

Transportation - Trucking

Survey Says: Demand (52.4) jumps above 50, Inventory view ticks lower at yearend

Industry Overview

Truck Shipper Survey #299, week of December 28th, 2023

This week, our proprietary bi-weekly **BofA Truckload Demand Indicator** for shippers' 0- to 3-month freight demand outlook **increased to 52.4 from 49.0 last survey**. The Demand Indicator moves above 50 for the first time since week of Nov 3, and for the only the 5th time in the past 20 issues. Nevertheless, it remains below the 54.2 average level of the '12, '15, '19 Freight Recession periods, highlighting the still relatively soft backdrop, but ends 2023 on a continued upswing from its recent trough. The Demand Indicator was up 6% year-year, its 8th year-year uptick in the past 10 issues. Rail carloads increased 22% year-year this week, above expectations even given the shift of Christmas day, its 6th uptick in 9 weeks. Dry van spot rates ex-fuel was \$1.39/mile, flat with last week, and remaining nicely above the \$1.21-\$1.26 band it was at between Aug-Oct. Of the respondents, 24% had a positive short-term demand outlook, up from 19% last survey; Neutral outlooks were 56%, down from 58%, and Negative outlooks were 20%, down from 23% last survey. In the week of Dec 28th, we surveyed 41 shippers for views on demand, supply, pricing, inventory.

Inventory falls slightly into end of 2023

The Rate Indicator, or shippers' view on truck rates, **decreased to 46.3** from 47.9, down 3% sequentially, as expectations of rate increases fell. **The Inventory Indicator fell to 52.4** from 53.1 last issue, down 1% sequentially, as shippers see slightly lower inventory levels after the holiday season and into yearend. **The Truck Capacity Indicator**, which measures shippers' views of available truckload capacity, **decreased to 64.6** from 68.8 last survey, as shippers see tighter truck capacity. With respect to rates, 17% of shippers expect rates to fall, flat with last issue, 73% expect flat pricing, from 71% last issue, and 10% expect rates to rise, from 13% last issue. On capacity, 37% expect capacity to rise, from 46% last issue, 56% expect capacity to remain flat, from 46% last issue, 7% expect capacity to be lower, from 8% last issue. **SHIPPER COMMENTS:** A Consumer shipper sees a few factors impacting rates (squeezing higher) during the winter as icy roads and cold temps have an adverse impact on transportation. It believes these effects will drive up the cost of shipping and is always something that plays a part in shipping. (*Shipper comments cont'd p. 5*).

West Coast port share gain to aid trucking length of haul

West Coast port container import flows have started to gain share over the East Coast as Ports of LA/Long Beach, which historically moved about a third of inbound seaborne containers, reported a 25% year-year uptick in November container imports (vs -4% at the Port of Savannah). Record low water levels at Panama Canal and recent attacks at the Red Sea constricting Suez Canal Asia-US East Coast trade (8% of Suez traffic) led to liner diversions to the Transpacific Lane and the US West Coast where supply chain fluidity is intact. Additionally, potential for labor unrest from the Int'l Longshoremen Assoc. at US East Coast ports (contract expires Sep. 2024) is leading to shipper concerns for potential service disruptions. Distance from Los Angeles to major US freight hubs, such as Chicago, are 2,000 miles vs East Coast port Savannah-Chicago long-haul lane at a shorter 1,000 miles. Thus, a shift in container flows could potentially increase Truckload demand given longer length of haul levels. We continue to focus on Less-than-Truckload carriers (SAIA, XPO, ODFL) and Truck-related carriers KNX and JBHT. Maintain ratings on covered companies.

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Chart 1: DEMAND INDICATOR

Shipper's view of demand next 0-3 months; Demand Indicator at 52.4



Source: BofA Global Research.

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Chart 2: RATE INDICATOR

Shipper's rates view; Rate Indicator at 46.3



Source: BofA Global Research.

