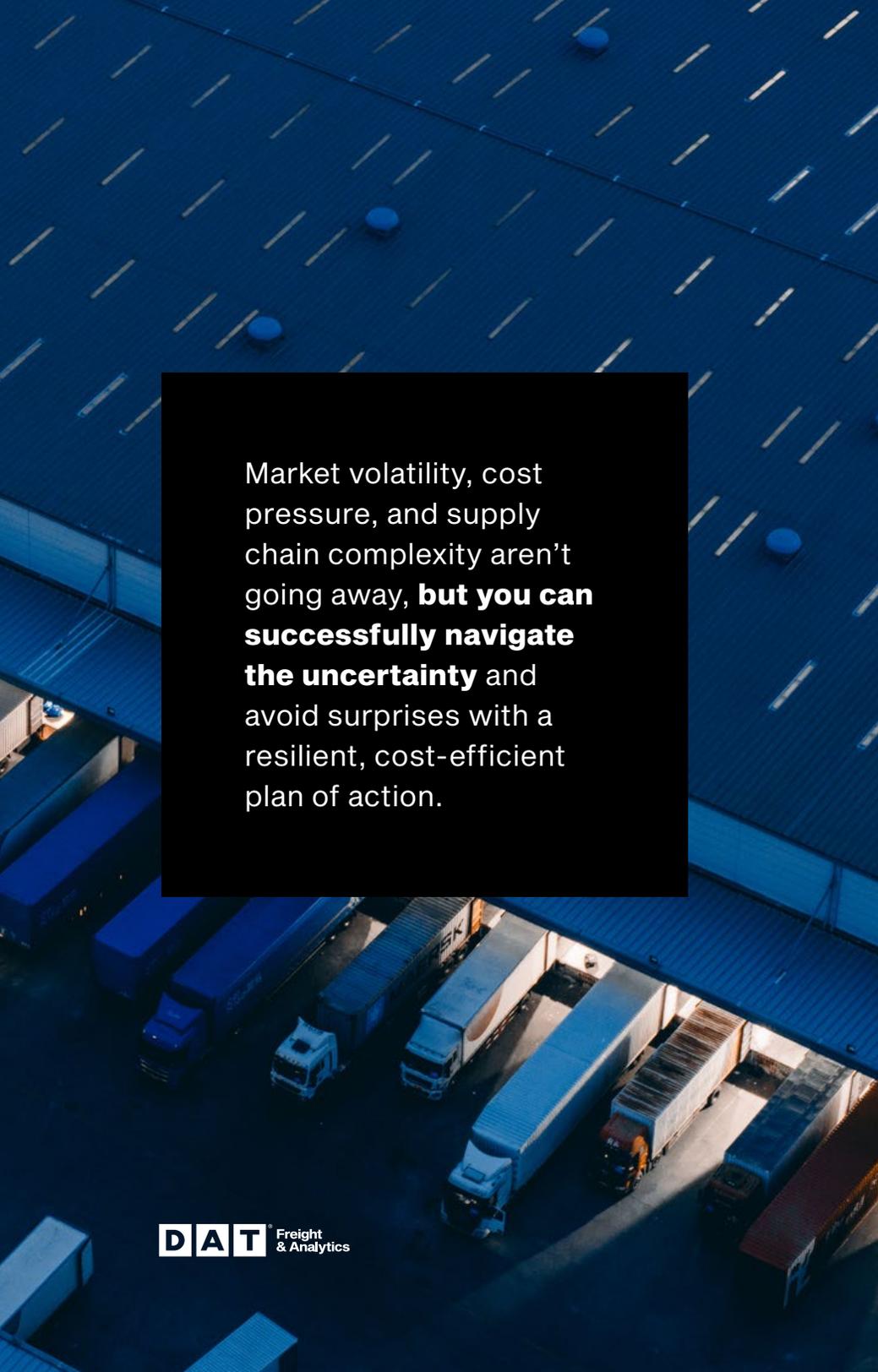




FREIGHT PROCUREMENT HAS CHANGED



Market volatility, cost pressure, and supply chain complexity aren't going away, **but you can successfully navigate the uncertainty** and avoid surprises with a resilient, cost-efficient plan of action.

Transportation teams are being asked to do more with less: control spend, ensure service, and prove their strategic value. Meeting those demands requires a shift from a reactive posture to a more agile, proactive stance in order to move faster from insight to action. With tariffs reshaping trade patterns and freight costs, procurement leaders must prioritize data-driven insights and operational flexibility to effectively manage their increasingly complex networks.

