



BTS 4-06
Monday, Jan. 23, 2006

Contact: Dave Smallen
Tel.: (202) 366-5586

More Freight Moves on U.S. Transportation System than Previously Reported, DOT Estimates

Much more freight moves on the nation's transportation system than previously reported and almost one out of 10 tons of freight shipments is related to international trade, according to "Freight in America," a new report from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS).

Working jointly on the calculations, BTS, a part of the Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), and the Department's Federal Highway Administration estimate that over 19 billion tons of freight, valued at \$13 trillion, was carried over 4.4 trillion ton-miles in 2002. This means that on a typical day in 2002, about 53 million tons of goods valued at about \$36 billion moved on the nation's multimodal transportation network.

The new estimates combine data from the Commodity Flow Survey (CFS) of 2002 – the most comprehensive nationwide source of freight data – and data from other sources to provide "the most complete picture of freight movement in America yet available," according to BTS.

BTS estimates that 25 percent more value measured by dollars and 23 percent more weight measured by tons moves on the transportation system than it previously estimated. These new estimates include previously uncovered sectors such as construction, retail, services and municipal solid waste.

Freight ton-miles, a measure that combines weight and distance, are now estimated to be 2 percent less than previously estimated because of revisions to the CFS data and new methodologies.

The BTS report notes that some long-standing freight trends persist and new ones are emerging. Trucking remains the single most-used mode of shipping, totaling 70 percent by value, 60 percent by weight and 34 percent by ton-miles. In general, trucking dominates shipment distances of less than 500 miles while rail dominates the longer distance shipments.

Air freight and express delivery are growing the most rapidly, although air cargo remains a small and specialized part of freight activity in terms of tonnage. Intermodal freight and use of containers for multimodal shipments are both increasing.

In other trends, the BTS report finds that growing demand for more efficient and faster delivery of high-value, low-weight products is changing the structure of the freight industry, creating new alliances among shippers, carriers, and logistics providers. At the same time, enormous volumes of bulk commodities – whether grains, lumber, ores, coal, or oil – continue to move into, out of, and within the United States.

According to the CFS, in 2002, more than \$1 out of every \$10 (11 percent) of freight goods shipped was for electronic, electrical, and office equipment, making it the top commodity but down slightly from 13 percent of the value in 1997. One out of every six tons transported by freight carriers was gravel and crushed stone. The top commodity by ton-miles in 2002 was coal, carrying 686 billion tons and accounting for about 22 percent of all CFS ton-miles.

“Freight in America” will be available at the RITA booth at the Transportation Research Board (TRB) annual meeting in Washington, DC this week. To order a copy of the report, contact BTS by phone at 202-366-DATA, by e-mail at orders@bts.gov or by mail sent to Product Orders, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, USDOT, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Room 4117, Washington, DC 20590. The report will also be available online at <http://www.bts.gov/> in March.

-END-