



DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20220

March 8, 2011

Ms. Diana Hyneck, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer
Department of Commerce
Room 6616
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Hyneck:

This letter seeks to provide commentary in support of the Monthly Retail Trade Survey.

The Monthly Retail Trade Survey is an important economic indicator tracked by the Office of Economic Policy at the Treasury Department. The survey provides important information on consumer spending – a key component of gross domestic product, accounting for roughly 70 percent of economic output in the United States. Indeed, one measure from the Monthly Retail Trade Survey – the so-called retail “control” – feeds directly into the calculation of consumer spending in the GDP accounts. This indicator is an important early signal of consumer spending; it is released approximately three weeks earlier than the monthly Personal Income and Outlays Survey put forth by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. The Monthly Retail Trade Survey plays a key role in informing our views on the current economic situation.

Discontinuing the Monthly Retail Trade Survey would thus eliminate a crucial, timely piece of economic data and seriously hamper our ability to assess the health of the U.S. economy. Senior Treasury officials, including the Secretary, rely on our analysis of current and prospective economic developments. The absence of these data would not only weaken our ability to provide policy-makers a well-rounded view of the economy but could also have an effect on their ability to formulate appropriate economic policies.

It is therefore *imperative* that the Department of Commerce continues to conduct this survey and present its results each month.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JB", written over a horizontal line.

John Bellows
Acting Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy
U.S. Department of the Treasury