



Through the Fuel Crisis: The Operator Playbook

There's a deal signal. There's also a reminder that hope isn't a plan. Three moves to prepare for both outcomes.

Why this guide, why now

Fuel hasn't been this hard to price in a decade. There's now a genuine deal signal coming out of Iran — and a reminder from Aramco that even if the strait reopens today, normalisation takes months, not weeks. The models you built last year don't work this year, the customer conversations are harder, and the market could move either way by next Tuesday.

This is what the operators getting through it are doing differently — three moves to prepare for both outcomes.

What's actually happening

Where the crisis stands today, what could come next, and where it lands for operators in the US and ANZ.


Conflict in the Persian Gulf escalated in February, putting the Strait of Hormuz — the bottleneck for roughly a fifth of the world's oil — under sustained pressure. This week brought the first credible deal signal: Trump announced negotiations are well advanced and Brent crude (*the global benchmark for pricing crude oil*) dropped below \$100 for the first time in months. But Iran's state media pushed back, and Aramco's CEO has warned that even if the strait reopens today, full normalisation takes until 2027. There's hope. There's also no plan you can build on hope.



20% of global oil supply passes through here.

What it means for fuel

Brent crude has swung as much as \$18 in a single week this year. The IEA has called the cumulative supply loss the largest in its history. Every major parcel carrier globally is running an active fuel surcharge at the same time — for the first time in memory. **Best case, fuel comes down gradually over six to twelve months. Worst case, the deal collapses and Brent is back above \$110 within days. Build for both.**



In the US

Ground fuel surcharges up **26.7% year-on-year** — outpacing the underlying diesel rise.

Carriers are passing volatility through accessorials, not base rates. The surcharge stack is the story.

In ANZ

Fair Work Commission's Emergency Order (**21 April**) — businesses at the top of supply chains must now update transport rates fortnightly.

NZ diesel has overtaken petrol at the pump for the first time ever.



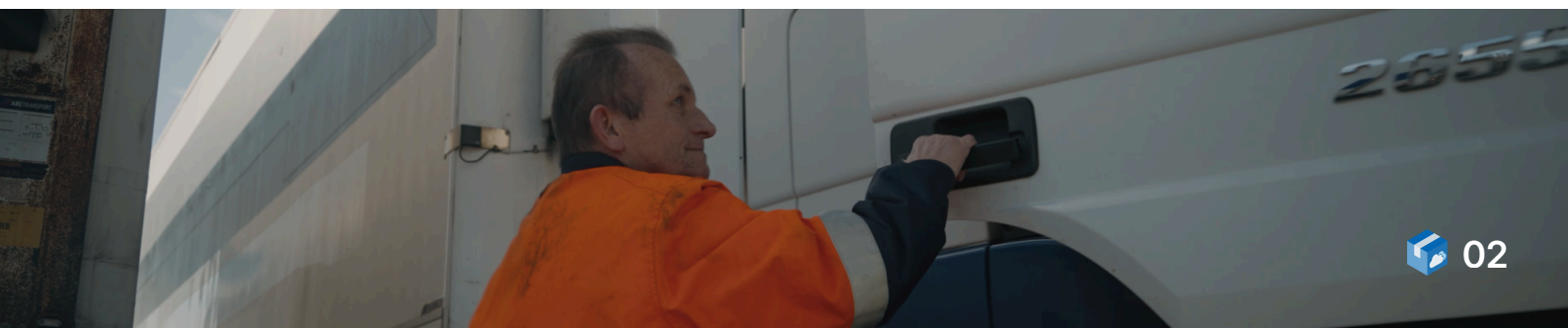
“Hope is not a plan. Prepare for both outcomes [fuel price rising or falling in coming 6 months]— because you might need either one by next Tuesday.”



— Shaun Hagen, CEO, CartonCloud ([TWIL Ep 13](#))

What you can do now

Build for the range, not the headline. If a deal lands, you'll need pricing that can come back down with the market — without you scrambling. If it collapses, you'll need to recover costs quickly. The three moves on the next page work either way.