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SHIPPERS VIEW OF DEMAND

Table 1: BofA Truckload Demand Diffusion Indicator

Demand Indicator: at 52.4, up 7% sequentially

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Jan	1/4 67.3	1/3 55.1	1/14 63.8	1/13 75.0	1/12 47.5
	1/18 76.7	1/17 58.1	1/28 63.8	1/27 70.0	1/26 51.3
Feb	2/1 69.8	1/31 56.7	2/11 67.5	2/10 69.5	2/9 45.1
	2/14 53.7	2/13 53.1	2/25 68.8	2/24 71.9	2/23 47.6
Mar	2/28 59.2	2/27 51.3	3/11 72.9	3/10 70.3	3/9 46.9
	3/14 60.1	3/12 46.1	3/25 68.8	3/24 69.2	3/23 48.3
Apr	3/28 59.2	3/26 43.5	4/8 73.0	4/7 64.1	4/6 49.5
	4/11 61.2	4/9 37.2	4/22 75.7	4/21 58.0	4/20 44.4
	4/25 58.3	4/23 33.3	5/6 77.6	5/5 57.5	5/4 49.5
May	5/9 56.6	5/7 37.8	5/20 78.3	5/19 55.0	5/18 44.3
	5/23 52.5	5/21 46.2	6/3 78.3	6/2 58.5	6/1 42.6
Jun	6/6 61.1	6/4 54.6	6/17 78.1	6/16 54.0	6/15 47.9
	6/20 52.5	6/18 56.4	7/1 75.7	6/30 55.5	6/29 49.4
Jul	7/4 52.3	7/2 59.3	7/15 70.9	7/14 50.9	7/13 47.1
	7/18 50.6	7/16 62.5	7/29 74.3	7/28 53.9	7/27 50.0
Aug	8/1 52.6	7/30 59.1	8/12 73.0	8/11 50.0	8/10 55.2
	8/15 51.9	8/13 63.5	8/26 73.0	8/25 54.5	8/24 51.0
Sep	8/29 55.0	8/27 71.1	9/9 73.6	9/8 51.6	9/7 52.4
	9/12 51.9	9/10 75.8	9/23 75.0	9/22 50.0	9/21 50.0
Oct	9/26 55.6	9/24 78.1	10/8 69.4	10/6 47.6	10/5 48.9
	10/10 48.7	10/8 73.3	10/21 68.3	10/20 45.6	10/19 52.5
	10/24 53.8	10/22 70.0	11/4 76.6	11/3 42.4	11/2 47.7
Nov	11/7 55.7	11/5 72.5	11/18 67.7	11/17 50.4	11/16 44.4
	11/21 51.3	11/19 69.9	12/2 69.7	12/1 47.8	11/30 49.0
Dec	12/5 52.3	12/3 63.8	12/16 68.6	12/15 47.2	12/14 49.0
	12/19 51.9	12/17 66.3	12/30 66.7	12/29 49.4	12/28 52.4
		12/31 67.7			

Source: BofA Global Research

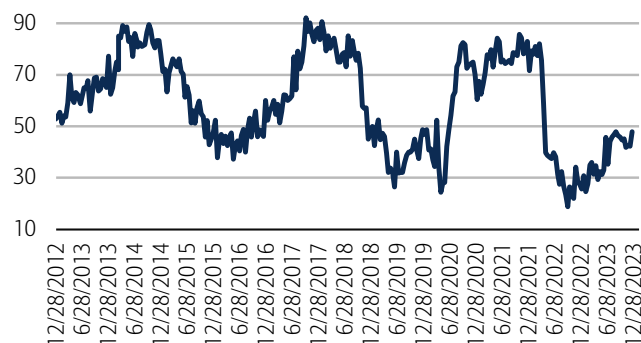
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Disclaimer: The indicator identified as BofA Truckload Diffusion Indicator in this report is intended to be an indicative metric only and may not be used for reference purposes or as a measure of performance for any financial instrument or contract, or otherwise relied upon by third parties for any other purpose, without the prior written consent of BofA Global Research. This indicator was not created to act as a benchmark

SHIPPERS' VIEW OF RATES

Chart 5: Shippers' view of rates over next three months

Rate Indicator at 46.3, -3% sequentially



Source: BofA Global Research.

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Chart 3: BofA Truckload Demand Diffusion Indicator

0-3 months demand time series; Demand Indicator at 52.4

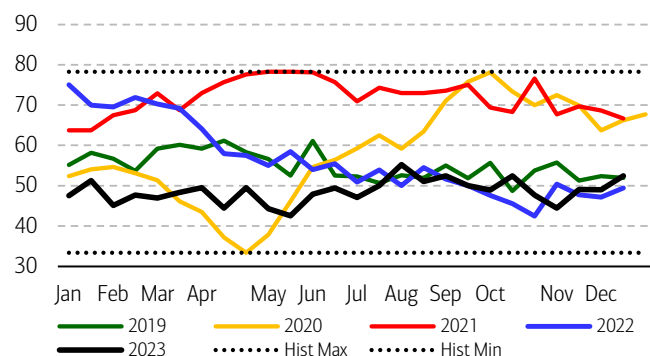


Source: BofA Global Research

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Chart 4: BofA Truckload Demand Diffusion Indicator

0-3 months demand outlook – stack basis y-y; Demand Indicator at 52.4



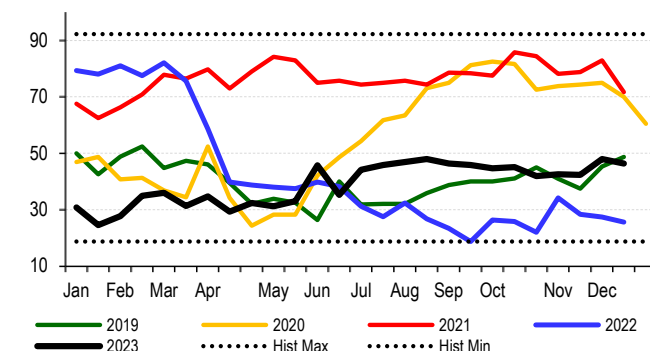
Source: BofA Global Research

Historical Max 04/03/14 (and 5/20-6/3/21). Historical Min 4/23/20. Survey began in mid-2012

