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|  | Reply |
| 1. Are the objectives and the rationale of the study clearly stated?  Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the clarity of the objectives and rationale of the study. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Mergers and acquisitions activities in the shipping industry is a hot research topic. However, mergers and acquisitions are different strategic decisions for the corporations. This manuscript uniquely focuses on merger decisions excluding acquisition decisions. The authors need to clarify the rationale of selecting criteria and why only chose to study mergers rather than mergers and acquisitions. Moreover, regarding the merger data the authors build, it includes merger events such as COSCO's merger with China shipping but also contains acquisition events such as Maersk acquiring CCNI.  Reviewer #2: yes | To Review 1: |
| 2. If applicable, is the application/theory/method/study reported in sufficient detail to allow for its replicability and/or reproducibility?  Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the replicability/reproducibility of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [X] No [] N/A []  Provide further comments here:  Since the authors manually create a merger list, if the authors would offer the dataset it is helpful for other researchers to reproduce the study.  Reviewer #2: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [X] No [] N/A []  Provide further comments here: | To Review 1: |
| 3. If applicable, are statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, and statistical reporting (e.g., P-values, CIs, effect sizes) appropriate and well described?  Please clearly indicate if the manuscript requires additional peer review by a statistician. Kindly provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the statistical analyses, controls, sampling mechanism, or statistical reporting. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [] No [X] N/A []  Provide further comments here:  For the sampling, this study aims to merge decisions of container shipping companies, but the merger list still contains other sectors including energy and bulk. For instance, the merger of COSCO and China shipping is not limited to the container sector, and both COSCO and China shipping groups involve dry bulk and tanker shipping. Hence the authors need to justify.  Moreover, for the firm size, the authors need to explain why to quantify the size by tonnage capacity, and this capacity is defined as operating fleet or owned fleet.  Regarding the distance between countries where the shipping companies are based, since the company is usually based in many cities within its registered country, how to calculate the distance if two companies registered in the same country?  Reviewer #2: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [X] No [] N/A []  Provide further comments here: | To Review 1: |
| 4. Could the manuscript benefit from additional tables or figures, or from improving or removing (some of the) existing ones?  Please provide specific suggestions for improvements, removals, or additions of figures or tables. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: For the attributes the authors choose, it is necessary to provide the detail about N\_b and N\_s for each period of the matching simulation.  Reviewer #2: no | To Review 1: |
| 5. If applicable, are the interpretation of results and study conclusions supported by the data?  Please provide suggestions (if needed) to the author(s) on how to improve, tone down, or expand the study interpretations/conclusions. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [X] No [] N/A []  Provide further comments here:  The authors need to define the percentage of correct matches and how to calculate it.  Reviewer #2: Mark as appropriate with an X:  Yes [X] No [] N/A []  Provide further comments here: | To Review 1: |
| 6. Have the authors clearly emphasized the strengths of their study/theory/methods/argument?  Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to better emphasize the strengths of their study. Please number each suggestion so that the author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Not sufficient.  The authors only claim that size has a more significant effect than age from 1991 to 2005, but do not explain the mechanism of how size influences the merger decision. Whether the buyer and seller with large size tend to merge.  I only agree with the insight the author argued in the interview section that merger decisions of shipping companies are determined by complex factors. It is oversimplified for only considering size, age, and distance.  It would be helpful if the authors could clarify more industrial insights based on the empirical study.  Reviewer #2: yes | To Review 1: |
| 7. Have the authors clearly stated the limitations of their study/theory/methods/argument?  Please list the limitations that the author(s) need to add or emphasize. Please number each limitation so that author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: Not sufficient.  The authors must add more previous studies about M&A activities in the shipping industry, especially comparing the findings about how company size, age, and geographical area affect merger decisions.  Reviewer #2: yes | To Review 1: |
| 8. Does the manuscript structure, flow or writing need improving (e.g., the addition of subheadings, shortening of text, reorganization of sections, or moving details from one section to another)?  Please provide suggestions to the author(s) on how to improve the manuscript structure and flow. Please number each suggestion so that author(s) can more easily respond.  Reviewer #1: The authors must add more previous studies about M&A activities in the shipping industry, especially comparing the findings about how company size, age, and geographical area affect merger decisions.  Reviewer #2: The discussion part could be improved. | To Review 1:  To Review 2: |
| 9. Could the manuscript benefit from language editing?  Reviewer #1: Yes  Reviewer #2: No    Reviewer #1: This field is optional. If you have any additional suggestions beyond those relevant to the questions above, please number and list them here.  Reviewer #2: This paper is well-written and utilizes a unique and valuable dataset. However, a few minor suggestions should be addressed before publication in the Transport Policy Journal.  1. The research title is quite lengthy and could be shortened for clarity.  2. Page 3, first paragraph: The sentence "Our estimation results indicate that the assortativeness of both size and geographical proximity contributes to merger incentives or disincentives" needs to be more specific. For instance, firm size influences merger incentives or disincentives in different periods, while geographical proximity consistently contributes to disincentives across all periods.  3. Page 3, first paragraph: The statement "First, the assortativeness of a firm's size shifts from negative (1991-2005) to positive (2006-2022)" appears to be incorrect; it should indicate a shift from positive to negative.  4. Page 10, Figures 2a and 2b: The text in the image is too small to read clearly, and the lines are not straight enough.  5. Page 19, first paragraph: "China Shipping's alliance" should be corrected to "China Shipping's alliance." | To Review 1: |