This playbook gives companies the fuel they need to meet the demands of the shifting freight procurement market. It highlights how transportation/logistics teams can go beyond operating as “cost centers” and become true, strategic contributors to their organizations.

DITCH THE OUTDATED RFPS AND STATIC CONTRACTS



“Smart companies are adopting systems that provide as close to real-time data as possible, and then using that intelligence to ride out the volatile market conditions.”

Ken Adamo, Chief of Analytics at DAT Freight & Analytics



As a major economic force, logistics both shapes and is shaped by the world’s biggest headlines: trade policy, geopolitical shifts, global port congestion, and more. Changes to North American cross-border tariffs are a very real scenario that many companies face this year. The start-stop-start tariff decisions are especially challenging and costly for firms using rigid procurement processes without access to reliable market insights.

“Smart companies are adopting systems that provide as close to real-time data as possible, and then using that intelligence to ride out the volatile market conditions,” says Ken Adamo, chief of analytics at DAT Freight & Analytics. “Many companies are wading through changes in North American cross-border tariffs this year. There is no ‘history’ for this in any company’s data repositories right now.”

The company’s DAT iQ platform provides a 360-degree view of the transportation market, including insights and data-driven analytics to help companies optimize their freight operations, save money, and enhance overall supply chain efficiency.

VOLATILITY IS HERE TO STAY

When freight markets are stable or predictable, companies can afford to rely on siloed internal data and lock in 12-month contracts with minimal risk. But that's no longer the case.

Shippers don't have this luxury today with conditions changing on a dime. "Unless you've lived through a North American trade war — and I'd guess that 99.99% of American businesses have not — then you don't have the context to navigate through what's happening right now," Adamo says.

In the absence of a unified freight data and analytics platform to provide real-time visibility and context, companies are forced to:

- Depend on internal data without a clear view of what's happening in the broader markets.
 - Make decisions based on only historical data, versus using real-time data for effective forecasting and needs planning.
 - Treat transportation as purely tactical — focused only on cost-cutting rather than long-term performance.
 - Rely on data that lacks the context needed for budgeting, contracting, or routing guide optimization.
 - Run freight procurement on autopilot, without a feedback loop to course-correct when market conditions shift.
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Companies are also building extra “slack” into their supply chains to avoid shortages and create a buffer just in case a new trade policy or tariff is introduced. This is another expensive tactic in an era of high inventory carrying costs, raw material prices, and interest rates. Getting caught short on inventory can be even more costly, especially when stock-outs drive customers to find other suppliers.

Finding the right balance between too much slack in the supply chain and not enough product to fill orders is becoming more difficult. It’s especially challenging for companies that haven’t created resilient, cost-efficient procurement game plans.



NAVIGATING THE NEW NORMAL

Traditional freight procurement methods like annual bid cycles, static routing guides, and fixed contracts weren't designed for today's dynamic freight environment. Collecting data but never putting it to use just doesn't cut it anymore.

To stay competitive, transportation and logistics teams don't just need better data; they need smarter tools and strategies that bridge the gap between insights and execution. Data is meaningless if it's not put into action to optimize their networks, save money, and improve service.

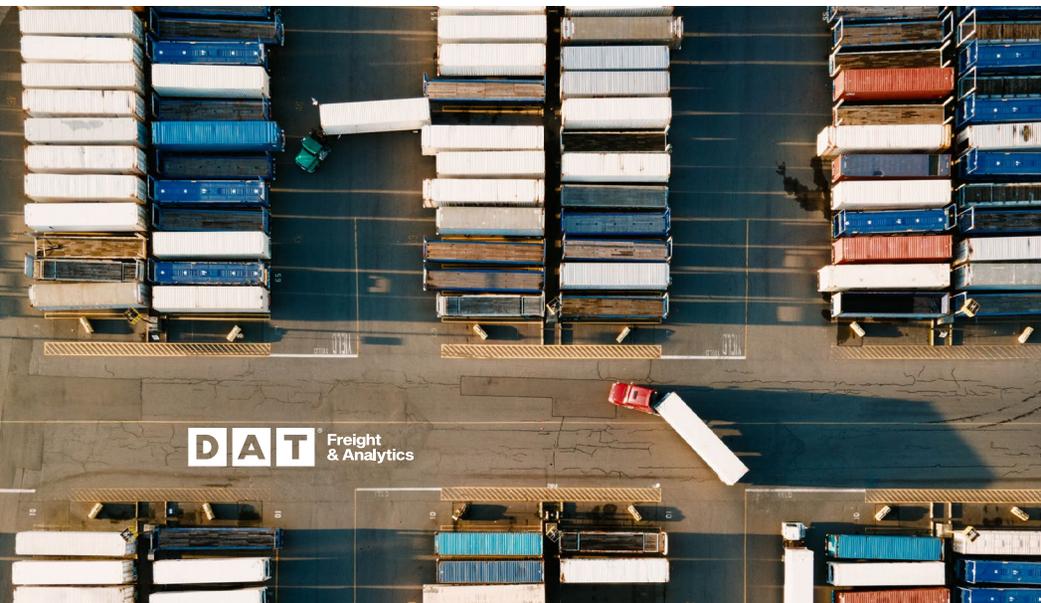
Adamo also recommends changing your planning horizons. For example, let's say you've historically relied on short (quarterly), medium (biannual), and long-term planning (one or more years). The current environment necessitates faster action and decision-making, which means your short-term may be reduced to one month or even just a few weeks, based on your operations. Then, your medium-term can focus on quarterly projections and your new long-term outlook will cover 6-12 months. Be sure to factor in all of your peak seasons early; don't wait until midyear to start planning holiday peak amid these volatile market conditions.