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Chart 6: Shippers' view of rates

Stack basis year-over-year; Rate Indicator at 46.3



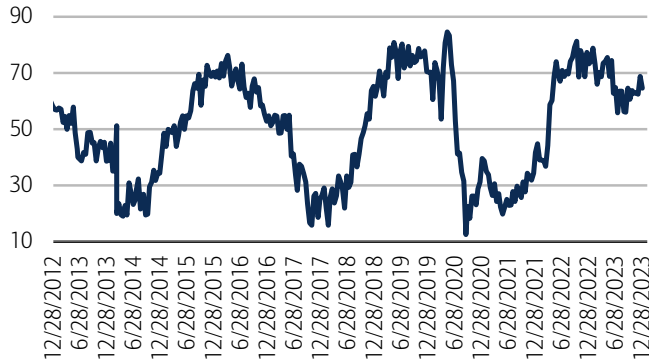
Source: BofA Global Research.

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CAPACITY AVAILABILITY

Chart 7: Shippers' view of available capacity

Capacity Indicator slightly higher at 64.6, down 6% sequentially

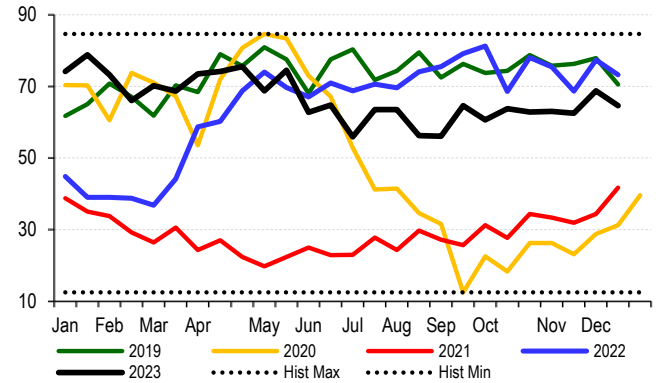


Source: BofA Global Research.

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Chart 8: Shippers' view of available capacity

Stack basis year-year; Capacity Indicator at 64.6



Source: BofA Global Research.

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6-12-MONTH FREIGHT DEMAND

Chart 9: Shippers' 6-12 month outlook for freight demand

L-T Demand Indicator at 58.5, up 10% sequentially

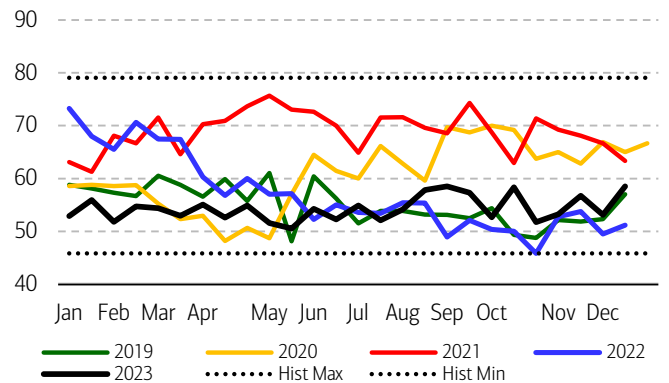


Source: BofA Global Research.

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Chart 10: Shippers' 6-12 mo. outlook for freight demand

Stack basis year-year; Long-Term Demand Indicator at 58.5



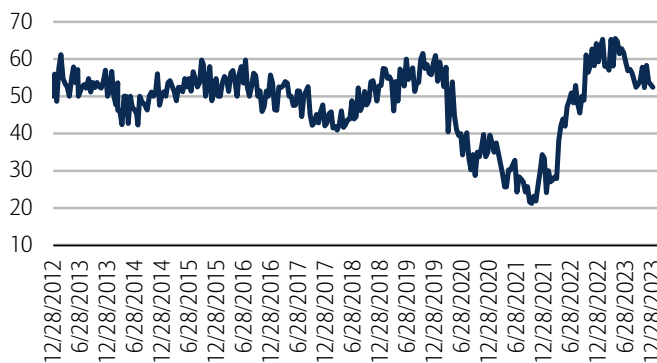
Source: BofA Global Research.

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INVENTORY

Chart 11: Shippers' view of inventory levels

Inventory Indicator at 52.4, down 1% sequentially from last issue.

