Impacts of Ocean Carrier Alliances on Containerized Freight

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# Abstract

Since the turn of the 21st century, vessel sharing via strategic alliances has become the dominant cooperative strategy among maritime freight carriers. These alliances have increasingly captured the attention of economists, industry analysts, and regulators, yet few empirical analyses have been published that measure the impact of such cooperative agreements on the maritime freight economy. This paper analyses extensive trade data at the vessel and container level to assess the impacts of ocean carrier alliances on the maritime freight economy, with an emphasis on US agricultural exporters. While alliances are global in their permitted scope, the level of actual cooperation between allies varies substantially across lanes and across time. When alliances are highly utilized, we find some small impacts on service frequency as measured by the number of vessels operating on each lane, but economically insignificant impacts of alliance utilization on other quality metrics including average vessel capacity, total lane-level capacity, and the number of ports/countries accessible from each port.

# Introduction

The transition from the sailing vessel to the steamship in the early 1800s enabled the first regularly scheduled maritime freight services, and maritime shipping has been a vital part of the global economy ever since. By the dawn of the 20th century, the maritime freight economy was well established and enabled producers, typically referred to as “shippers”, to deliver their products to any coastal market on the globe[[1]](#footnote-2). The firms operating the vessels that carried the cargoes between ports became known as “carriers,” and the state of competition among carriers, or lack thereof, has been the subject of many volumes.

Profit maximization for ocean carriers requires maximizing capacity utilization (minimizing empty haul), as the cost of a sailing is primarily a fixed cost (i.e., the marginal cost of adding additional cargo to an existing sailing is near zero). This is especially true in the modern era of shipping in standardized containers, which allows cargo of almost any type to be carried on any containership. Combined with the fact that the per-container unit costs of sailing decrease with ship size, economies of scale in maritime freight are quite pronounced.

In pursuit of maximal capacity utilization, ocean carriers, since the earliest days of maritime shipping, have entered cooperative agreements that provide structure for capacity sharing and improve capacity utilization (Sjostrom 2010) (Panayides and Wiedmer 2011). Cooperation also enables carriers to capture economies of scale, as cargoes on the same lane can be pooled onto larger vessels. The exact form of this cooperation has varied over time, and by the late 19th century, cooperation among carriers fully permeated the maritime industry in the form of cooperative groups of carriers called “conferences.”

A primary concern of economists and regulators has been, since at least the work of Alfred Marshall in the early 20th century, that the economies of scale inherent in ocean shipping and the relatively small number of firms operating between port pairs enable carriers to act as monopolistic cartels (Marshall 1921). Despite these concerns, regulations in the United States have historically been favorable to cooperation between carriers, and in 1916 US regulators granted antitrust immunity to shipping conferences in exchange for regulatory oversight in an attempt to mitigate the oversupply issues common at that time (Sjostrom 2010) (Clyde and Reitzes 1998). In practice, this allowed shippers to enter conferences on a given lane (i.e., an origin-destination port pair) that collectively set rates, subject to regulatory approval and the publishing of said rates to the public. Conference members were forced to honor the published rates for any shipper wishing to send similar cargo on that lane. The resulting economic behavior of carriers under this system has been widely viewed as the exact kind of monopolistic cartel behavior that Marshall anticipated (Stewart and Inaba 2003) (Clyde and Reitzes 1998) (Tang and Sun 2018) (Fox 1992) (Wilson and Casavant 1991) (Sjostrom 2010).

Globalization skyrocketed the maritime shipping industry to prominence. Between 1970 and 2023, shipments of goods via maritime container ship increased by more than an order of magnitude and now account for some 90% of international trade (UNCTAD 2023, OECD 2024). This rise brought renewed focus on maritime shipping from the public and regulators, and support for the antitrust exemptions long enjoyed by carriers began to weaken in the late 20th century. The Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 1984 weakened the market power of the shipping conferences, and by 1998 the conference system was eliminated entirely. Since that time, carriers have been required to negotiate rates and service contracts with shippers in private under typical antitrust regulations. Although strategic alliances between carriers existed during the conference era, this regulatory change, along with concurrent advancements in supply chain management, quickly led to strategic alliances becoming the dominant cooperative strategy between ocean carriers (Evangelista and Morvillo 1999, M. Fusillo 2006, Sheppard and Seidman 2001, Panayides and Wiedmer 2011).

