ATA Truck Tonnage Index Rose 0.4% in September

Arlington, Va. — The American Trucking Associations’ advanced seasonally adjusted (SA) For-Hire Truck Tonnage Index increased 0.4% in September after falling 0.9% in August. In September, the SA index equaled 118.7 (2000=100). The level in September was the same as in January 2012, so the index has been on a flat trend-line over the past 9 months. Compared with September 2011, the SA index was 2.4% higher, the smallest year-over-year increase since December 2009. Year-to-date, compared with the same period last year, tonnage was up 3.6%.

The not seasonally adjusted index, which represents the change in tonnage actually hauled by the fleets before any seasonal adjustment, equaled 115.3 in September, which was 9% below the previous month.

During the third quarter, SA tonnage increased 0.4% from the previous quarter and 3.4% from the same quarter in 2011.

“The year-over-year deceleration in tonnage continued during September, although I was encouraged that the seasonally adjusted index edged higher from August,” ATA Chief Economist Bob Costello said. Costello noted again this month that the acceleration in housing starts, which is helping truck tonnage, is being countered by a flattening in manufacturing output and elevated inventories throughout the supply chain.

“Expect year-over-year comparisons to continue shrinking through the rest of the year as tonnage grew nicely during the last three months of 2011,” he said. As a result, tonnage is expected to increase less than 3.5% in 2012.

Note on the impact of trucking company failures on the index: Each month, ATA asks its membership the amount of tonnage each carrier hauled, including all types of freight. The indexes are calculated based on those responses. The sample includes an array of trucking companies, ranging from small fleets to multi-billion dollar carriers. When a company in the sample fails, we include its final month of operation and zero it out for the following month, with the assumption that the remaining carriers pick up that freight. As a result, it is close to a net wash and does not end up in a false increase. Nevertheless, some carriers are picking up freight from failures and it may have boosted the index. Due to our correction mentioned above however, it should be limited.

Trucking serves as a barometer of the U.S. economy, representing 67% of tonnage carried by all modes of domestic freight transportation, including manufactured and retail goods. Trucks hauled 9.2 billion tons of freight in 2011. Motor carriers collected $603.9 billion, or 80.9% of total revenue earned by all transport modes.

ATA calculates the tonnage index based on surveys from its membership and has been doing so since the 1970s. This is a preliminary figure and subject to change in the final report issued around the 10th day of the month. The report includes month-to-month and year-over-year results, relevant economic comparisons, and key financial indicators.

American Trucking Associations is the largest national trade association for the trucking industry. Through a federation of 50 affiliated state trucking associations and industry-related conferences and councils, ATA is the voice of the industry America depends on most to move our nation’s freight. Follow ATA on Twitter or on Facebook. Good stuff. Trucks Bring It!
ATA's Truck Tonnage Index
(Seasonally Adjusted; 2000 = 100)