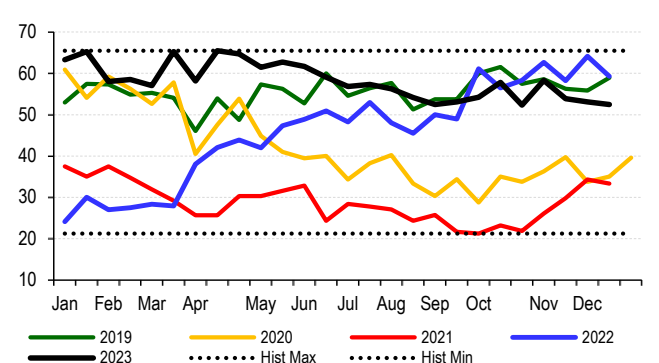


Source: BofA Global Research.

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Chart 12: Shippers' view of inventory levels

Stack basis year-year; Inventory Indicator at 52.4



Source: BofA Global Research.

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The survey, which is distributed to approximately 1,300 shipping managers, received responses from a varied mix of all major end markets (retail, consumer goods, industrial, manufacturing, basic materials, healthcare, tech).

Figure 1: Shippers' core end-market

Retail and Manufacturing oriented end-markets



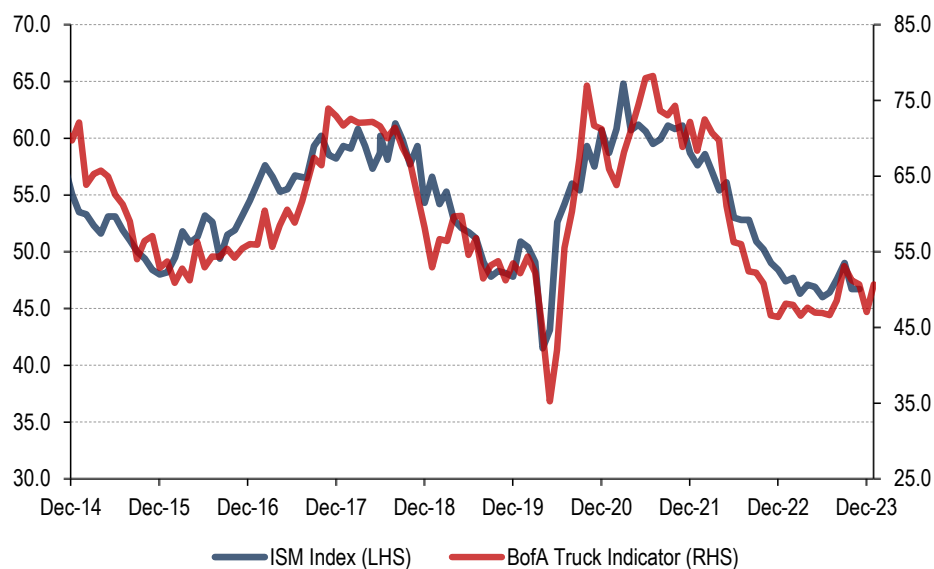
Source: BofA Global Research estimates.

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Correlation between BofA Truck indicator and ISM Index

Chart 13: BofA Truck Indicator and ISM Index

Two data sets have shown correlation since survey inception (0.81 on a one-month leading basis)



Source: BofA Global Research estimates, ISM Index

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Shipper Comments (continued)

- A Durables Shipper noted that it continues to see truck rate decreases for domestic shipments. It expects the first few weeks to continue that trend.

- An Industrial Shipper continues to receive a lot of cold calls from new carriers and brokers looking for business.

Exhibit 1: Stock Mentioned

Stock prices and ratings mentioned in this report

BofA Ticker	Bloomberg ticker	Company name	Price	Rating
JBHT	JBHT US	J.B. Hunt Trans	US\$ 201.86	B-1-7
KNX	KNX US	Knight-Swift	US\$ 58.41	B-1-7
ODFL	ODFL US	Old Dominion	US\$ 411.06	B-1-7
SAIA	SAIA US	Saia Inc.	US\$ 448.43	B-1-9
XPO	XPO US	XPO, Inc.	US\$ 90.03	C-1-9

Source: BofA Global Research

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Price objective basis & risk

J.B. Hunt Transport Services (JBHT)

Our \$215 price objective is based on a 24.5x target multiple of our 2024e EPS. Our target multiple is above its 16x-23x one standard deviation trading band as earnings are expected to trough in late '23 and begin to recover in '24. We expect pricing pressure to be somewhat countered with improved operational performance as supply chains improve fluidity. We forecast solid double-digit EPS gains over time, robust Intermodal performance, and potential for improved box turns as rail service improves. It also plans to grow its container fleet to 150k over 2-4 years as it scales growth on BNSF's network, post competitors shift to UNP.

Risks to our PO are a slowing economic environment, an inability for the company to raise rates to offset rising costs (driver pay, insurance, depreciation, and fuel), a severe accident impacting costs or the company's image, or significant impacts (strikes, network outages) to BNSF or Norfolk Southern's rail network or J.B. Hunt's relationship with either of those carriers impacting intermodal operations. Additional risks are regulatory changes impacting the flow of freight from the highway to rail, or rapidly falling fuel prices that could encourage freight to stay on the highway, its occasional arbitration with BNSF over rail rates, a sustained loose capacity truckload market that may overhang Intermodal pricing, and inability to obtain labor.

