

U.S. FREIGHT CARS BY TYPE AND AGE*

		Total	Avg. Age	1-10 yrs.	11-20 yrs.	21-30 yrs.	31-40 yrs.	Over 40 yrs.
Box Cars	RR	105,148	25.7	10,918	28,721	4,176	57,886	3,467
	PVT	18,281	22.2	7,032	1,003	122	9,158	966
Covered Hoppers	RR	136,206	24.7	24,925	34,583	15,476	52,009	9,213
	PVT	322,429	20.0	72,139	123,132	46,356	68,549	12,253
Open Hoppers	RR	74,768	28.7	8,861	10,864	10,684	35,832	8,527
	PVT	102,081	15.6	40,957	34,965	9,051	14,517	2,591
Gondolas	RR	127,906	25.0	19,972	39,176	13,803	36,923	18,032
	PVT	113,673	16.7	37,611	43,811	10,460	18,730	3,061
Flat Cars	RR	73,818	17.0	35,224	19,562	5,670	9,457	3,905
	PVT	131,278	20.7	26,603	57,144	17,577	14,474	15,480
Refrigerator	RR	13,413	26.6	2,593	2,596	866	5,877	1,481
	PVT	3,148	19.1	1,090	860	316	703	179
Tank Cars	RR	536	33.1	3	51	150	277	55
	PVT	285,477	18.0	97,554	88,861	47,846	43,693	7,523
All Others	RR	2,063	35.5	0	122	345	1,009	587
	PVT	3,323	24.7	530	1,001	454	1,191	147
Total	RR	533,858	24.5	102,496	135,675	51,170	199,250	45,267
	PVT	979,690	18.7	283,516	350,777	132,182	171,015	42,200

* As of January 2011; totals may not match other sources. RR = Railroad car owners. PVT = Private car owners.

Source: AAR/UMLER



THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND THE ORDER SPIKE

As orders for new rail cars begin to stream in once again, demand for two car types is driving the trend: intermodal wells and small-cube covered hoppers, according to Rail Theory Forecasts L.L.C. President Toby Kolstad, who estimates 5,000 to 6,000 intermodal cars and 9,000 to 10,000 small-cube covered hoppers will be built in 2011.

"There are a lot of 40-foot wells in storage, but there are a lot of 53-foot wells being built because of a change in shipper logistics," he says. "Intermodal traffic is approaching pre-recession levels, so once we get into the growth area, maybe next year, we'll start taking some of those 40-footers out of storage."

Orders are flowing in for small-cube covered hoppers, too. The cars are being used to haul industrial sand for hydrofracking gas well drilling, Kolstad says.

"Those two car types are really driving the market," he says. "We're forecasting 35,000 cars this year and if you take intermodal and small cube covered hoppers, they account for almost half the total cars."

Economic Planning Associates Inc. (EPA) predicts demand will begin to pick up for other car types in the near future. Automobile sales and production is ramping up, and that could lead to a rebound in demand for auto parts box cars and auto rack cars, according to the firm's April 2011 "Rail Car Overview." And as demand for steel products continues to rise, orders for mill gondolas could increase, EPA predicts.

"Longer term, far stronger economic activities will provide support for certain rail-car assemblies while an improvement in the financial environment, high gasoline prices and strong government backing stimulate greater demand for ethanol and DDG cars," the report stated. "Replacement pressures and technological advances, as well as legislative measures, will also play a role in promoting the demand for a variety of rail cars."

— Angela Cotey