarter of 2025 thanks to widespread frontloading ahead of expected tariff increases. Air cargo enabled this response on a scale. Import values transported by air rose by around 70–95% year-on-year (YoY) in January to March 2025, while growth via other modes was far more limited.
- In value terms, more than four-fifths of the additional imports in Q1 2025 moved by air, underlining the speed and flexibility required to accelerate shipments within a short window. This illustrates air cargo’s role as a shock absorber for the global trading system, a role that was also in full display during the covid-19 pandemic.
- The dynamics shifted from Q2 2025, but air cargo remained central to US imports. As tariffs were implemented and incentives to frontload dissipated, growth in air imports moderated, while imports by other modes turned negative YoY. For 2025 as a whole, imports by air still posted a clear increase, while imports by other modes declined.
- This pattern continues into 2026. Imports by air fell by around 23% YoY in January and February 2026, but remain around one-third above their 2024 levels. Imports by other modes, however, are 6% below their 2024 levels in early 2026, highlighting the divergence between air cargo and slower transport options.
- One year after Liberation Day, the extraordinary frontloading of early 2025 has faded. However, air cargo continues to play an elevated role in US imports, amid higher demand for time-sensitive goods (including AI-related) and persistent trade-policy uncertainty.

IATA Sustainability & Economics

economics@iata.org

Terms and Conditions for the use of this IATA Economics Report and its contents can be found [here](#).  
By using this IATA Economics Report and its contents in any manner, you agree that the IATA Economics Report Terms and Conditions apply to you and agree to abide by them. If you do not accept these Terms and Conditions, do not use this report.