Knight-Swift Transportation Holdings Inc (KNX)

Our \$65 price objective is based on a 18.5x target multiple on our 2024 EPS estimate. Our target multiple is above the bottom of its one-standard-deviation 22-year historical trading range of 14x-25x on year ahead estimates, as it nears trough earnings (led by pressure on economic growth and truck spot rate declines). We view downside as somewhat limited given its diversified model and strong operational performance, and a truckload market that is beginning to work out excess capacity (though recognize the pendulum can overswing on rate declines and cost pressures). Nevertheless, given its diversification moves (LTL, Intermodal, Brokerage/Logistics, and Trucking/Dedicated) it looks to prove earnings will be more sustainable than in prior cycles.

Risks to our price objective are volatility at its truckload segment (particularly its historical SWFT segment, which is more exposed to large retail and project pricing), slower earnings growth from its LTL acquisitions, weaker-than-expected economic conditions, an inability for the company to have trucking rates offset rising costs (driver pay, insurance, depreciation, and fuel), a severe accident impacting the company's image and finances, over-expanding (or acquiring assets) without maintaining its focus on cost controls, and a lack of growth opportunities, and the failure to complete its acquisition of US Xpress, which may affect its growth outlook.



Old Dominion Freight Line (ODFL)

Our \$447 price objective is based on a 34x target multiple on our 2024 EPS estimate. Our target is above the company's 20-year historical one-standard deviation range of 13x-27x forward earnings, adjusted for outlier periods, and the top of its 3-year range of 28x-34x. We are at the top of its historical range given the seminal event in the LTL industry as YELL declared bankruptcy, ODFL's sustained share gains, above-inflation cost pricing, and a robust free cash flow yield. It continues to post superior operating performance relative to peers and the favorable dynamics of the LTL industry.

Downside risks to our PO are weak freight demand and slow or negative industrial production growth. Additionally, increasing LTL competition could limit Old Dominion's ability to grow volume and increase market share, while also negatively impacting freight rates and pressuring profit margins. A return to industry pricing competition, last experienced en masse in the 2008 Great Recession, could weigh on investor views on the health of the industry, and thus OD's leading multiple. The less-than-truckload industry is competitive, with a large number of national and regional companies vying for business. A potential turnaround at Yellow could lead to increased freight capacity and negative pricing pressures.

Saia Inc. (SAIA)

Our \$468 price objective is based on a 29x target multiple on our 2024 EPS estimate. Our target remains above its 14x-23x one-standard deviation 10-year trading range as it continues to benefit from ramping EPS. Our target multiple is above the top end given its leading service, ability to win share, and disruption in the LTL market which can aid premiere carriers, which should more than offset a soft freight environment.

Downside risks to our PO are weak freight demand and slow or negative industrial production growth. Our price objective is also threatened by increasing competition, which could limit Saia's ability to grow volume and increase market share, while also negatively impacting freight rates and pressuring profit margins. The less-than-truckload industry is competitive, with a large number of national and regional companies vying for business.

XPO, Inc. (XPO)

Our \$102 price objective is based on a 31x P/E multiple on its 2024e EPS, above the upper end of peer range at 8x-24x, as we look for it to close the premium gap to best-in-class peers as it executes on its Network 2.0 growth plan and its purchase of Yellow real estate.

Downside risks to our price objective are a downturn in the global economy, which could reduce volume and pressure margins, while also potentially having a disproportionate impact on XPO's earnings given its leveraged capital structure. Long term inability to secure a sale of its Europe operation may also be a downside risk to our price objective. Its inability to improve cargo claims, insource linehaul, obtain tractors/trailers at pace it desires, and failure to improve pricing on its improved service levels would be a downside risk to targets/valuation. A potential turnaround at Yellow could lead to increased freight capacity and negative pricing pressures.

Analyst Certification

I, Ken Hoexter, hereby certify that the views expressed in this research report accurately reflect my personal views about the subject securities and issuers. I also certify that no part of my compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendations or view expressed in this research report.

