



THE CONFERENCE BOARD

FOR RELEASE: 10:00 A.M. ET, Friday, April 17, 2015

The Conference Board®
U.S. Business Cycle IndicatorsSM
THE CONFERENCE BOARD LEADING ECONOMIC INDEX®
(LEI) FOR THE UNITED STATES
AND RELATED COMPOSITE ECONOMIC INDEXES FOR MARCH 2015

The Conference Board Leading Economic Index® (LEI) for the U.S. increased 0.2 percent, **The Conference Board Coincident Economic Index®** (CEI) increased 0.1 percent and **The Conference Board Lagging Economic Index®** (LAG) increased 0.4 percent in March.

- The Conference Board LEI for the U.S. increased again in March. Large positive contributions from initial unemployment claims and the yield spread more than offset the large negative contribution from building permits. In the six-month period ending March 2015, the leading economic index increased 1.8 percent (about a 3.7 percent annual rate), much slower than the growth of 3.3 percent (about a 6.7 percent annual rate) during the previous six months. But the strengths among the leading indicators have remained more widespread than the weaknesses.
- The Conference Board CEI for the U.S., a measure of current economic activity, edged up in March. The coincident economic index rose 1.4 percent (about a 2.9 percent annual rate) between September 2014 and March 2015, slightly better than its growth of 1.3 percent (about a 2.6 percent annual rate) for the previous six months. And the strengths among the coincident indicators have remained very widespread. The lagging economic index continued to increase at a modestly faster pace than the CEI. As a result, the coincident-to-lagging ratio has declined slightly in the past three months. Real GDP expanded at a 2.2 percent annual rate in the final quarter of 2014, after increasing 5.0 percent (annual rate) in the third quarter.
- The Conference Board LEI for the U.S. continued to increase through March, but its six-month growth rate has slowed in recent months. Meanwhile, The Conference Board CEI for the U.S. increased marginally, and its six-month growth rate has also decelerated. Taken together, the current behavior of the composite indexes and their components suggest that the expansion in economic activity should continue, but the pace of growth may moderate in the months ahead.

LEADING INDICATORS. Six of the ten indicators that make up The Conference Board LEI for the U.S. increased in March. The positive contributors – beginning with the largest positive contributor – were average weekly initial claims for unemployment insurance (inverted), the interest rate spread, average consumer expectations for business conditions, the Leading Credit Index™ (inverted), manufacturers' new orders for nondefense capital goods excluding aircraft*, and manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials. The negative contributors – beginning with the largest negative contributor – were building permits, the ISM® new orders index, and average weekly manufacturing hours. Stock prices were essentially unchanged in March.

The LEI for the U.S. now stands at 121.4 (2010=100). Based on revised data, this index increased 0.1 percent in February and increased 0.2 percent in January. Over the six-month span through March, the leading economic index increased 1.8 percent, with six out of ten components advancing (diffusion index, six-month span equals 65 percent).

COINCIDENT INDICATORS. Three of the four indicators that make up The Conference Board CEI for the U.S. increased in March. The positive contributors to the index – beginning with the largest positive contributor – were personal income less transfer payments*, employees on nonagricultural payrolls, and manufacturing and trade sales*. Industrial production declined in March.

The CEI now stands at 112.0 (2010=100). Based on revised data, this index increased 0.2 percent in February and increased 0.2 percent in January. During the six-month period through March, the coincident economic index increased 1.4 percent, with three out of four components advancing (diffusion index, six-month span equals 87.5 percent).

LAGGING INDICATORS. The Conference Board Lagging Economic Index for the U.S. stands at 116.2 (2010=100) in March, with four of its seven components advancing. The positive contributors to the index – beginning with the largest positive contributor – were the average duration of unemployment (inverted), commercial and industrial loans outstanding*, the change in the index of labor cost per unit of output, manufacturing*, and the ratio of consumer installment credit outstanding to personal income*. The ratio of manufacturing and trade inventories to sales*, the average prime rate charged by banks and the change in CPI for services held steady in March. Based on revised data, the lagging economic index increased 0.3 percent in February and increased 0.3 percent in January.

DATA AVAILABILITY AND NOTES.

The data series used to compute **The Conference Board Leading Economic Index[®]** (LEI) for the U.S., **The Conference Board Coincident Economic Index[®]** (CEI) for the U.S. and **The Conference Board Lagging Economic Index[®]** (LAG) for the U.S. and reported in the tables in this release are those available “as of” 8:30 am ET on April 16, 2015. Some series are estimated as noted below.