An Ocean Carrier Alliance (OCA) is a strategic alliance between two or more carriers that enable them to share space on each other’s vessels, set service types and schedules, coordinate on vessel maintenance and repair, and even co-charter vessels. OCAs must be approved by the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) and are highly similar to the vessel sharing agreements that carriers have been commonly utilizing both before and after the fall of the conference system; however, vessel sharing agreements are typically very limited in geographic scope—applying only to a handful of lanes within a single region—and in the expected number of vessels utilized, which is typically less than a dozen. OCAs, by contrast, are global agreements that allow for the use of hundreds of vessels (often a majority of the alliance members’ combined fleets). The most recent filing of the THE Alliance agreement, for instance, applies to “ports in North Asia, South Asia, Middle East (including the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea Regions), Northern Europe, Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Black Sea, Egypt, Panama, Mexico, Canada, Central America and the Caribbean on the one hand, and ports on the East, Gulf, and West Coasts of the United States, by any route including via the Panama and Suez Canals or the Cape of Good Hope, on the other, as well as ports and points served via such U.S. and foreign ports” (THE Agreement 2024). OCAs, unlike vessel sharing agreements, also require standing committees and/or coordination centers to be jointly operated by the members in order to execute the alliance’s joint operations.

Furthermore, our analysis in this paper shows that membership in an OCA has a notable, sometimes quite dramatic, effect on a carrier’s cargo sharing behavior. Figures X.1 and X.2 show examples of which other carriers Mediterranean and Evergreen, respectively, share cargo with before and after joining an OCA.

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Unlike conferences, OCAs are barred from sharing rate information between the members, jointly marketing their services, or sharing revenues. These regulations undercut carriers’ ability to engage in traditional cartel price-fixing behavior (Wang 2012, Stewart, Inaba and Blatner 2003).

OCA members are required by their alliance agreements to negotiate slot sharing prices—the price that the member charges for carrying an ally’s container on vessels operated by the member—along with the specific number of slots on their ships that each member will allow their ally to utilize on that lane. This slot allocation and pricing is known to all members of the alliance, but it is not filed with the FMC nor made available to the public. Importantly, as of the time of this writing, all 3 active OCA agreements stipulate, either directly or indirectly, “the principle that the Parties’ basic slot allocation will be equivalent to contribution” to the alliance (OCEAN Alliance Agreement, 2024). We discuss this allocation extensively below.

OCAs have been the subject of much review by economists, which we discuss in more detail in the next section, and have been viewed by many as allowing carriers to improve capacity utilization, reduce operational costs, and increase service quality (Sheppard and Seidman 2001) (Panayides and Wiedmer 2011) (Evangelista and Morvillo 1999). However, this has not dissuaded all concerns that the maritime freight economy under the alliance system is sufficiently competitive. Taken together, carriers in OCAs represent roughly 90% of global capacity, raising concerns that alliances may exercise market power in various ways (Evangelista and Morvillo 1999) (Ghorbani, et al. 2022) (Fusillo 2003); OCA shares of total US export volumes are presented Figure XX. Despite these concerns, few empirical studies have been conducted with the goal of measuring the impacts of OCAs on the maritime freight economy (Ghorbani, et al. 2022).

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This paper provides empirical research into the impacts of OCAs, arguing that viewing the members of an OCA as a single collective entity, and especially viewing all services provided by all members on all lanes as related to the OCA, is a flawed approach. Rather, it is vital to account for the fact that, while global in their *permitted* scope, in practice OCAs are highly utilized on some lanes and minimally utilized, if at all, on other lanes. The same is true across time, as we will see below in our analysis of the PIERS Bill of Lading database, which includes carrier, commodity, vessel, and various other data on every container imported or exported from US maritime ports since 2006. We investigate whether OCAs improve capacity utilization and quality of service, as well as to what extent OCAs facilitate anti-competitive behavior among carriers.

This section introduced Ocean Carrier Alliances and provided the basic historical and regulatory context for our analysis, and the next section reviews the relevant economics literature. We then discuss our research methodology, followed by a discussion of the data sets utilized in our analysis. The Results section presents the empirical findings, and we conclude with a discussion of OCA impacts and recommendations for future research.

