

FOR WIRE TRANSMISSION 8:30 A.M. ET, Thursday, March 11, 2004.

**ADVANCE MONTHLY SALES FOR RETAIL TRADE AND FOOD SERVICES
FEBRUARY 2004**

Intention to Revise Retail Estimates: Monthly retail sales estimates will be revised based on the results of the 2002 Annual Retail Trade Survey. Revised unadjusted and corresponding adjusted data are scheduled for release on March 30.

The Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce announced today that advance estimates of U.S. retail and food services sales for February, adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes, were \$327.2 billion, an increase of 0.6 percent ($\pm 0.8\%$) from the previous month and up 7.9 percent ($\pm 1.0\%$) from February 2003. Total sales for the December 2003 through February 2004 period were up 6.8 percent ($\pm 0.5\%$) from the same period a year ago. The December 2003 to January 2004 percent change was revised from -0.3 percent ($\pm 0.8\%$) to +0.2 percent ($\pm 0.4\%$).

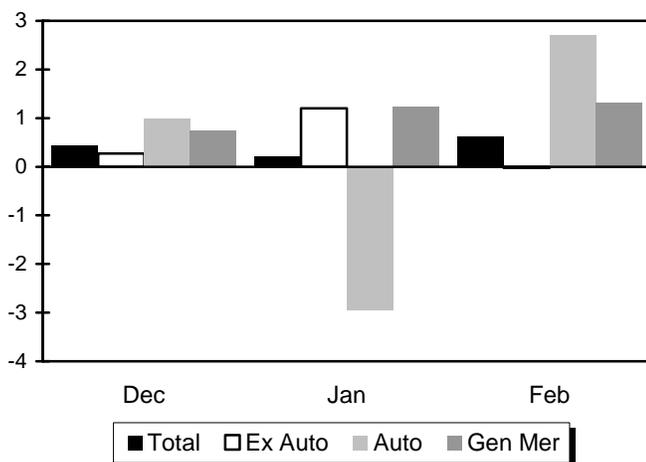
Retail trade sales were up 0.7 percent ($\pm 0.8\%$) from January and were 7.5 percent ($\pm 1.0\%$) above last year. Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers sales were up 14.7 percent ($\pm 2.3\%$) from February 2003 and sales of electronics and appliance stores were up 12.3 percent ($\pm 2.6\%$) from last year.

The advance estimates are based on a subsample of the Bureau's full retail and food services sample. A stratified random sampling method is used to select approximately 5,000 retail and food services firms whose sales are then weighted and benchmarked to represent the complete universe of over three million retail and food services firms. Responding firms account for approximately 65% of the MARTS dollar volume estimate. For an explanation of the measures of sampling variability included in this report, please see the Reliability of Estimates section on the last page of this publication.

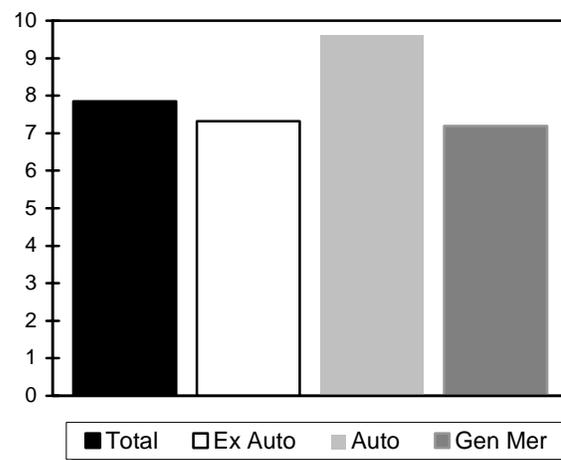
Percent Change in Retail Sales and Food Services Sales

(Data adjusted for seasonal, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

From Previous Month



From Previous Year



The Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services for March is scheduled to be released April 13, 2004 at 8:30 a.m.

Address inquiries concerning this report to Scott Scheleur, Service Sector Statistics Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233. Telephone: 301-763-2713.

This report is available the day of issue through the Department of Commerce's online Economic Bulletin Board. For information call 202-482-1986. The data are also available on the Internet - <http://www.census.gov/retail>.

Table 1. Estimated Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services, by Kind of Business

(In Millions of Dollars and Annual Percent Change)

