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The Conference Board® U.S. Business Cycle IndicatorsSM
U.S. LEADING ECONOMIC INDICATORS
AND RELATED COMPOSITE INDEXES FOR APRIL 2008

The Conference Board announced today that the U.S. leading index increased 0.1 percent, the coincident index remained unchanged and the lagging index increased 0.1 percent in April.

- The leading index increased for the second straight month in April, after declining in the previous five months. Stock prices, the interest rate spread, and housing permits made large positive contributions to the index this month, more than offsetting the sharp declines in average weekly hours and consumer expectations. In April, the six-month rate of decline in the leading index slowed to -1.2 percent (a -2.3 percent annual rate), from -2.4 percent (a -4.7 percent annual rate) from July 2007 to January 2008. In addition, the weaknesses among the leading indicators have become somewhat less widespread in the last two months.
- The coincident index was unchanged again in April, and this measure of current economic activity has not increased since October 2007. Industrial production and employment decreased this month, but these declines were offset by gains in personal income less transfer payments* and real manufacturing and trade sales*. The six-month change in the coincident index continued to fall, to -0.4 percent (a -0.7 percent annual rate) in April, down from an increase of 0.3 percent (a 0.6 percent annual rate) from July 2007 to January 2008. The lagging index continued to increase this month and as a result, the coincident to lagging ratio decreased further.
- After declining steadily since the middle of 2007, the leading index appears to have stabilized lately, increasing slightly in March and April. Meanwhile, the coincident index declined slightly since October 2007 and the weaknesses among its components have been widespread in recent months. During the first quarter, real GDP expanded at a 0.6 percent annual rate, the same growth rate that prevailed in the fourth quarter of 2007. The current behavior of the composite indexes so far still suggests that economic activity is likely to remain weak in the near term.

LEADING INDICATORS. Six of the ten indicators that make up the leading index increased in April. The positive contributors – beginning with the largest positive contributor – were stock prices, interest rate spread, building permits, average weekly initial claims for unemployment insurance (inverted), index of supplier deliveries (vendor performance) and manufacturers' new orders for consumer goods and materials*. The negative contributors – beginning with the largest negative contributor – were index of consumer expectations, average weekly manufacturing hours, and manufacturers' new orders for nondefense capital goods*. Real money supply* held steady in April.

The next release is scheduled for June 19, Thursday at 10 A.M. ET.

The leading index now stands at 102.0 (2004=100). Based on revised data, this index increased 0.1 percent in March and decreased 0.3 percent in February. During the six-month span through April, the leading index decreased 1.2 percent, with four out of ten components advancing (diffusion index, six-month span equals 40 percent).

COINCIDENT INDICATORS. Two of the four indicators that make up the coincident index increased in April. The positive contributors to the index – beginning with the larger positive contributor – were personal income less transfer payments* and manufacturing and trade sales*. The negative contributors were industrial production and employees on nonagricultural payrolls.

The coincident index now stands at 106.9 (2004=100). This index remained unchanged in March and decreased 0.3 percent in February. During the six-month period through April, the coincident index decreased 0.4 percent.

LAGGING INDICATORS. The lagging index stands at 112.2 (2004=100) in April, with three of the seven components advancing. The positive contributors to the index – beginning with the largest positive contributor – were commercial and industrial loans outstanding*, change in CPI for services, and ratio of consumer installment credit to personal income*. The negative contributors – beginning with the largest negative contributor – were average duration of unemployment (inverted), average prime rate charged by banks, and change in labor cost per unit of output*. The ratio of manufacturing and trade inventories to sales** held steady in April. Based on revised data, the lagging index increased 0.4 percent in March and increased 0.4 percent in February.

DATA AVAILABILITY AND NOTES.

The data series used by The Conference Board to compute the three composite indexes and reported in the tables in this release are those available “as of” 12 Noon on May 16, 2008. Some series are estimated as noted below.

* Series in the leading index that are based on The Conference Board estimates are manufacturers’ new orders for consumer goods and materials, manufacturers’ new orders for nondefense capital goods, and the personal consumption expenditure used to deflate the money supply. Series in the coincident index that are based on The Conference Board estimates are personal income less transfer payments and manufacturing and trade sales. Series in the lagging index that are based on The Conference Board estimates are inventories to sales ratio, consumer installment credit to income ratio, change in labor cost per unit of output, the consumer price index, and the personal consumption expenditure used to deflate commercial and industrial loans outstanding.