[Need to include more discussion on ag commodities, containerized ag shipments, etc]

[Visualize ag export volumes]

# Literature Review

Alfred Marshal laid the foundation of analyzing anti-competitive behavior in the context of high economies of scale, and ocean carriers were used as a type example in his seminal book, *Industry and Trade*, first published in 1919. Marshal’s warnings did not go unnoticed, but for the majority of the 20th century, concerns about the high costs of inefficiencies in maritime shipping and the benefits offered by collaboration between carriers won out over the concerns about cartel behavior. This was not only true of US regulators, as evidenced by the antitrust immunities granted to conferences that lasted from 1916 to 1998, but also of many economic analysts. We refer the reader to Sjostrom (2010) for a thorough overview of the economic models applied to the maritime freight economy throughout conference era. Our discussion picks up after the fall of the conferences and the rise of OCAs as the dominant cooperative strategy among carriers at the turn of the millennium.

Sheppard and Seidman (2001) argue that cooperation via OCAs can provide carriers with the economies of scale necessary to operate efficiently without the regulatory concerns associated with mergers and acquisitions[[2]](#footnote-3). Subsequent works have elaborated on the potential benefits of OCAs, but these studies have been largely hypothetical in nature; (Panayides and Wiedmer 2011) provide a thorough review of this literature.

OCAs are not without their challenges, however. Early work by (Midoro and Pitto 2000) highlighted the instability of OCAs due to management complexities and especially intra-alliance competition. They argue that the transaction and coordination costs inherent in managing global alliances with multiple partners hinder the ability of alliances to achieve the intended efficiency gains, a concern echoed by (Bergantino and Veenstra 2002) in their network theoretic study of OCAs. Instability and management costs have been a consistent concern since then, and analysts have investigated various approaches to achieving stability. (Ghorbani, et al. 2022) provide a thorough review of this literature.

Empirical investigations into the impacts and performance of OCAs have been sparce. (Fusillo 2003) showed that, despite the theoretical potential of OCAs to improve capacity utilization, excess capacities changed very little, if at all, in the years since the conference era. Fusillo posits that holding excess capacity may be an intentional strategy among carriers with market power (either on their own or via their OCA) to construct barriers to entry for smaller firms. However, the data used in this analysis go only through 2001, so perhaps the instability marked by (Midoro and Pitto 2000) prevented OCAs from achieving their goals. Fusillo’s 2003 analysis is also limited to industry averages, and does not differentiate capacity utilization of ships operating under an OCA from those operating independently. We will inspect this issue in our analysis below.

In 2006, using updated data from the same PIERS database that we utilize in this study, Fussilo provided a thorough description of the structure of the maritime freight economy, pointing out that market concentration (measured by the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index) fell from the late 1980s through the mid 2000s and that the fastest-growing markets (e.g., Northeast Asia – US West Coast) tend to be the least concentrated. After noting what we mentioned above, namely that while OCAs are not allowed to fix prices, they are permitted to meet regularly to discuss a wide array of supply and demand information. Fusillo states the concern of many analysts and regulators: “Whether this leads to illicit price fixing is an open question and, because of the paucity of adequate pricing data, not easy to answer” (M. Fusillo 2006) pg 465. This remains true to this day, almost two decades later.

Indeed, whether the maritime freight economy enables competitive equilibria to exist in the first place has been brought into question by researchers such as Pirrong (1992), who argue that the variable demand and indivisible production costs inherent in ocean shipping result in the persistence of excess production capacities that destabilize competitive equilibria. In this condition, core theory predicts that cooperation (even so far as “cartelization”) among producers may be an efficient response.

Whether or not excess production capacities in ocean shipping result in an “empty core” is somewhat controversial[[3]](#footnote-4) and beyond the scope of this study; however, the ability to reduce excess capacities has long been the primary argument for allowing cooperation among ocean carriers (Sheppard and Seidman 2001) (Sjostrom 2010) (Panayides and Wiedmer 2011). As is the case with anti-competitive behavior, though, empirical investigation into excess capacities has been scant—only one paper, (Fusillo 2003) mentioned above, is known to the authors to measure excess capacities.