* Series in The Conference Board LEI for the U.S. based on our estimates are manufacturers’ new orders for consumer goods and materials and manufacturers’ new orders for nondefense capital goods excl. aircraft. Series in The Conference Board CEI for the U.S. that are based on our estimates are personal income less transfer payments and manufacturing and trade sales. Series in The Conference Board LAG for the U.S. that are based on our estimates are manufacturing and trade inventories to sales ratio, the change in labor cost per unit of output, manufacturing, consumer installment credit to income ratio, and the personal consumption expenditure deflator 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 commercial and industrial loans outstanding) now incorporates the current month’s consumer price index when it is available before the release of The Conference Board LEI for the U.S.

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THE CYCLICAL INDICATOR APPROACH. The composite economic indexes are the key elements in an analytic system designed to signal peaks and troughs in the business cycle. The leading, coincident, and lagging economic indexes are essentially composite averages of several 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 Conference Board LEI for the U.S. have occurred before those in aggregate economic activity, while the cyclical turning points in The Conference Board CEI for the U.S. have occurred at about the same time as those in aggregate economic activity. The cyclical turning points in The Conference Board LAG for the U.S. generally have occurred after those in aggregate economic activity.

U.S. Composite Economic Indexes: Components and Standardization Factors

<u>Leading Economic Index</u>	<u>Factor</u>
1 Average weekly hours, manufacturing	0.2733
2 Average weekly initial claims for unemployment insurance	0.0328
3 Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials	0.0836
4 ISM [®] new orders index	0.1603
5 Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods excl. aircraft	0.0407
6 Building permits, new private housing units	0.0306
7 Stock prices, 500 common stocks	0.0394
8 <i>Leading Credit Index</i> [™]	0.0829
9 Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds	0.1108
10 Avg. consumer expectations for business conditions	0.1456
<u>Coincident Economic Index</u>	
1 Employees on nonagricultural payrolls	0.5278
2 Personal income less transfer payments	0.2047
3 Industrial production	0.1469
4 Manufacturing and trade sales	0.1206
<u>Lagging Economic Index</u>	
1 Average duration of unemployment	0.0373
2 Inventories to sales ratio, manufacturing and trade	0.1256
3 Labor cost per unit of output, manufacturing	0.0501
4 Average prime rate	0.2960
5 Commercial and industrial loans	0.0967
6 Consumer installment credit outstanding to personal income ratio	0.1890
7 Consumer price index for services	0.2053

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 with the release in January 2015, and all historical values for the three composite economic indexes were revised at this time to reflect the changes. (Under normal circumstances, updates to the leading, coincident, and lagging economic indexes only incorporate revisions to data over the past six months.) The factors for The Conference Board LEI for the U.S. were calculated using May 1990-December 2013 as the sample period for measuring volatility. A separate set of factors for the February 1959 - December 1977, January 1978 - December 1983 and January 1984 – April 1990 periods are available upon request. The primary sample period for the coincident and lagging economic indexes was February 1959 – December 2013. 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: <http://www.conference-board.org/data/bci.cfm>

The trend adjustment factor for The Conference Board LEI for the U.S is -0.0682 (over the 1984 – present) and 0.0904 (over the 1959-1983 period), and the trend adjustment factor for The Conference Board LAG for the U.S is 0.1514.

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 economic 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.

NOTICES

The Conference Board Leading Economic Index[®] (LEI) for the U.S. news release schedule for 2015:

Thursday, May 21, 2015	For April 2015 data
Thursday, June 18, 2015	For May 2015 data
Thursday, July 23, 2015	For June 2015 data
Thursday, August 20, 2015	For July 2015 data
Friday, September 18, 2015	For August 2015 data
Thursday, October 22, 2015	For September 2015 data
Thursday, November 19, 2015	For October 2015 data
Thursday, December 17, 2015	For November 2015 data

All releases are at 10:00 AM ET.

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(Includes monthly release, data, charts and commentary)

\$ 714 (for TCB members)/\$ 908 (for non-TCB members) per year (1 user)

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Table 1. Summary of U.S. Composite Economic Indexes

	2014							2015
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Leading index	119.2	119.9	120.3	120.9 r	121.1	121.2 r	121.4 p	
Percent change	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.5 r	0.2	0.1 r	0.2	
Diffusion index	85	65	60	75	40	50	60	
Coincident index	110.4	110.6	111.2	111.5	111.7	111.9	112.0 p	
Percent change	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	
Diffusion index	100	87.5	100	75	75	100	75	
Lagging index	114.4	114.5	114.8	115.0	115.4	115.7 r	116.2 p	
Percent change	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	
Diffusion index	57.1	50	28.6	57.1	64.3	92.9	71.4	
Coincident-lagging ratio	96.5	96.6	96.9	97.0	96.8	96.7 r	96.4	

	Mar to	Apr to	May to	Jun to	Jul to	Aug to	Sep to
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Leading index							
Percent change	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.2	2.3	2.3	1.8
Diffusion index	90	100	90	75	80	60	65
Coincident index							
Percent change	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.4
Diffusion index	100	100	100	100	100	100	87.5
Lagging index							
Percent change	1.7	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.5	1.3	1.6
Diffusion index	64.3	50	50	50	64.3	64.3	78.6