The procedure used to estimate the current month’s personal consumption expenditure deflator (used in the calculation of real money supply and commercial and industrial loans outstanding) now incorporates the current month’s consumer price index when it is available before the release of the U.S. Leading Economic Indicators.

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THE CYCLICAL INDICATOR APPROACH. The composite indexes are the key elements in an analytic system designed to signal peaks and troughs in the business cycle. The leading, coincident, and lagging indexes are essentially composite averages of between four and ten individual leading, coincident, or lagging indicators. (See page 3 for details.) They are constructed to summarize and reveal common turning point patterns in economic data in a clearer and more convincing manner than any individual component—primarily because they smooth out some of the volatility of individual components.

Historically, the cyclical turning points in the leading index have occurred before those in aggregate economic activity, while the cyclical turning points in the coincident index have occurred at about the same time as those in aggregate economic activity. The cyclical turning points in the lagging index generally have occurred after those in aggregate economic activity.

U.S. Composite Indexes: Components and Standardization Factors

<u>Leading Index</u>		<u>Factor</u>
1	Average weekly hours, manufacturing	0.2552
2	Average weekly initial claims for unemployment insurance	0.0307
3	Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials	0.0773
4	Index of supplier deliveries – vendor performance	0.0668
5	Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods	0.0183
6	Building permits, new private housing units	0.0271
7	Stock prices, 500 common stocks	0.0391
8	Money supply, M2	0.3550
9	Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds	0.1021
10	Index of consumer expectations	0.0284
 <u>Coincident Index</u>		
1	Employees on nonagricultural payrolls	0.5426
2	Personal income less transfer payments	0.1890
3	Industrial production	0.1493
4	Manufacturing and trade sales	0.1191
 <u>Lagging Index</u>		
1	Average duration of unemployment	0.0373
2	Inventories to sales ratio, manufacturing and trade	0.1239
3	Labor cost per unit of output, manufacturing	0.0615
4	Average prime rate	0.2822
5	Commercial and industrial loans	0.1112
6	Consumer installment credit to personal income ratio	0.1880
7	Consumer price index for services	0.1959

Notes:

The component factors are inversely related to the standard deviation of the month-to-month changes in each component. They are used to equalize the volatility of the contribution from each component and are “normalized” to sum to 1. When one or more components are missing, the other factors are adjusted proportionately to ensure that the total continues to sum to 1.

These factors were revised effective on the release for April 2008, and all historical values for the three composite indexes were revised at this time to reflect the changes. (Under normal circumstances, updates to the leading, coincident, and lagging indexes only incorporate revisions to data over the past six months.) The factors for the leading index were calculated using 1984-2006 as the sample period for measuring volatility. A separate set of factors for the 1959-1983 period is available upon request. The primary sample period for the coincident and lagging indexes was 1959-2006. For additional information on the standardization factors and the index methodology see: “Benchmark Revisions in the Composite Indexes,” *Business Cycle Indicators* December 1997 and “Technical Appendix: Calculating the Composite Indexes” *Business Cycle Indicators* December 1996, or the Web site: www.conference-board.org/economics/bci.

The trend adjustment factor for the leading index is -0.0164, and the trend adjustment factor for the lagging index is 0.1644.

To address the problem of lags in available data, those leading, coincident and lagging indicators that are not available at the time of publication are estimated using statistical imputation. An autoregressive model is used to estimate each unavailable component. The resulting indexes are therefore constructed using real and estimated data, and will be revised as the unavailable data during the time of publication become available. Such revisions are part of the monthly data revisions, now a regular part of the U.S. Business Cycle Indicators program. The main advantage of this procedure is to utilize in the leading index data such as stock prices, interest rate spread, and manufacturing hours that are available sooner than other data on real aspects of the economy such as manufacturers’ new orders. Empirical research by The Conference Board suggests that there are real gains in adopting this procedure to make all the indicator series as up-to-date as possible.

U.S. Leading Economic Indicators news release schedule for 2008:

Thursday, June 19, 2008	for May 2008 data
Monday, July 21, 2008	for June 2008 data
Thursday, August 21, 2008	for July 2008 data
Thursday, September 18, 2008	for August 2008 data
Monday, October 20, 2008	for September 2008 data
Thursday, November 20, 2008	for October 2008 data
Thursday, December 18, 2008	for November 2008 data

All releases are at 10:00 AM ET.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE BOARD. The Conference Board is the premier business membership and research network founded in 1916. It has become a global leader in helping executives build strong professional relationships, expand their business knowledge and find solutions to a wide range of business challenges. The Conference Board's Economics Program is a recognized source of forecasts, economic analysis and objective indicators such as the Leading Economic Indicators and the Consumer Confidence Index.