# Data

The primary data source used in this study is S&P Global’s Port Import/Export Reporting Service (PIERS), which provides detailed data at the bill of lading (BOL)[[4]](#footnote-5) level from US Customs and Border Protection, US Census data, UN port information, as well as data manually collected by PIERS staff. The data include the quantities and types of each commodity being shipped, the carriers, vessel identification codes, departure and arrival ports and dates, and various other data for every shipment imported to or exported from the US via maritime ports from January 2006 through March 2024. Representing more than 247 million shipments, these data allow us to inspect many aspects of the maritime freight economy.

To the PIERS data we add vessel specifications such as total capacity along with port entry and exit dates for each vessel from the US Army Corp of Engineers Foreign Traffic Vessel Entrances and Clearances database. Due to the private nature of contract pricing discussed above, we do not have price information for each BOL in the PIERS database. We do, however, analyze rate indexes for each lane and month from Drewery’s Container Freight Rate Insight (CFRI) reports in order to inspect the impacts of OCA activities and other variables on average monthly rates. Drewery CFRI reports list lanes at a much more aggregated/regional level than PIERS; we find the best match from Drewery for each PIERS lane based on the geographic locations of the origins and destinations listed in each source. The regional nature of Drewery lanes limits our ability to investigate an important aspect of maritime shipping, namely the substitutionary nature of nearby ports. Intuition dictates that shippers facing rate increases (or quality decreases) on one lane would substitute for a nearby lane, especially in the case when either shipper or final buyer (or both) are located away from the port city itself.

Almost all variables used in this study are identical to those in the original sources mentioned above, with two notable exceptions. First, arrival and departure dates in the PIERS BOL data sometimes vary from the actual arrival and departure dates of the vessel[[5]](#footnote-6). Where possible, we use the port entry dates from the Corp of Engineers database to resolve discrepancies, and otherwise cluster nearby dates into a single arrival or departure date using a machine learning algorithm. Second, in order to analyze the dynamics of cargo slot sharing between carriers, we infer the vessel’s owner (i.e., the carrier operating that vessel at any given time, whether by owning the vessel outright, chartering it, or any of the other various means by which carriers control vessels) from the carrier and vessel on each BOL in the PIERS data. The carrier representing the plurality of containers carried on a given vessel during a given month is taken to be that vessel’s owner. Containers carried on that vessel from carriers other than the vessel’s owner are thus deemed shared cargo.

Data sources and variables descriptions for the main database are presented in Table 1.

Table 1A screenshot of a computer

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This study is concerned with the impacts of OCAs on US agricultural producers; we thus limit the data to exports only. As we see in Figure XX below, export volumes are highly concentrated into the major shipping lanes, with only the top 75 out of 22,400 total lanes seeing more than a single vessel’s worth of cargo in a given month. Given that large lanes typically see hundreds of vessels and many different carriers, and smaller lanes often see only a handful of vessels (on which they fill small percentages of the vessel’s capacity) and 1 or 2 carriers, it is natural to suspect that OCA activity would have potentially very different effects on large lanes than on small ones. Smaller lanes, however, still collectively represent the vast majority of lanes and a substantial percentage (XX%) of total volumes, and their inclusion in the calculations of average treatment effects may hide (or inflate) certain effects. For the purposes of this study, we restrict the data to only the top 500 lanes by volume[[6]](#footnote-7).

A graph with numbers and a number of points

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As described in the Methodology section below, we inspect OCA impacts at several different levels of aggregation, each organized into monthly panels. At the highest level of aggregation, we inspect lane characteristics over time such as carrier concentration, number of vessels in service, etc. We then inspect individual carrier characteristics on each lane over time, such as the capacity offered by each carrier on that lane. Our aggregations get more specific with each model, ending with a panel consisting of carriers carrying specific commodities on specific vessels on each lane over time. Summary statistics and descriptions for the variables of interest are presented in Tables 2.1–2.5.

Table 2.1 – Lane Panel

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Table 2.2 – Carrier-Lane Panel

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Table 2.3 – Commodity-Carrier-Lane Panel

Table 2.4 – Vessel-Carrier-Lane Panel

Table 2.5 – Vessel-Commodity-Lane Panel

# Methodology

How does lane-month-vessel alliance activity affect vessel operations? Do alliance-operated vessels behave differently than non-alliance operated vessels?

