9) Validating the Commodity Flow Survey with TRANSEARCH

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Poster Summary:

Transearch is an independent, proprietary data base of national freight flows that can be used to validate the findings of the Commodity Flow Survey (CFS). While Transearch does make some limited use of CFS information in its annual construction, the 2007 version was developed and completed two years ago, well before the most recent CFS. Consequently, the results can serve as a completely independent cross-check. Transearch has a time-proven methodology that was established over thirty years ago, and has been refined and utilized on an annual basis over this entire time span.

While the overall nature of the two data sets is quite similar, portraying market-to-market freight flow volumes by mode and commodity, there are differences in scope, coverage, commodity, and modal identification that need to be accounted for in order to make accurate comparisons. Highlighting these distinctions, and making necessary adjustments to the data, will be a key component of the presentation. Preliminary findings show that there appears to be a very high level of correlation between the two sets of freight flow volume data, with the correspondence being more pronounced at more aggregate levels of geographic market and commodity detail. The presentation will explain where the two data sets differ in terms of coverage, such as the handling of import and cross-border traffic; modal definitions, particularly in the multimodal categories, such as the CFS's "truck and rail mode" versus how Transearch portrays each portion of this multimodal movement in the appropriate but distinct "truckload" and "rail intermodal" mode categories; and commodity identification, where the CFS uses SCTG (Standard Classification of Transported Goods) and Transearch uses STCC (Standard Transportation Commodity Code). As practitioners, IHS Global Insight has a significant level of experience and expertise in making the appropriate translations and adjustments to the data to facilitate accurate comparisons.

The poster presentation will be heavily graphic, with tables, charts and graphs that illustrate the results of the comparisons. The presentation will first explain and highlight where and how adjustments need to be made to address the issues and differences of scope of coverage, modal identification, and commodity definitions. The analysis will begin by looking at more aggregate level comparisons, such as national mode and commodity tonnages, and will then delve into more detailed assessments, such as looking at individual state level results. Because the Transearch development process is geared towards accurately capturing tonnages, the presentation will focus on this particular unit of measure.

Specific adjustments that need to be made in order to get an accurate comparison of the two data sets include:
Coverage of Imported Goods
Coverage differences in the handling of waste and scrap
Pipeline activity
Format of Rail Highway Intermodal Activity
Format of Rail Water Intermodal Activity
Format of Truck Air Intermodal Activity
Coverage of Air Mail
Format of Warehouse/Secondary Traffic Coverage