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 contributing positively. 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 <https://www.conference-board.org/data/bcicountry.cfm?cid=1>

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Table 2. Data and Net Contributions for Components of the U.S. Leading Economic Index

Component	2014				2015		
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
U.S. Leading Economic Index component data							
Average work week, production workers, mfg. (hours).....	42.1	42.1	42.2	42.1	42.1	41.9 r	41.8
Average weekly initial claims, state unemployment insurance (thousands)*.....	296.2 r	282.5 r	295.1 r	287.7 r	288.9 r	305.5 r	285.5
Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials (mil. 1982 dol.).....	134,519	134,444	133,160 r	134,031	133,675 r	132,940 r	133,182 **
ISM® New Orders Index (percent).....	59.4	63.0	62.1	57.8	52.9	52.5	51.8
Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods excl. aircraft (mil. 1982 dol.)...	43366	42513	42301 r	42050	41878 r	41381 r	41785 **
Building permits (thous.).....	1,039	1,102	1,060	1,060	1,060	1,102 r	1,039
Stock prices, 500 common stocks © (index: 1941-43=10).....	1,993.23	1,937.27	2,044.57	2,054.27	2,028.18	2,082.20	2,079.99
Leading Credit Index™ (std. dev.)*.....	-0.74 r	-0.65 r	-1.46 r	-1.20 r	-0.89 r	-1.20 r	-0.84
Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds.....	2.44	2.21	2.24	2.09	1.77	1.87	1.93
Avg. Consumer Expectations for Business Conditions (std. dev.).....	0.01 r	0.34 r	0.14 r	0.37 r	0.86 r	0.49 r	0.50
LEADING INDEX (2010=100).....	119.2	119.9	120.3	120.9 r	121.1	121.2 r	121.4 p
Percent change from preceding month.....	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.5 r	0.2	0.1 r	0.2 p
U.S. Leading Economic Index net contributions							
Average work week, production workers, mfg.....	....	.00	.06	-.06	.00	-.13 r	-.07
Average weekly initial claims, state unemployment insurance.....	....	.16 r	-.14 r	.08 r	-.01 r	-.18 r	.22
Manufacturers' new orders, consumer goods and materials.....	....	.00	-.08 r	.05 r	-.02 r	-.05 r	.02 **
ISM® New Orders Index.....	....	.15	.14	.05	-.05	-.06	-.07
Manufacturers' new orders, nondefense capital goods excl. aircraft.....	....	-.08	-.02	-.02 r	-.02 r	-.05 r	.04 **
Building permits.....	....	.18	-.12	.00	.00	.12 r	-.18
Stock prices, 500 common stocks ©.....	....	-.11	.21	.02	-.05	.10	.00
Leading Credit Index™.....	....	.05	.12	.10	.07	.10 r	.07
Interest rate spread, 10-year Treasury bonds less federal funds.....	....	.24	.25	.23	.20	.21	.21
Avg. Consumer Expectations for Business Conditions.....	....	.05	.02	.05	.12 r	.07 r	.07

p Preliminary. r Revised. c Corrected.
¹ Standard deviation above or below the mean

* Inverted series; a negative change or value 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 U.S. Coincident Economic Index and U.S. Lagging Economic Index