For each vessel-month, identify if the vessel is alliance-operated, and by which alliance. Alliance vessels are assumed to be alliance-operated if over 90% of cargo is from an alliance, the vessel is carrying cargo for at least two alliance members (the vessel owner, and one other member of the alliance). Then, for each lane-month-alliance-vessel, identify differences in vessel operations between alliance- and non-alliance-operated vessels.

* Measures
  + Indicator =1 if vessel is alliance-operated (robustness around this definition)
    - Test this, lots of graphs, measure against reported vessel operations
    - Concerns:
      * Need to be careful about not characterizing Maersk vessel as 2M vessel just because they have carried some nominal volume of Med cargo
      * Need to recognize that alliance allocation may happen at the lane-level, and thus not be observable on any single vessel.
* Outcomes
  + Volume (teus)
  + Vessel capacity
  + Time between calls
  + Time in port
  + Number of ports accessible
  + Number of countries accessible
  + Number of regions accessible

Yvaijt = b0 + Vv + Aa + Lijt + a1Aaijt + a2Avaijt + evaijt

Vv: is a vessel fixed effect

Aa: is an alliance fixed effect

Lijt: lane-time fixed effect

Aaijt: indicator =1 if alliance a has an alliance-operated vessel active on lane ij in period t

Avaijt: indicator =1 if vessel v is an alliance-operated vessel operating on lane ij in period t

Data shape: one row for each vessel, alliance, lane, time period; indicator =1 if vessel is alliance-operated; do not need to fill ‘missing’ zeros, already conditional on observed vessels.

Identification: control group is non-alliance-operated vessels from the same alliance on the same lane in the same time period; conditioned on alliance activity by the alliance on the same lane in the same time period; protected from lane-time variant unobservables and time invariant unobserved vessel characteristics.

How does lane-month-alliance alliance activity affect carriers? How does alliance activity of the carrier’s alliance, affect their operations? How does alliance activity of other alliances, affect the carriers’ operations?

* Measures
  + Incidence of my own alliance operated vessels
  + Incidence of others’ alliance operated vessels
  + Number of my own alliance operated vessels
  + Number of others’ alliance operated vessels
* Outcomes
  + Volume (teus)
  + Total vessel capacity
  + # of calls
  + Average time between calls
  + Number of ports accessible
  + Number of countries accessible
  + Number of regions accessible

Ycaijt = b0 + Ccaij + Lijt + a1Aat + a2Aaijt + a3A-at + a4A-aijt + ecaijt

Lijt: lane-time fixed effect

Ccaij: is a carrier-alliance-lane fixed effect

Alliance activity of alliance a (market share of alliance a, number of alliance-operated vessels of alliance a)

* Aat: alliance activity of alliance a across all port/lanes in period t
* Aait: alliance activity of alliance a at U.S. port i in period t
* Aajt: alliance activity of alliance a at foreign port j in period t
* Aaijt: alliance activity of alliance a on lane ij in period t
* Aa-it: alliance activity of alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t
* Aa-jt: alliance activity of alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t
* Aa-ijt: alliance activity of alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Alliance activity of other alliances (hhi leave-out alliance a, number of alliance-operated vessels leave-out alliance a)

* A-at: alliance activity leave-out alliance a across all port/lanes in period t
* A-ait: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at U.S. ports i in period t
* A-ajt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at foreign ports j in period t
* A-aijt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a on lane ij in period t
* A-a-it: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t
* A-a-jt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t
* A-a-ijt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Alliance activity of ALL alliances (hhi, number of alliance-operated vessels)

* At: alliance activity across all port/lanes in period t
* Ait: alliance activity at U.S. ports i in period t
* Ajt: alliance activity at foreign ports j in period t
* Aijt: alliance activity on lane ij in period t
* A-it: alliance activity at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t
* A-jt: alliance activity at substitute foreign ports -j in period t
* A-ijt: alliance activity on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Across all lanes

Port-specific

Lane specific

Substitute ports

Substitute lanes

Port-level alliance activity of other alliances (hhi leave-out alliance a, number of alliance-operated vessels leave-out alliance a)

A-ait: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at U.S. ports i in period t

A-ajt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at foreign ports j in period t

Alliance activity on substitute lanes and at substitute ports

Aa-ijt: alliance activity of alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Aa-it: alliance activity of alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

Aa-jt: alliance activity of alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

Leave-out alliance activity

A-a-ijt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

A-a-it: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

A-a-jt: alliance activity leave-out alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

Data shape: one row for each carrier, lane, time period; count of alliance operated vessels from each alliance; need to fill ‘missing’ zeros to capture switching (alliance activity by other carriers or on other lanes may drive volumes to or from zero); don’t need to fill ‘missing’ zeros if we are interested in the impact of alliance activity conditioned on non-zero carrier-lane-month teus.

