Book Reviews


Legitimate reasons for revision of a textbook on transportation include improvement in the structure and range of topics covered, presentation of the most recent descriptive statistics about a changing industry, and correction of errors that occurred in a previous edition (or editions). These three reasons form the structure of this review.

In contrast to the fifth edition, which contained fourteen chapters divided into four parts, under the themes of The Role and Importance of Transportation, Overview of Carrier Operations, Carrier Management, and Technology and Strategies, the sixth edition contains thirteen chapters divided into three parts under the themes of The Role and Importance of Transportation, Overview of Transportation Providers, and Transportation Management.

Like the previous edition, Part I of the sixth edition (as indicated by the key words in its title, “Role and Importance”), contains an introductory chapter on the role of transportation in the supply chain and in the economy, and a chapter that provides an overview of transportation regulation and public policy. Part II, Transportation Providers, forms the core of the book. The eight chapters within it include one each on motor, rail, and air carriers, one chapter covering both domestic (United States) water carriers and pipelines, one chapter on intermodal and special carriers, and one on global transportation. Learning tools in the form of mini-case problems and related discussion questions are presented within each of the eight chapters.

Overall, Part II provides a relatively comprehensive and lucid perspective of each of the modes of transportation. Material on post 9/11 international cargo security requirements has been added in Chapter 8, Global Transportation. However, the chapter on private transportation contained in the fifth edition has been eliminated. This represents an inopportune change, give that the recent turn toward marked tightness in the supply of for-hire freight transportation service has revived pursuit of private transportation service options. Another criticism, albeit not major but irritating to this reviewer, concerns the degree of attention given to coal slurry pipelines as compared to chemical and natural gas pipelines (pp. 198–199).

Part III contains chapters on costing and pricing in transportation, carrier management strategies, shipper management strategies, and shipper processes.

In the costing and pricing chapter, the former Appendix B, Ratemaking in Practice, has been moved forward into the main part of the chapter, thus increasing its chances of being studied. While some may argue that “in practice” (rates and tariffs-related) material presented within the chapter is outdated, rates are still the language of transportation pricing, and tariffs provide at least a starting point for many rate negotiations. An error in calculation from the previous edition remains: The shipping charge for 177 cwt, at $8.46 per cwt, is $930, not $9.30. In the same section, the authors correctly discuss the class rate structure, i.e.: “Items that are placed into class 125 will be charged 125 percent of the first-class rate found in the uniform scales of rates.” (p. 278). Four pages later, and without further introduction other than in the erroneous sample calculation noted above, is a table of a sample class rate tariff for classes 200, 100, and 85. Unfortunately, this particular tariff has undergone enough modifications over the years that the rates for class 200 shipments are not twice the rates for class 100; nor are the rates for class 85 shipments the same as 85 percent of the class 100 rates. A quick spreadsheet analysis reveals the tabulated class 85 rates as ranging from 81 percent to nearly 92 percent of the class 100 rate. It is difficult to convince students that they can correctly obtain a class 35 rate by
starting with the class 100 rate and multiplying by 35 percent. Students have asked, “Then why doesn’t that work with the class 85 rate? Why don’t I get what’s shown in the table?” Tariffs in older transportation textbooks (e.g., Lieb, p. 222) have examples with the expected consistency.

The bulk of the costing information promised by the chapter title remains in the Appendix. If the authors produce a seventh edition, they might consider splitting this chapter into two parts and giving costing the prominence that its importance merits. The chapters on carrier and shipper strategies and shipper processes are new. Gone from the sixth edition is the chapter on Relationship Management. Portions of its contents have been placed in the strategies chapters. Space precludes a detailed critique of the contents of the new chapters. Suffice it to note here that the authors’ coordination of the Shipper Process chapter with the remainder of the text is still evolving. Bill of lading material appears here, after having been covered just two chapters earlier. Also, the chapter includes a small section entitled Global Transportation Process that consists mainly of the Incoterms material that was formerly (fifth edition) presented within the chapter labeled International Transportation.

Looking across the book as a whole, the degree of updating is inconsistent and inadequate at some points. For example, in Chapter 4, Railroads, data on intermodal traffic (p. 141) are presented through 2001, while the map of intermodal traffic flows (p. 142) is for 1990. Such time lags are indefensible, given the significant changes in the intermodal freight sector that have occurred since 1990, and the availability of much more recent data on rail intermodal traffic.

Teaching from multiple editions of this text has given the reviewer and his students more opportunities to notice errors, many of which remain in the sixth edition. Space limits permit notice of only a few here. Both the old and new editions claim that motor carriers hauled 200 billion tons in 1980, followed by 3.7 billion in 1997 and 4.1 billion 2001. Greater care in proofreading would have caught the missing decimal point in the entry of 200 for 1980. A decimal point error that struck the fifth edition’s Air Carriers chapter recurred in the sixth edition. That is, on page 171, costs per seat-mile are presented as $0.0046 and $0.00686 for the Boeing 747 and DC-9, respectively. The presumed correct amounts of 4.6 cents and 6.86 cents appear a few pages earlier in Table 5.3. Neither of these figures can be calculated from the tabulated data on seats, air speed, and operating cost per hour. The assumptions that account for the differences (4.3 cents per seat mile, or 7 percent, for the 747, and 5.3 cents, or 29 percent, for the DC-9) need to be stated, or a possible error in computation tracked down.

In conclusion, the authors need to exercise greater care with details relating to deficiencies such as noted above if they undertake production of a seventh edition. However, these deficiencies are not fatal. They can be remedied by a course instructor. Overall, the book stands as an effective teaching and learning tool. Furthermore, it presently stands virtually alone as an available text on transportation with a U.S. and North American focus. Anyone charged with teaching transportation subject matter thus should hope that the authors will invest the time and effort required to produce an improved seventh edition relatively soon.

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REFERENCE