This role is part of a long tradition of research and education that stretches back to the compilation of the first continuous measure of the cost of living in the United States in 1919. In 1995, The Conference Board assumed responsibility for computing the composite indexes from the U.S. Department of Commerce. The Conference Board now produces business cycle indexes for the U.S., Australia, France, Germany, Korea, Japan, Mexico, Spain and the U.K. To subscribe to any of these indexes, please visit www.conference-board.org/economics/bci or contact the customer service department at 212-339-0345 or email indicators@conference-board.org.

AVAILABLE FROM THE CONFERENCE BOARD

U.S. Business Cycle Indicators Internet Subscription <i>(Includes monthly release, data, charts and commentary)</i>	\$ 575 per year (1 user)
Individual Data Series	\$ 30 per series downloaded
Monthly BCI Report <i>(Sample available on request)</i>	\$ 250 per year
BCI Handbook (published 2001)	\$ 20
Corporate Site License	contact Indicators Program at (212) 339-0330

Business Cycle Indicators for Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Spain and the UK are available at \$575 per country per year (1 user). Discounts are available to Associates of The Conference Board and accredited academic institutions.

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Table 1.--Summary of Composites Indexes

	2007							2008
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	
Leading index	103.2	102.8 r	102.6	102.1 r	101.8 r	101.9 r	102.0 p	
Percent change	-.5	-.4 r	-.2 r	-.5 r	-.3	.1	.1 p	
Diffusion index	25.0	40.0	40.0	45.0	25.0	50.0	65.0	
Coincident index	107.3	107.2	107.2	107.2	106.9 r	106.9 p	106.9 p	
Percent change	.1	-.1	.0	.0	-.3 r	.0 p	.0 p	
Diffusion index	75.0	37.5	50.0	50.0	25.0	62.5	62.5	
Lagging index	110.2	110.6	110.9	111.2 r	111.7 r	112.1 p	112.2 p	
Percent change	.2	.4	.3	.3 r	.4 r	.4 p	.1 p	
Diffusion index	35.7	71.4	42.9	64.3	71.4	71.4	42.9	
Coincident-lagging ratio	97.4	96.9	96.7	96.4 r	95.7 r	95.4 p	95.3 p	
	Apr to	May to	Jun to	Jul to	Aug to	Sep to	Oct to	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	
Leading index								
Percent change	-.7	-1.2	-1.3	-2.4	-1.7	-1.7	-1.2	
Diffusion index	40.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	20.0	30.0	40.0	
Coincident index								
Percent change	.8	.7	.6	.3	-.2	-.3	-.4	
Diffusion index	100.0	100.0	100.0	75.0	37.5	12.5	12.5	
Lagging index								
Percent change	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.8	2.0	1.9	1.8	
Diffusion index	35.7	35.7	50.0	57.1	85.7	85.7	85.7	

p Preliminary. r Revised (noted only for index levels and one-month percent changes). c Corrected.

CALCULATION NOTE: The diffusion indexes measure the proportion of the components that are rising. Components that rise more than 0.05 percent are given a value of 1.0, components that change less than 0.05 percent are given a value of 0.5, and components that fall more than 0.05 percent are given a value of 0.0.

The full history of composite and diffusion indexes is available by subscription on our web site at www.conference-board.org/economics/bci

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Table 2.--Data and Net Contributions for Components of the Leading Index