Identification: protected from lane-time variant unobservables, lane-carrier unobservables, and alliance-time variant unobservables; unprotected from lane-time-alliance variant unobservables that affect lane-level alliance activity and the outcome variable.

How does lane-month-carrier/alliance market power affect carriers? Market power of the carrier? Market power of their alliance? Market power of other carriers? Market power of other alliances?

* Measures
  + Share of my volumes on alliance operated vessels
  + Share of others’ volumes on alliance operated vessels
  + Market power of alliance-operated vessels
  + Market power of alliance across all vessels operated by alliance members
  + Leave-out market power of other alliance-operated vessels (hhi leave-out alliance a)
  + Leave-out market power of other alliances across all vessels operated by alliance members (hhi leave-out alliance a)
* Outcomes
  + Volume (teus)
  + Total vessel capacity
  + # of calls
  + Average time between calls
  + Number of ports accessible
  + Number of countries accessible
  + Number of regions accessible

Ycaijt = b0 + Ccij + Lijt + Pcijt + Paijt + P-cijt +P-aijt + ecaijt

Lijt: lane-time fixed effect

Ccij: is a carrier-lane fixed effect

Pcijt: lane-level market power of the carrier

Paijt: lane-level market power of the alliance

P-cijt: leave-out lane-level market power of other carriers (hhi leave-out carrier c)

P-aijt: leave-out lane-level market power of other alliances (hhi leave-out alliance a) (hhi leaveout 2m = sum of squared shares of alliances, where shares are computed as a fraction of total volumes – 2m volumes, and the sum does not include 2m shares)

Consider port-level market power, and market power on substitute lanes and ports

Pcit: market power of carrier c at U.S. port i in period t

Pcjt: market power of carrier c at foreign port j in period t

Pc-ijt: market power of carrier c on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Pc-it: market power of carrier c at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

Pc-jt: market power of carrier c at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

P-c-ijt: market power leave-out carrier c on substitute lanes -ij in period t

P-c-it: market power leave-out carrier c at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

P-c-jt: market power leave-out carrier c at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

Pait: market power of alliance a at U.S. port i in period t

Pajt: market power of alliance a at foreign port j in period t

Pa-ijt: market power of alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

Pa-it: market power of alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

Pa-jt: market power of alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

P-a-ijt: market power leave-out alliance a on substitute lanes -ij in period t

P-a-it: market power leave-out alliance a at substitute U.S. ports -i in period t

P-a-jt: market power leave-out alliance a at substitute foreign ports -j in period t

Data shape: one row for each carrier, lane, time period; market power of each alliance on each lane; need to fill ‘missing’ zeros to capture switching (alliance activity may drive volumes to or from zero); don’t need to fill ‘missing’ zeros if we are interested in the impact of alliance activity conditioned on non-zero carrier-lane-month teus.

Identification:

Are the effects of market power mediated through the incidence of an alliance operated vessel, or does it persist on lanes or in periods without an alliance-operated vessel?

Ycaijt = b0 + Ccij + Lijt + Pcijt + Paijt + P-cijt +P-aijt + Aaijt\*Pcijt + Aaijt\*Paijt + A-aijt\*P-cijt + A-aijt\*P-aijt + ecaijt

Lijt: lane-time fixed effect

Ccij: is a carrier-lane fixed effect

Pcijt: market power of the carrier

Paijt: market power of the alliance

P-cijt: leave-out market power of other carriers (hhi leave-out carrier c)

P-aijt: leave-out market power of other alliances (hhi leave-out alliance a)

Aaijt: indicator =1 if a is an active alliance on lane ij in period t

A-aijt: indicator=1 if an alliance leave-out a is active on lane ij in period t

Data shape:

Identification:

How does lane-month alliance activity affect lane-month outcomes?

