

THEME BRIEF · THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE · ONE-PAGE SHEET · ARCHIVE EDITION

Is the Northwest Passage becoming a shipping lane?

6 commercial

Not on the published record: **6** of the **35** full transits in **2025** were commercial, and Canada publishes no Arctic icebreaking fee, so the Coast Guard sells no Arctic escort slot.

35
transits,
2025

5.2%
deep-draft

0 of 3
Arctic fee
zones

6 of 35

full transits in 2025 were in the commercial category

5.2%

of 465 transits since 1906 used a deep-draft route

0 of 3

Coast Guard icebreaking fee zones are in the Arctic

2004

last update of the hull market's Arctic area sheet

THE ANSWER

The Northwest Passage is not becoming a shipping lane on the published record. In the 2025 season 35 ships completed a full transit and 6 were in the publisher's commercial category; across 1906 to 2025 the publisher records 465 transits, 56 of which conveyed commercial cargo or fuel (Robert Headland and colleagues, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, revised 1 Nov 2025, re-read 30 Sep 2026).

What a shipper cannot obtain here is certainty. Canada's three icebreaking fee zones are all southern, so the Coast Guard sells no Arctic escort slot, and the hull market's area sheets for these waters date from 2004 and 2006 (Canadian Coast Guard; Lloyd's Market Association, both read 30 Sep 2026).

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

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Four options for five classes of reader are set out in the executive read and the full brief; each rests on a dated public instrument.

TAKEAWAYS

1. Commercial transits reached ten in a season twice, in 2023 and 2024, and fell to six in 2025.
2. The Canadian Coast Guard reported 40 commercial escorts across its 2025 Arctic operations, free of any published tariff.
3. Canada's Arctic reporting rule changed on 31 March 2026 and incorporates a Coast Guard publication as amended from time to time.
4. In the Nunavut Settlement Area, the Nunavut Agreement governs what is built and operated; ship movements not tied to a project are outside its screening.

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Sources and full terms: full brief, annex. Robert Headland and colleagues, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Northwest Passage transits to end of the 2025 navigation season (revised 1 Nov 2025): individual counts restated as facts, with credit; no SPRI list, table or chart is reproduced. The University's site terms reserve all rights and permit non-commercial use only.