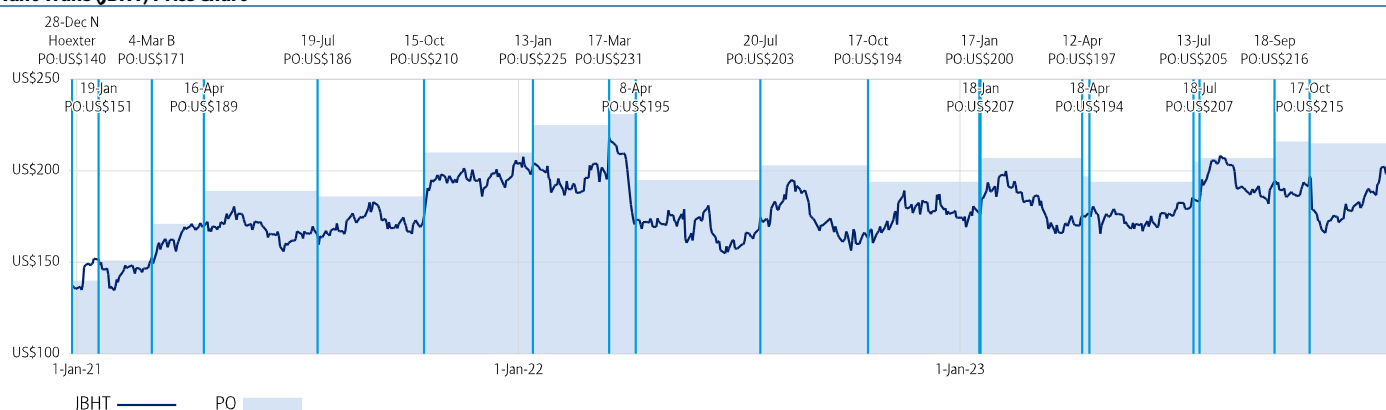
US - Transportation Coverage Cluster

Investment rating	Company	BofA Ticker	Bloomberg symbol	Analyst
BUY				
	Canadian Pacific Kansas City Ltd	CP	CP US	Ken Hoexter
	CSX Corporation	CSX	CSX US	Ken Hoexter
	FedEx Corp.	FDX	FDX US	Ken Hoexter
	J.B. Hunt Transport Services	JBHT	JBHT US	Ken Hoexter
	Kirby Corp	KEX	KEX US	Ken Hoexter
	Knight-Swift Transportation Holdings Inc	KNX	KNX US	Ken Hoexter
	Norfolk Southern	NSC	NSC US	Ken Hoexter
	Old Dominion Freight Line	ODFL	ODFL US	Ken Hoexter
	RXO, Inc.	RXO	RXO US	Ken Hoexter
	Saia Inc.	SAIA	SAIA US	Ken Hoexter
	Union Pacific	UNP	UNP US	Ken Hoexter
	XPO, Inc.	XPO	XPO US	Ken Hoexter
NEUTRAL				
	Canadian National	CNI	CNI US	Ken Hoexter
	Schneider National	SNDR	SNDR US	Ken Hoexter
	Scorpio Tankers Inc.	STNG	STNG US	Ken Hoexter
	Teekay Tankers Limited	TNK	TNK US	Ken Hoexter
	TFI International	TFII	TFII US	Ken Hoexter
	TFI International	YTFII	TFII CN	Ken Hoexter
	UPS	UPS	UPS US	Ken Hoexter
	Wabtec Corp.	WAB	WAB US	Ken Hoexter
UNDERPERFORM				
	ArcBest Corporation	ARCB	ARCB US	Ken Hoexter
	C.H. Robinson	CHRW	CHRW US	Ken Hoexter
	The Greenbrier Companies	GBX	GBX US	Ken Hoexter
	Werner Enterprises	WERN	WERN US	Ken Hoexter
	World Kinect	WKC	WKC US	Ken Hoexter