* Measures
  + Incidence of alliance operated vessels
  + Number of alliance operated vessels
  + Share of volumes on alliance operated vessels
  + Market power of alliance-operated vessels
  + Market power of alliances across all vessels
* Outcomes
  + More volumes?
  + Different cargo types?
  + More shared cargo?
  + Less non-alliance cargo?
  + Have better operational efficiency?
  + Make more turns? (average time between port visits)
  + Make more port calls?
  + Higher rates?

Yijt = b0 + Lij + Lit + Ljt + Aijt + eijt

Port-month and lane-month alliance activity:

Yijt = b0 + Lij + Ait + Ajt + Aijt + eijt

Alliance activity on substitute lanes and at substitute ports:

Yijt = b0 + dt + Lij + Vijt + Ait + Ajt + Aijt + A-it + A-jt + A-ijt + eijt

Ait: when alliance activity increases in Seattle (i), what is the average lane-level effect for lanes originating in Seattle (Seattle-j)?

Ajt: when alliance activity increases in Tokyo (j), what is the average lane-level effect for lanes destined for j (i-Tokyo)?

Aijt: when alliance activity increases on lane ij (Seattle-Tokyo), what is the lane-level effect?

A-it: when alliance activity increases at leave-out domestic ports (-i, Tacoma), what is the average lane-level effect for lanes originating in Seattle (i, Seattle-j)?

A-jt: when alliance activity increases at leave-out foreign ports (-j, Busan), what is the average lane-level effect for lanes destined for j (i-Tokyo)?

Aijt: when alliance activity increases on substitute lanes -ij (Tacoma-Busan), what is the lane-level effect?

Data shape:

Identification: protected from lane-level time invariant unobservables, U.S. port-level time variant unobservables, and foreign port-level time variant unobservables; unprotected from lane-time variant unobservables correlated alliance activity and the outcome of interest.

U.S. port-month alliance activity on U.S. port-month outcomes:

Yit = b0 + Li + Ait + A-it + eit

Foreign port-month alliance activity on foreign port-month outcomes:

Yjt = b0 + Lj + Ajt+ A-jt + ejt

Data shape:

Identification:

To dos:

* For each port (U.S. and foreign), identify the set of substitute ports. For each lane, identify the set of substitute lanes.
  + - (matching algorithmically based on port/lane characteristics, of course location being an important one, size (maybe restricting on size), carriers visiting, terminal characteristics)
    - Find the 5 closest ports with average monthly export volumes within 1 stdev of the ports export volumes. Set of ports within a bandwidth that satisfy above constraint on volumes.
    - For each port group on vessel\_id, year: these represent the set of candidate substitute ports. We will identify voyages eventually…
  + Then generate set-level alliance activity and concentration metrics
    - Recognize that some of these metrics may be insensitive to bad substitute sets (market concentration of an alliance among a set of substitute ports, you are going to sum shares grouped by alliances among those ports, so inclusion of some small port will become irrelevant… you probably won’t see an alliance operate vessel visiting port, so summing the number of alliance operated vessels within the set will also not be affected)
* Generate variables:
  + Leave-out market power/concentration
  + Time since last port call, average time between calls
  + Capacity (resolve capacity in vessel-lane-month-carrier file)
  + ~~Operational efficiency (capacity utilization)~~
* ~~Fill zeros where appropriate~~
* Generate alliance-level market share and market power/concentration
  + Check to make share market share/power calculation don’t treat non-alliance carriers as a single entity

# Results

Results…

# Discussion

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1. So long as the political relationship between the respective countries allowed, of course. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. OCAs are exempt from the antitrust regulations applied to mergers and acquisitions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Wang (2012) analyzed rate data from Drewery and found that the fall of the conference system in 1998 shifted the structure of the economy from cartel price-fixing to a competitive market. Notably, their analysis supported healthy competition through at least Q4 2009, well into the era of OCAs. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For every shipment, the shipper and carrier sign a “bill of lading,” which serves both as the title for the goods as well as the service contract between the two parties. The bill of lading accompanies the shipment at all times while in transit. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. E.g., Even though container vessels rarely spend more than a few hours in port, one bill may be dated as arriving January 3rd and another, from the same vessel and port, may be dated January 5th. When a round trip between the relevant ports takes weeks, we consider those two bills to have arrived on the same date, and assume the difference in dates is due to when the bill was processed rather than when the cargo actually arrived. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Determining the best cutoff and/or accounting for lane size are opportunities for future analyses. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)