BOEING PREDICTS AIR CARGO BOOM WILL PUSH GLOBAL FREIGHTER FLEET BEYOND 4,000 AIRCRAFT BY 2045

News / Manufacturer



Boeing forecasts that global air cargo traffic will double over the next two decades, driving the worldwide freighter fleet beyond 4,000 aircraft by 2045, according to its 2026 World Air Cargo Forecast. The projected growth is expected to be fueled by increasing demand for time-critical shipments linked to advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence hardware, evolving supply chains and the continued expansion of e-commerce. At the same time, cargo operators are expected to adapt their route networks to shifting trade flows and an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

The aerospace manufacturer unveiled its latest biennial outlook during The International Air Cargo Association's Air Cargo Forum in Miami. The 20-year forecast provides an in-depth analysis of key global air trade markets, emerging industry trends and the long-term evolution of the world's freighter fleet, offering insights into the opportunities and challenges shaping the future of the air cargo sector.

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Darren Hulst, Boeing vice president of Commercial Marketing commented: "Air cargo's adaptability and speed are strategic advantages enabling reliable transport, dynamic rerouting and critical support for evolving supply chains. As global trade patterns change and demand for time-sensitive, high-value goods grows, dedicated freighters will remain essential to global commerce."

Market snapshot:

- Record traffic: Global air cargo traffic reached a new annual record in 2025, growing nearly 5% year over year from 2024, despite trade volatility and geopolitical disruptions.
- Network resilience: Air cargo networks are adapting to changing trade flows, rerouting challenges and shifting production locations while continuing to provide speed, reliability and security.
- Key demand drivers: E-commerce, direct-to-consumer business model and demand for high-tech goods are fueling air cargo growth. According to IATA, more than 70% of AI-related goods were transported by air in 2025.

World Air Cargo Forecast highlights and insights:

- Fundamentals: Structural growth drivers and proven resilience are expected to support air cargo traffic growth of 3.5% annually over the next two decades, outpacing long-term economic and trade growth. Trade flows touching Asia will lead growth and represent approximately 60% of the global market.
- Freighter fleet growth: The worldwide fleet is expected to grow 67% by 2045 from 2,395 airplanes in 2025 to 4,010 airplanes. Dedicated freighters are expected to carry more than half of global air cargo traffic in the long term.
- Growth and replacement: Operators will need 2,930 new and converted freighters over the next 20 years to support traffic growth and replace retiring airplanes. About 55% of deliveries will add capacity; approximately 45% will replace older, less efficient freighters. Two-thirds of deliveries will be converted passenger airplanes and the remainder will be new-production freighters.
- Market mix: Nearly one-third of all air cargo revenues are earned by airlines with passenger belly cargo capacity as well as dedicated main deck freighters to serve a broad network and diverse markets. Growing demand for express services will lift integrators' (time-definite and express operators) share of global air cargo traffic to nearly 25% in 2045.

The full 2026 World Air Cargo Forecast is available at boeing.com/wacf(opens in a new tab).

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