Disclosures

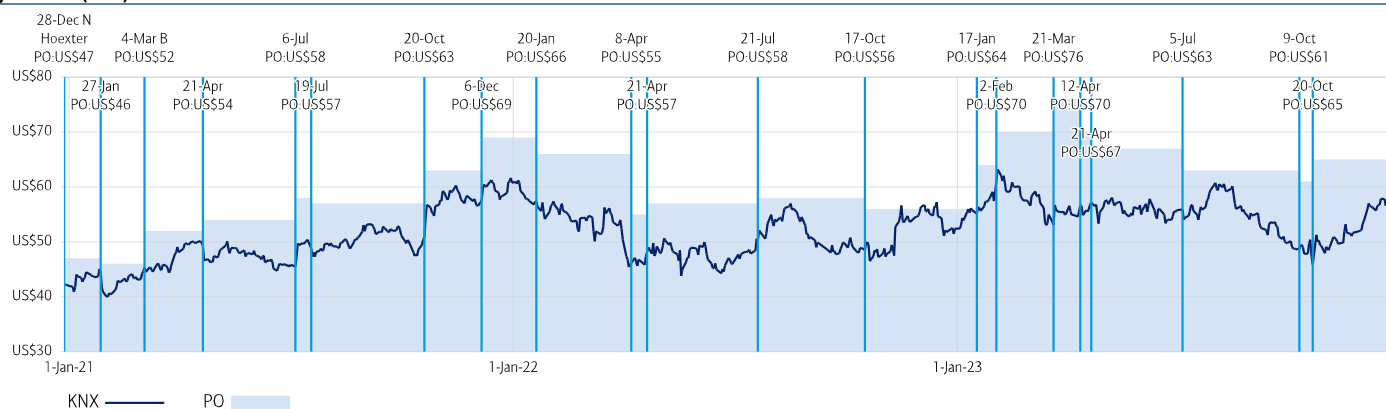
Important Disclosures

J.B. Hunt Trans (JBHT) Price Chart



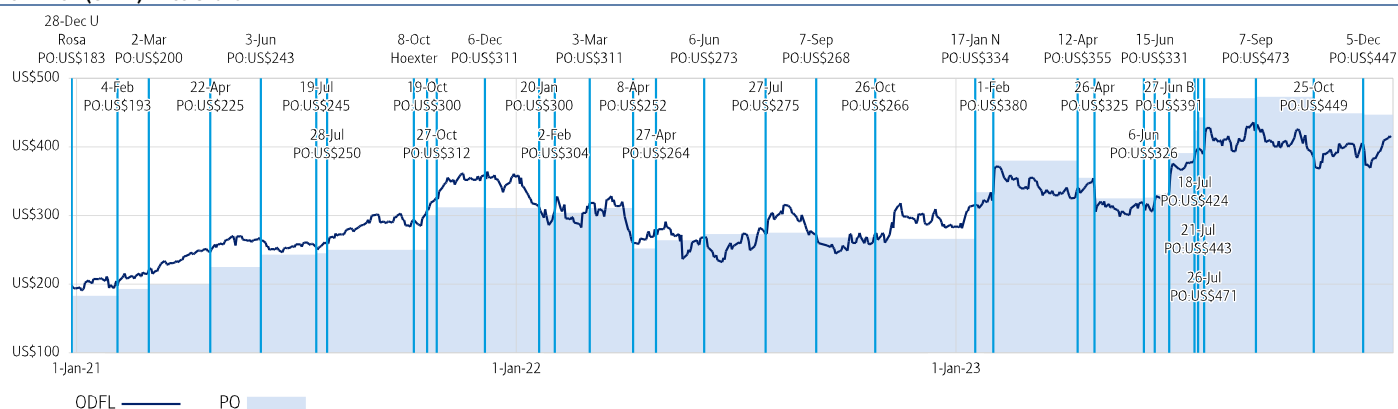
B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

The Investment Opinion System is contained at the end of the report under the heading "Fundamental Equity Opinion Key". Dark grey shading indicates the security is restricted with the opinion suspended. Medium grey shading indicates the security is under review with the opinion withdrawn. Light grey shading indicates the security is not covered. Chart is current as of a date no more than one trading day prior to the date of the report.

Knight-Swift (KNX) Price Chart

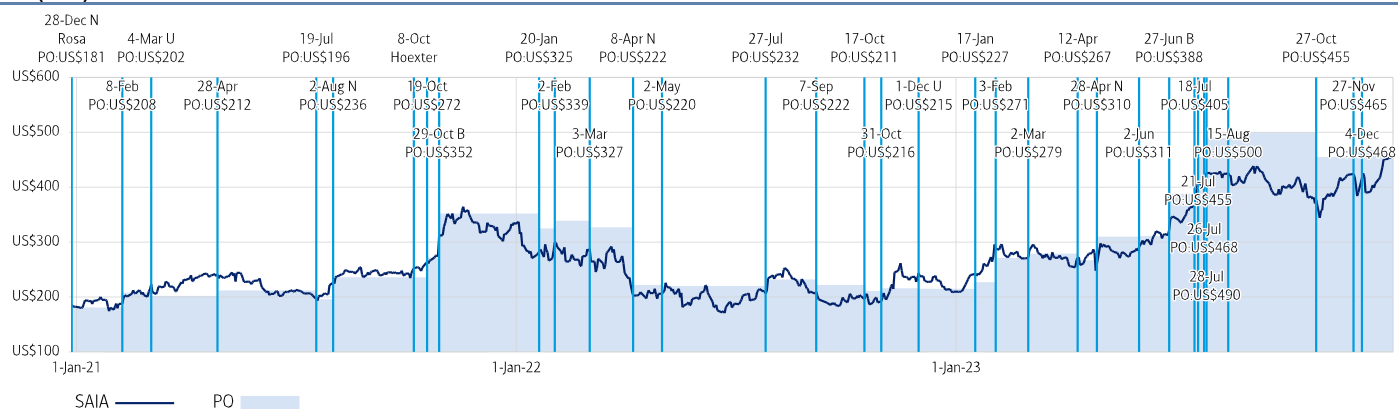
B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

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Old Dominion (ODFL) Price Chart