Short-term: Quarterly → 1 week – 1 month

Medium-term: Biannually → Quarterly

Long-term: One or more years → 6–12 months

“Think about what peak means for your networks as you condense and hone your planning horizons,” Adamo says. “This will help you stay in tune with changes in the marketplace.” This shortsighted approach isn't permanent, he adds, but it is completely warranted this year in light of the many outside forces impacting the freight markets and the economy.



Top-performing teams treat procurement as an always-on, iterative process, not a one-and-done project, by:



Going outside their own four walls for data and insights.

Relying on static, siloed internal data limits perspective, especially in volatile markets. External benchmarking provides the broader context needed for smarter, more objective decision-making. It lets you see how your rates and performance compare to the broader market so that you're not flying blind.



Using accurate, reliable external data to drive change.

Benchmarking data can be leveraged into smarter negotiations, better routing guide compliance, and measurable cost savings. Forecasting takes benchmarking a step further by helping you see where rates are headed, not just where they've been. Working in tandem, benchmarking and forecasting provide the context and confidence that procurement teams need for planning, negotiating, and executing with precision.



Effectively balancing spot vs. contract freight procurement strategies.

Using benchmarking and forecasting, companies can stay agile and resilient without overspending or sacrificing service. This strategic equilibrium helps organizations leverage favorable market rates while also ensuring consistent capacity and reliable carrier relationships. It also creates a buffer against volatile market fluctuations, provides greater cost predictability, and fosters operational stability.



Turning insights into actions.

It's one thing to collect data, but actually turning those insights into actionable steps requires a deeper dive. Smart companies are leveraging analytics in procurement, budgeting, and network optimization, all in the name of building more resilient, cost-efficient game plans. Instead of just tracking trends, they're capitalizing on them by shaping strategy and staying ahead of the market.



UNLOCKING FREIGHT PROCUREMENT RESILIENCE

When companies put data-driven, agile procurement approaches in place, the wins begin to surface pretty quickly, including:

- 3–7% cost savings through better rate alignment and negotiation.
- Fewer routing guide failures.
- Less reliance on costly spot freight.
- More accurate budgets, fewer fire drills, and improved internal trust.
- Better alignment with carriers by grounding expectations in reality rather than outdated data and inaccurate projections.

Adamo says spend optimization and improved service levels are the two key benefits that companies using resilient, data-driven procurement strategies can count on. In certain cases, it may actually pay to spend a bit more in exchange for better service or to protect a carrier relationship, versus always going with the lowest bidder. Or, if one ocean shipper can avoid a particularly congested port and get your goods delivered faster than another, it can get you to market and paid faster.



“Ultimately, the focus should be on blending cost and service in order to optimize the entire portfolio, versus just cutting corners or saving money in one area at the peril of another.”

Ken Adamo, Chief of Analytics at DAT Freight & Analytics

“There’s an old adage in logistics that very few people get fired for overpaying, but if the service is subpar then the logistics practitioner’s position could be in peril,” Adamo points out. “Ultimately, the focus should be on blending cost and service in order to optimize the entire portfolio, versus just cutting corners or saving money in one area at the peril of another.”

The benefits of real-time data, benchmarking, and forecasting don’t end there. Once companies have clean, trusted market data, they can start using it beyond procurement to enable cross-functional partners:

- Finance teams use it to validate budgets and reduce variance.
- Channel strategy & marketing teams can plan more strategic promotions, inventory pushes, and launches.

- Executives use it to understand risk across the supply chain.
- Sales teams can improve deal margin and align pricing with true landed cost.
- Network design teams use it to evaluate modal and lane strategies.

