

Using Trade Data to Assess the Value of Air Cargo Movements

Collecting data on the value of air cargo movements is one way to specifically describe the role air cargo plays in supporting business activity in your region. The value of goods shipped from your region through your airport to customers in the rest of the U.S. or the world represents the value of production of industries in your region and business sales from your region facilitated by air service. Note that some air cargo handled by an airport in your region may originate from outside your region and therefore cannot be directly associated with economic activity in your region.

1. Sources of air cargo data

The following are two sources of trade data often employed in assessments of air cargo movements:

Data	Description and Comments
FAF Data Tabulation Tool	The FAF Data Tabulation Tool allows you to create and download statistics about both domestic trade flows and international imports and exports. Its mode filters can help isolate goods moved by air. The geographic resolution for the data corresponds either to the state or to major metropolitan areas. Therefore, you can look at goods movement by regions of origin and by destination markets but may not be able to isolate goods moved through an individual airport. This tool is a good source of easily accessible data describing the types of commodities moved by air, and their key origins and destinations.
WISERTrade	WISERTrade offers detailed data from the U.S. Census Bureau Foreign Trade Division on international trade through specific airports, with commodity and industry detail. The data provide a more current accounting of international cargo than the FAF data and allow for more specific isolation of individual airports, but are only available through a subscription (potential partners for analysis such as government agencies, universities, and consultants may already have active subscriptions). Unlike FAF data, WISERTrade does not provide information about the origin of specific commodity flows moving through a given airport.

2. Using airport records of air cargo volumes

If data is available on the tonnage of goods moved through a given airport but not the movement of specific commodities, then WISERTrade and/or FAF can be used in combination to characterize an airport's commodity flows. Barring individual airport records, WISERTrade provides the most up-to-date estimates of tonnage for international exports, and their commodity breakdown. In some cases, an airport may also have its own breakdown of tonnage for international versus domestic trade. In this case, WISERTrade data can be scaled to match airport numbers, while the commodity profile of WISERTrade data is adopted. Once international exports have been characterized, the remaining tonnage in the airport's accounts of outbound flows can be assumed to have a domestic destination. At this point, FAF data can be used to develop a commodity profile for domestic flows. If the analyst wishes to use FAF exclusively, then the proportion of international versus domestic tonnage and commodity profiles from FAF can be applied to available airport tonnage data.

3. Acknowledging freight originating in other regions

The other point of subtlety related to outbound air cargo is that while available data characterizes outbound flows from a given airport, additional assumptions may have to be made to describe the portion of goods actually originating in the study region around the airport, as opposed to through-flows coming from a different part of the state or country. Only those goods originating in the study region can be associated with business sales in the study region. For an example analysis of air cargo, including adjustments for region of origin, refer to Chapter 4 of the [Hartsfield - Jackson Atlanta International Airport's 2005 Economic Impact Study *Connecting the Region to the World*](#).