Component	2007						2008
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Leading index component data							
Average workweek, production workers, mfg. (hours).....	41.2	41.3	41.1	41.1	41.1 r	41.2 r	40.9
Average weekly initial claims, state unemployment insurance (thousands)*.	330.0	340.1 r	344.6	339.2	346.0	374.8 r	366.6
Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials (mil. 1982 dol.).....	142,736	141,158 r	140,926	138,735	136,067 r	135,309 r	135,468 **
Index of supplier deliveries -- vendor performance (percent).....	50.7	51.5	52.6	52.8	50.1	53.6	54.0
Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods (mil. 1982 dol.).....	48,746	51,170 r	53,977	49,621	49,541 r	49,758 r	49,520 **
Building permits (thous.).....	1,182 r	1,187 r	1,111 r	1,052 r	981 r	932 r	978
Stock prices, 500 common stocks (c) (index: 1941-43=10).....	1,539.66	1,463.39	1,479.23	1,378.76	1,354.87	1,316.94	1,370.47
Money supply, M2 (bil. chn. 2000 dol.).....	6,223.8	6,208.6	6,216.5	6,240.5 r	6,318.7	6,366.1 r	6,366.7 **
Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds.....	-0.23	-0.34	-0.14	-0.20	0.76	0.90	1.40
Index of consumer expectations (c) (1966:1=100).....	70.1	66.2	65.6	68.1	62.4	60.1	53.3
LEADING INDEX (2004=100).....	103.2	102.8 r	102.6	102.1 r	101.8 r	101.9 r	102.0 p
Percent change from preceding month..	-0.5	-0.4 r	-0.2 r	-0.5 r	-0.3	0.1	0.1 p
Leading index net contributions							
Average workweek, production workers, mfg.....	....	.06	-.12	.00	.00 r	.06	-.19
Average weekly initial claims, state unemployment insurance.....	....	-.09 r	-.04 r	.05 r	-.06 r	-.25 r	.07
Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials.....	....	-.09 r	-.01 r	-.12	-.15 r	-.04 r	.01 **
Index of supplier deliveries -- (vendor performance).....	....	.05	.07	.01	-.18	.23	.03
Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods.....	....	.09	.10	-.15	.00 r	.01	-.01 **
Building permits.....	....	.01 r	-.18 r	-.15 r	-.19 r	-.14 r	.13
Stock prices, 500 common stocks (c)	....	-.20	.04	-.27	-.07	-.11	.16
Money supply, M2.....	....	-.09	.05	.14 r	.44 r	.27	.00 **
Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds.....	....	-.03	-.01	-.02	.08	.09	.14
Index of consumer expectations (c)	....	-.11	-.02	.07	-.16	-.07	-.19

p Preliminary. r Revised. c Corrected.

* Inverted series; a negative change in this component makes a positive contribution to the index.

** Statistical Imputation (See page 3 for more details)

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CALCULATION NOTE--The percent change in the index does not always equal the sum of the net contributions of the individual components (because of rounding effects and base value differences).

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Table 3.--Data and Net Contributions for Components of the Coincident and Lagging Indexes

Component	2007						2008
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Coincident index component data							
Employees on nonagricultural payrolls (thousands).....	137,977	138,037	138,078	138,002	137,919 r	137,838 r	137,818
Personal income less transfer payments (ann. rate, bil. chn. 2000 dol.).....	8,530.1	8,514.2	8,514.9	8,501.9 r	8,508.4 r	8,508.6 r	8,531.5 **
Industrial production (index: 2002=100).....	111.826	112.296	112.442	112.597 r	111.785 r	111.983 r	111.181
Manufacturing and trade sales (mil. chn. 2000 dol.).....	986,580	974,572	967,797	972,104 r	956,988 r	962,522 **	963,500 **
COINCIDENT INDEX (2004=100).....	107.3	107.2	107.2	107.2	106.9 r	106.9 p	106.9 p
Percent change from preceding month.....	0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0	-0.3 r	0.0 p	0.0 p
Coincident index net contributions							
Employees on nonagricultural payrolls.....	....	.02	.02	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.01
Personal income less transfer payments....	....	-.04	.00	-.03 r	.01	.00 r	.05 **
Industrial production.....	....	.06	.02	.02	-.11	.03 r	-.11
Manufacturing and trade sales.....	....	-.15	-.08	.05 r	-.19 r	.07 **	.01 **
Lagging index component data							
Average duration of unemployment (weeks)*.....	17.0	17.2	16.6	17.5	16.8	16.2	16.9
Ratio, manufacturing and trade inventories to sales (chain 2000 dol.).....	1.301	1.315	1.323	1.323 r	1.344 r	1.342 **	1.342 **
Change in index of labor cost per unit of output, mfg. (6-month percent, ann. rate).....	-1.4	-.6	-.8	1.40 r	2.4	4.0 **	3.9 **
Average prime rate charged by banks (percent).....	7.74	7.50	7.33	6.98	6.00	5.66	5.24
Commercial and industrial loans outstanding (mil. chn. 2000 dol.).....	766,235	769,385	774,613	780,777 r	794,858 r	795,564 r	807,005 **
Ratio, consumer installment credit out- standing to personal income (percent).....	21.13 r	21.21	21.13	21.24	21.19 r	21.25 r	21.26 **
Change in CPI for services (6-month percent, ann. rate).....	3.1	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
LAGGING INDEX (2004=100).....	110.2	110.6	110.9	111.2 r	111.7 r	112.1 p	112.2 p
Percent change from preceding month.....	.2	.4	.3	.3 r	.4 r	.4 p	.1 p
Lagging index net contributions							
Average duration of unemployment.....	....	-.04	.13	-.20	.15	.14	-.16
Ratio, manufacturing and trade inventories to sales.....	....	.13	.08	.00 r	.20 r	-.02 **	.00 **
Change in index of labor cost per unit of output, mfg.....	....	.05 r	-.01	.14 r	.06 r	.10 **	-.01 **
Average prime rate charged by banks.....	....	-.07	-.05	-.10	-.28	-.10	-.12
Commercial and industrial loans outstanding.....	....	.05	.08	.09	.20	.01	.16 **
Ratio, consumer installment credit out- standing to personal income.....	....	.07	-.07	.10	-.04 r	.05 r	.01 **
Change in CPI for services.....	....	.02	-.02	.04	.02	.02	.02