Component	2014					2015		
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
U.S. Coincident Economic Index component data								
Employees on nonagricultural payrolls (thousands).....	139,619	139,840	140,263	140,592	140,793 r	141,057 r	141,183	
Personal income less transfer payments (ann. rate, bil. chn. 2009 dol.).....	11,266	11,305 r	11,377 r	11,435 r	11,515 r	11,535 r	11,567 **	
Industrial production (index: 2007=100).....	105.186	105.144 r	106.309 r	106.221 r	105.788 r	105.893 r	105.216	
Manufacturing and trade sales (mil. chn. 2009 dol.).....	1,188,177	1,192,709 r	1,197,674 r	1,204,571 r	1,210,474 r	1,213,516 **	1,216,722 **	
COINCIDENT INDEX (2010=100).....	110.4	110.6	111.2	111.5	111.7	111.9	112.0	p
Percent change from preceding month.....	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	p
U.S. Coincident Economic Index net contributions								
Employees on nonagricultural payrolls.....	....	.08	.16	.12	.08 r	.10 r	.05	
Personal income less transfer payments.....	....	.07	.13	.10	.14	.03 r	.06 **	
Industrial production.....	....	-.01	.16 r	-.01 r	-.06 r	.01	-.09	
Manufacturing and trade sales.....	....	.05 r	.05 r	.07 r	.06 r	.03 **	.03 **	
U.S. Lagging Economic Index component data								
Average duration of unemployment (weeks)*.....	31.8	32.9	33.0	32.8	32.3	31.7	30.7	
Ratio, manufacturing and trade inventories to sales (chain 2009 dol.).....	1.396	1.395 r	1.393 r	1.390 r	1.387 r	1.388 **	1.388 **	
Change in index of labor cost per unit of output, mfg. (6-month percent, ann. rate).....	-2.7	0.2 r	-0.8	-1.2 r	-0.9 **	-0.6 **	-0.4 **	
Average prime rate charged by banks (percent).....	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	
Commercial and industrial loans outstanding (mil. chn. 2009 dol.).....	1,095,696 r	1,079,364 r	1,108,015 r	1,112,194 r	1,122,162 r	1,123,068 r	1,136,304 **	
Ratio, consumer installment credit outstanding to personal income (percent).....	22.01 r	22.04	22.05 r	22.10 r	22.08 r	22.10 r	22.11 **	
Change in CPI for services (6-month percent, ann. rate).....	2.0	2.3	1.9	1.9	2.1	2.2 r	2.2 **	
LAGGING INDEX (2010=100).....	114.4	114.5	114.8	115.0	115.4	115.7 r	116.2	p
Percent change from preceding month.....	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	p
U.S. Lagging Economic Index net contributions								
Average duration of unemployment.....	....	-.13	-.01	.02	.06	.07	.12	
Ratio, manufacturing and trade inventories to sales.....	....	-.01 r	-.02	-.03 r	-.03 r	.01 **	.00 **	
Change in index of labor cost per unit of output, mfg.....	....	.15 r	-.05 r	-.02 r	.02 **	.02 **	.01 **	
Average prime rate charged by banks.....	....	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	
Commercial and industrial loans outstanding.....	....	-.15	.25	.04	.09	.01 r	.11 **	
Ratio, consumer installment credit outstanding to personal income.....	....	.03	.01 r	.04	-.02 r	.02	.01 **	
Change in CPI for services.....	....	.06	-.08	.00	.04	.02 r	.00 **	

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)

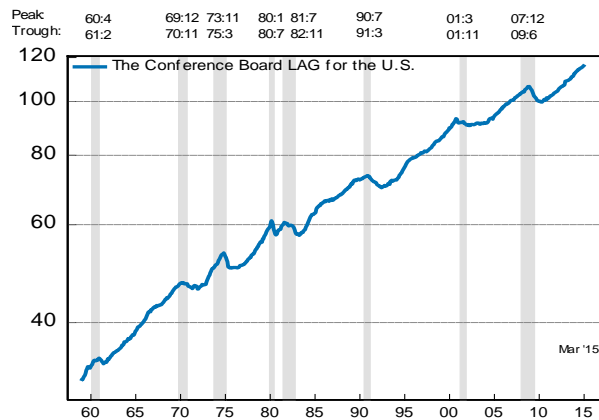
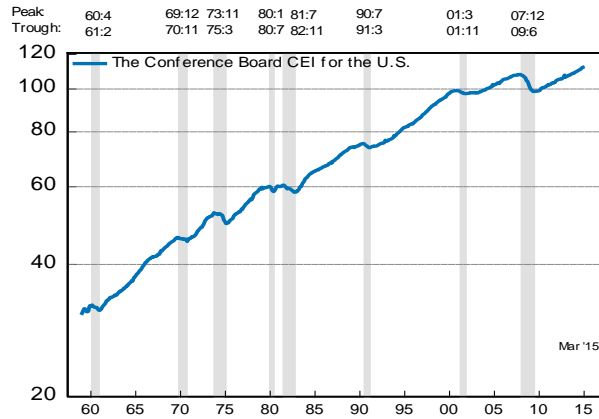
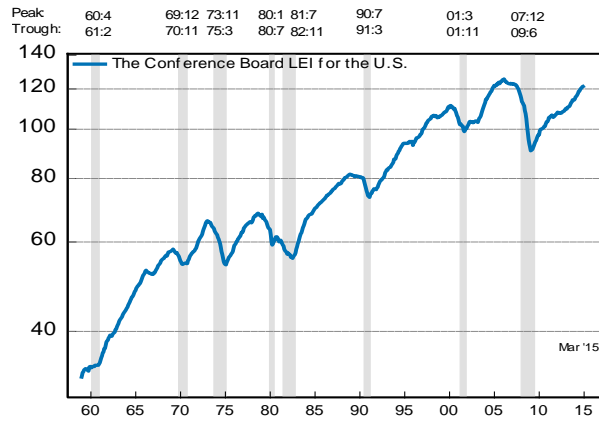
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U.S. Composite Economic Indexes (2010=100)



Shaded areas represent recessions as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

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