/ Preparing for the next 6-12 moths

What operators can do today, to future proof their margins.

1

Know what each lane costs you

Do this: Work out what each customer actually costs you to serve, and make sure sales is quoting on this month's fuel — not last month's.

Why: This is the foundation. There's freight on the market and trucks parked up — the problem isn't capacity, it's that on today's fuel some lanes don't pay. Until you know which customers are profitable, the calls you make next are guesses.

Larger operations: Check your billing data. Are surcharges tied to actual trips, or back-dated estimates?

If you're smaller: Find one thing in your invoicing or billing that costs you time every week, and fix it this fortnight.



As Scott Murray puts it on [TWIL Ep 9](#): "Take a really good hard look at your customer base. Sometimes people become shocked at what the actual cost is."

2

Lead the customer conversation

Do this: Talk to your top customers about fuel before your next invoice run, not after.

Why: There's a growing gap between what your customers are hearing and what you're experiencing. They're seeing headlines about a deal closing and expecting cost relief — you're still carrying elevated fuel and labour costs that won't drop overnight. **That expectation gap is commercially dangerous.** Close it by talking to customers first — explain what's improved, what hasn't, and what they can do on their end.

Larger operations: Group your account base by fuel exposure and work through them in priority order. Don't send the email — make the call.

If you're smaller: Fifteen minutes each with your top five customers this fortnight. Same job — no surprises.



"The best operators are doubling down on what they're good at and being a bit more picky. They're talking to people early — not waiting until they're raising the invoice and letting their customers get a surprise." — Scott Murray, VP of Operations, CartonCloud ([TWIL Ep 9](#)).

3

Protect your margin

Do this: Don't unwind your fuel surcharge on hope. Build pricing that works at \$85 Brent and at \$120, and adjusts in both directions.

Why: With the numbers and the conversations in hand, you can adjust rates with confidence. If you've been pricing on the assumption fuel stays high, don't immediately unwind because of one headline. If you've been assuming it normalises soon, don't bet your margin on a deal that isn't finalised. The operators doing this well have pricing that adjusts both ways — recover quickly when fuel climbs, respond to customers when it drops. ANZ operators: the fortnightly RTCCO adjustment isn't optional.

Larger operations: Run your top 20 accounts at both Brent prices. The ones that break either way need renegotiating before the next review.

If you're smaller: Pick your three most fuel-exposed customers and rebuild their pricing this fortnight.



As Shaun Hagen puts it on [TWIL Ep 13](#): *"Build pricing that adjusts both ways. When fuel drops, you respond. When it climbs, you recover. You're built for the range."*

/ Your action checklist

Three moves to protect your margin — whether the deal lands or doesn't. Take this to your ops and sales leads, tick what's done, and work the rest this fortnight.

- Ops** Work out what each customer actually costs you to serve on each freight lane (with current fuel prices).
- Ops** Run your numbers at \$85 Brent and \$120 Brent. Don't unwind your surcharge on a headline.
- Ops** Determine how your business will manage fuel price impact — rate changes and adjustments.
- Comms** Call your top 10 customers about any adjustments before they read the deal headlines. Close the expectation gap with clear communication.
- Comms** Show fuel surcharge as its own line on quotes, with a short explainer of how it's calculated. This will add transparency to your customers.
- Outlook** Research alternatives you can offer customers under pressure — rail, intermodal, or consolidated freight.
- Outlook** Check your fuel surcharge updates fortnightly and continue to manage.

Run your operation without the chaos

CartonCloud is built for the way 3PLs and transport operators actually run. Fuel surcharges that update with your costs, invoices that show your working, and a clear view of what each customer costs you. Less reconciliation, fewer awkward conversations, more time on the work that matters.

Learn more about rate cards.

[Rate Cards](#)

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