

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government reported today its index anticipating economic trends gained for the fourth Straight month in February, but at a slower rate than during the previous month.

The Commerce Department said its composite of a dozen economic statistics, called leading indicators, climbed by eight-tenths of 1 per cent in February. That compared to a gain of 1.5 per cent in January, which had been the largest increase in six months.

The January figure was revised downward from an original estimate of 2.2 per cent.

The index has been gaining steadily, except for a four-tenths of 1 per cent setback in October. It signals steady economic growth in the months ahead, although still at a pace slower than before the nation hit recession in 1973.

Commerce said the biggest factor in the latest increase was a higher percentage of companies reporting slower deliveries from their suppliers. The percentage reporting slower deliveries climbed from 42 per cent in January to 50 per cent in February. Slower deliveries are taken as a sign of increased demand and quicker economic activity.

In all, eight of the 11 individual sectors available in time for compilation into the February composite showed a gain

Among them were a lower layoff rate in

industry, an increase in the wholesale prices of key commodities, a faster formation of new businesses, higher stock prices, a bigger money supply after adjustment for inflation, a higher volume of orders for manufactured goods and greater demand for building permits.

Commerce said the strongest downward influence on the index was a slower growth

in the liquid assets held by consumers and non-financial companies. Liquid assets are those held in cash or investments which can be quickly converted into cash.

Other downward influences were a shorter average work week and a lower volume of orders for factories and facilities.