Ultimately, analytics empower transportation teams to speak the language of the business and elevate their roles from tactical execution to strategic leadership. This holistic approach also contributes to more resilient, agile supply chains that can weather storms and tap into new opportunities as they emerge. “It’s about using analytics and external data to drive meaningful change across the organization,” Adamo says.

BUILDING STRATEGIC VALUE WITH AGILE FREIGHT PROCUREMENT RESILIENCE



Companies that want to drive meaningful change in any market conditions should factor three core components into their procurement: forecasting, benchmarking, and real-time data. “Organizations that are doing this really well have all three of these components dialed in,” says Adamo. Top-performing teams are using technology to gather, assess, and act on the most relevant signals, instead of overwhelming procurement and logistics teams with every single data point, issue, and emerging problem.

Rather than monitoring everything, exception-based decisions focus only on addressing anomalies and deviations from the norm. DAT’s platform leans into this approach by distilling tons of data into a few high-impact dashboards that inform smart, immediate decision-making while ignoring irrelevant noise.

“We’re helping companies focus on the most important parameters in their businesses,” Adamo explains. For example, a distribution-driven retail operation wants to know how quickly its orders are being shipped out of the warehouse, while an outbound shipper that uses thousands of carriers needs to know how all of its core carriers are performing relative to their industry peers and the market as a whole.

REAL-WORLD IMPACT: BENCHMARKING IN ACTION

The J.M. Smucker Company is one global organization that's made benchmark data an integral part of its transportation team's decision-making process. The team relies on DAT's benchmark data to unify operations, refine processes, and adapt strategies, ensuring informed and agile supply chain decisions.

"Whether it is market capacity insight, routing guide changes, spot decision, or RFP awards, we here at Smucker rely on DAT data on a regular basis," says Anbu Kuppusamy, the director of transportation, supply chain transformation, and analytics at The J.M. Smucker Co.

Global CPG manufacturer Kimberly-Clark has integrated DAT iQ tools into its transportation strategy to drive operational efficiencies and maintain cost leadership through data-driven insights.

"We use the DAT products in a few ways. We utilize DAT iQ Benchmark to help model out potential network changes as the batch upload allows us to bring in rates for large lane files," explains Brad Whitson, director of transportation strategy, solutions, and analytics at Kimberly-Clark. "On the DAT iQ side, we use this to help us assess our network for cost competitiveness and in knowing where opportunities for improvement exist."

5 STEPS TO FREIGHT PROCUREMENT RESILIENCE

The faster you can deliver clear, data-backed insights to your transportation partners, the quicker you can align on solutions and build a more resilient network. **Here are five steps you can take now to get moving in the right direction:**

01

Benchmark against the market. Compare your rates and performance to the broader market to gain objective insights that enable smarter, more informed decisions, especially in volatile times.

02

Revisit your routing guide. Use analytics to identify lanes with chronic failures and create a more resilient carrier mix.

03

Forecast to plan, not react. Use rate forecasting to anticipate cost shifts and build better budgets.

04

Build a feedback loop. Continuously monitor performance and adjust proactively — don't wait for the next bid cycle.

05

Report upstream strategically. Use analytics to tell a clear story to finance, operations, and leadership that proves transportation isn't just a cost center, it's a source of insight.

STOP REACTING, START ACTING

Static, reactive freight procurement is a thing of the past. Filled with complexity, ambiguity and volatility, today's supply chain landscape requires a dynamic, data-driven approach. By embracing real-time market intelligence and leveraging benchmarking and forecasting, transportation, logistics, and procurement teams can serve as strategic business drivers that proactively navigate uncertainty and build resilient, cost-efficient supply chains.

Clinging to outdated methods is no longer a viable option. Embracing an "always-on" procurement mindset powered by analytics and external insights doesn't just help you manage freight spend — it empowers your organization to move faster, operate smarter, and compete stronger.





DAT Freight & Analytics operates DAT One, North America's largest truckload freight marketplace; DAT iQ, the industry's leading freight data analytics service; and Trucker Tools, the leader in load visibility. Shippers, transportation brokers, carriers, news organizations, and industry analysts rely on DAT for market trends and data insights, informed by nearly 700,000 daily load posts and a database exceeding \$1 trillion in freight market transactions.

Founded in 1978, DAT is a business unit of Roper Technologies (Nasdaq: ROP), a constituent of the Nasdaq 100, S&P 500, and Fortune 1000. Headquartered in Beaverton, Ore., DAT continues to set the standard for innovation in the trucking and logistics industry.

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