

31 January 2022

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Dr. William J. Brennan
Director, Office of Economics
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

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Dear Dr. Brennan:

Please consider this request for access to the confidential Carload Waybill Sample for use in my research as a PhD student. I want to better understand how US transportation networks adjust when shocked by changes in demand. For example, trade between the US and China has profoundly affected US manufacturing (as documented by Autor, Dorn, and Hanson and coauthors), but its effects on the US transportation sector have received less attention. I hope to explore how railroads and rates adjust to changes in demand for service along particular rail lines, and, further, how these adjustments affect US railroad customers.

To conduct this research, I request access to the full, unmasked Carload Waybill Sample for the waybill years ranging from 1984 through 2019. The Public Use Waybill File does not provide geographic, pricing, and commodity information with enough specificity for me to explore how railroads, rates, and shippers are affected by demand shocks such as the “China shock.”

Although US trade with China does not consist of every good and every railroad route, I request access to all goods along all routes so that I can estimate how exposed routes are affected relative to other goods and routes. This is especially important since there are likely spillover effects as railroads adjust their operations to the change in demand.

I understand the sensitive nature of these data. I will comply with the Board’s confidentiality standards, and I will only use the data for my academic research.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacob Lefler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jacob" and last name "Lefler" clearly distinguishable.

Jacob Lefler
PhD Student
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of California, Berkeley