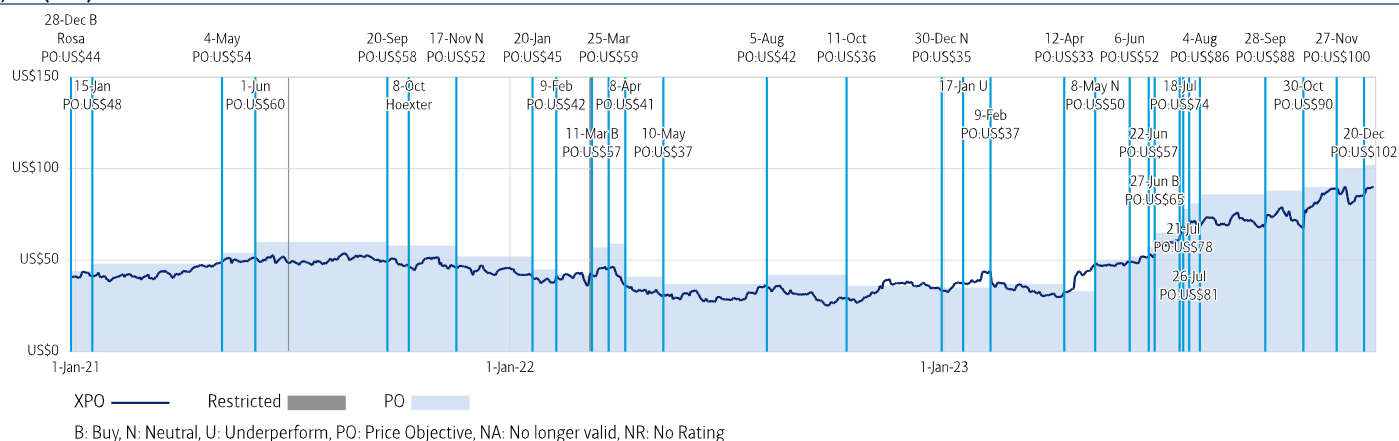
B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

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Saia Inc. (SAIA) Price Chart

B: Buy, N: Neutral, U: Underperform, PO: Price Objective, NA: No longer valid, NR: No Rating

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XPO, Inc. (XPO) Price Chart

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Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Transport/Infrastructure Group (as of 30 Sep 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships ^{R1}	Count	Percent
Buy	71	53.38%	Buy	43	60.56%
Hold	29	21.80%	Hold	13	44.83%
Sell	33	24.81%	Sell	17	51.52%

Equity Investment Rating Distribution: Global Group (as of 30 Sep 2023)

Coverage Universe	Count	Percent	Inv. Banking Relationships ^{R1}	Count	Percent
Buy	1869	53.48%	Buy	1046	55.97%
Hold	828	23.69%	Hold	461	55.68%
Sell	798	22.83%	Sell	370	46.37%

^{R1} Issuers that were investment banking clients of BofA Securities or one of its affiliates within the past 12 months. For purposes of this Investment Rating Distribution, the coverage universe includes only stocks. A stock rated Neutral is included as a Hold, and a stock rated Underperform is included as a Sell.

FUNDAMENTAL EQUITY OPINION KEY: Opinions include a Volatility Risk Rating, an Investment Rating and an Income Rating. **VOLATILITY RISK RATINGS**, indicators of potential price fluctuation, are: A - Low, B - Medium and C - High. **INVESTMENT RATINGS** reflect the analyst's assessment of both a stock's absolute total return potential as well as its attractiveness for investment relative to other stocks within its Coverage Cluster (defined below). Our investment ratings are: 1 - Buy stocks are expected to have a total return of at least 10% and are the most attractive stocks in the coverage cluster; 2 - Neutral stocks are expected to remain flat or increase in value and are less attractive than Buy rated stocks and 3 - Underperform stocks are the least attractive stocks in a coverage cluster. An investment rating of 6 (No Rating) indicates that a stock is no longer trading on the basis of fundamentals. Analysts assign investment ratings considering, among other things, the 0-12 month total return expectation for a stock and the firm's guidelines for ratings dispersions (shown in the table below). The current price objective for a stock should be referenced to better understand the total return expectation at any given time. The price objective reflects the analyst's view of the potential price appreciation (depreciation).

Investment rating	Total return expectation (within 12-month period of date of initial rating)	Ratings dispersion guidelines for coverage cluster ^{R2}
Buy	≥ 10%	≤ 70%
Neutral	≥ 0%	≤ 30%
Underperform	N/A	≥ 20%

^{R2} Ratings dispersions may vary from time to time where BofA Global Research believes it better reflects the investment prospects of stocks in a Coverage Cluster.

INCOME RATINGS, indicators of potential cash dividends, are: 7 - same/higher (dividend considered to be secure), 8 - same/lower (dividend not considered to be secure) and 9 - pays no cash dividend. **Coverage Cluster** is comprised of stocks covered by a single analyst or two or more analysts sharing a common industry, sector, region or other classification(s). A stock's coverage cluster is included in the most recent BofA Global Research report referencing the stock.

Price Charts for the securities referenced in this research report are available on the [Price Charts website](#), or call 1-800-MERRILL to have them mailed.

BofAS or one of its affiliates acts as a market maker for the equity securities recommended in the report: J.B. Hunt Trans, Knight-Swift, Old Dominion, Saia Inc., XPO, Inc.

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