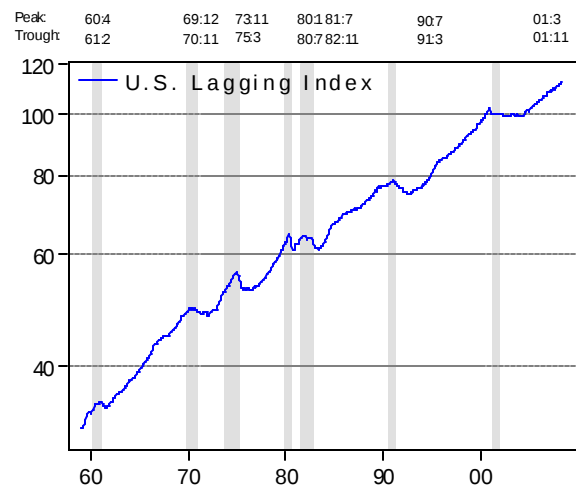
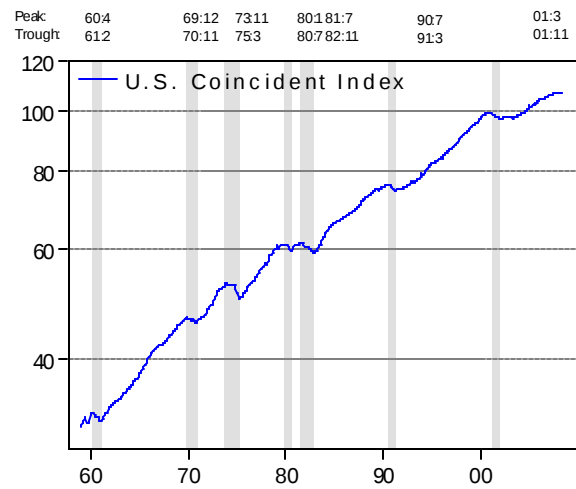
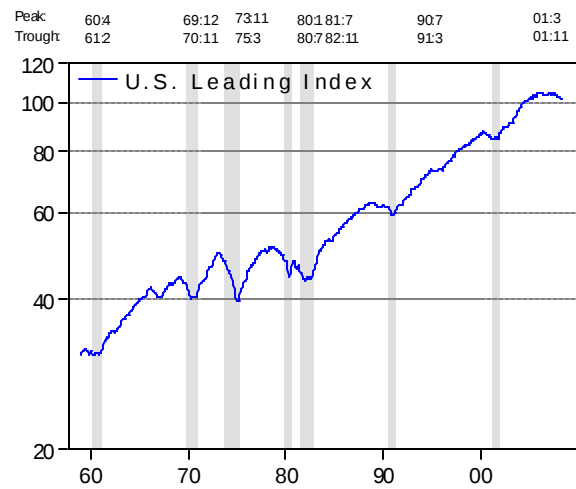
CPI Consumer Price Index. For additional notes see table 2.

* Inverted series; a negative change in this component makes a positive contribution to the index.

** Statistical Imputation (See page 3 for more details)

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U.S. Composite Indexes (2004=100)



Shaded areas represent recessions.

Source: The Conference Board