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Not Adjusted							Adjusted ¹				
		2 month total		2004		2003			2004		2003		
		2004	% Chg. 2003	Feb. ² (a)	Jan. (p)	Dec. (r)	Feb.	Jan.	Feb. ² (a)	Jan. (p)	Dec. (r)	Feb. (r)	Jan. (r)
	Retail & food services, total	592,650	8.0	296,387	296,263	374,490	269,569	279,009	327,168	325,182	324,509	303,350	306,482
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts) ...	454,928	8.9	225,160	229,768	302,008	204,635	213,172	249,852	249,897	246,934	232,813	232,643
	Retail	533,102	7.5	266,628	266,474	343,390	243,532	252,558	295,374	293,424	293,190	274,675	277,855
	GAFO³	(*)	(*)	(*)	72,815	129,875	66,435	67,077	(*)	84,342	83,242	78,594	78,282
441	Motor vehicle & parts dealers	137,722	5.3	71,227	66,495	72,482	64,934	65,837	77,316	75,285	77,575	70,537	73,839
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers ..	125,616	5.3	65,102	60,514	66,148	59,280	60,065	70,533	68,610	70,822	64,156	67,489
44111	New car dealers	(*)	(*)	(*)	51,577	57,239	50,119	51,561	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4413	Auto parts, acc. & tire stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,981	6,334	5,654	5,772	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
442	Furniture & home furn. stores	15,922	11.6	7,901	8,021	10,408	6,928	7,343	8,682	8,718	8,623	7,732	8,008
4421	Furniture stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	4,602	5,159	3,969	4,181	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4422	Home furnishings stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	3,419	5,249	2,959	3,162	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
443	Electronics & appliance stores	15,526	12.9	7,605	7,921	13,551	6,626	7,121	8,390	8,346	8,329	7,471	7,476
44311, 13	Appl., T.V. & camera.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,663	10,362	4,730	5,128	(*)	6,037	6,000	5,387	5,455
44312	Computer & software stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,258	3,189	1,896	1,993	(*)	2,309	2,329	2,084	2,021
444	Building material & garden eq. & supplies dealers	44,605	10.9	22,115	22,490	25,531	19,124	21,085	28,042	28,036	28,312	24,442	25,819
4441	Building mat. & sup. dealers	(*)	(*)	(*)	20,487	22,984	17,296	19,160	(*)	24,565	24,794	21,274	22,648
445	Food & beverage stores	83,576	5.9	40,404	43,172	46,724	37,882	41,068	43,391	43,596	42,720	41,824	41,884
4451	Grocery stores	75,723	5.1	36,427	39,296	40,607	34,493	37,582	38,835	39,139	38,381	37,821	37,847
4453	Beer, wine & liquor stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,428	3,893	2,176	2,253	(*)	2,781	2,765	2,612	2,602
446	Health & personal care stores	32,175	7.0	15,658	16,517	18,950	14,643	15,423	16,344	16,550	16,464	15,528	15,423
44611	Pharmacies & drug stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	14,202	16,204	12,586	13,323	(*)	14,188	14,103	13,234	13,257
447	Gasoline stations	42,739	6.0	21,055	21,684	21,291	19,999	20,326	23,011	23,044	22,412	22,521	21,693
448	Clothing & clothing accessories stores	25,036	11.2	13,234	11,802	26,895	11,699	10,825	15,728	15,673	15,347	14,350	14,632
44811	Men's clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	740	1,488	608	659	(*)	898	892	798	807
44812	Women's clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,434	4,663	2,287	2,244	(*)	3,109	3,100	2,823	2,899
44814	Family clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	3,939	8,974	3,618	3,601	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4482	Shoe stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	1,457	2,450	1,504	1,334	(*)	1,900	1,882	1,803	1,769
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book & music stores	12,096	3.6	5,471	6,625	12,418	5,260	6,415	6,847	6,930	6,834	6,709	6,810
452	General merchandise stores	71,833	10.7	36,746	35,087	61,470	32,830	32,071	41,786	41,246	40,739	38,983	38,008
4521	Department stores (ex. L.D.).....	29,525	2.2	15,298	14,227	31,243	14,640	14,247	18,412	18,189	18,059	18,289	18,198
4521	Department stores (incl. L.D.) ⁴	(*)	(*)	(*)	14,449	31,760	14,899	14,471	(*)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4529	Other general merch. stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	20,860	30,227	18,190	17,824	(*)	23,057	22,680	20,694	19,810
45291	Warehouse clubs & superstores	(*)	(*)	(*)	18,034	25,038	15,539	15,304	(*)	19,581	19,230	17,538	16,726
45299	All oth. gen. merch. stores.....	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,826	5,189	2,651	2,520	(*)	3,476	3,450	3,156	3,084
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	16,699	4.3	8,312	8,387	11,333	7,897	8,118	8,900	9,022	8,907	8,535	8,725
454	Nonstore retailers	35,173	7.8	16,900	18,273	22,337	15,710	16,926	16,937	16,978	16,928	16,043	15,538
4541	Elect. shopping & m/o houses	(*)	(*)	(*)	10,838	14,894	8,972	9,902	(*)	10,925	10,793	9,991	9,892
722	Food services & drinking places ...	59,548	13.5	29,759	29,789	31,100	26,037	26,451	31,794	31,758	31,319	28,675	28,627

(*) Advance estimates are not available from the subsample panel for these business classifications.

(NA) Not available. (a) Advance estimates. (p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

Note: Totals include data for business classifications not shown separately.

(1) Data are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-12-ARIMA program and the factors derived from the program are used in calculating all seasonally adjusted data shown in this publication. Factors and explanatory material are released on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/mrts/www/mrts.html>.

(2) Advance estimates are based on early reporting by a small subsample of the full survey panel. All other estimates are based on the full sample.

(3) GAFO represents stores which specialize in department store types of merchandise (furniture & home furnishings (442), electronics & appliances(443), clothing & accessories(448), sporting goods, hobby, book, music (451), general merchandise(452), office supplies, stationery, and gift stores(4532)).

(4) Includes data for leased departments operated within department stores. Data for this line not included in broader kind-of-business totals.

Table 2. Percent Change in Estimated Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services, by Kind of Business

(Adjusted for seasonal variations, holiday, and trading-day differences, but not for price changes)

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Percent Change ¹					
		Feb. 2004 Advance from --		Jan. 2004 Preliminary from --		Dec. 2003 through Feb. 2004 from --	
		Jan. 2004 (p)	Feb. 2003 (r)	Dec. 2003 (r)	Jan. 2003 (r)	Sept. 2003 through Nov. 2003	Dec. 2002 through Feb. 2003
	Retail & food services, total	0.6	7.9	0.2	6.1	1.5	6.8
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts)	0.0	7.3	1.2	7.4	1.7	7.2
	Retail	0.7	7.5	0.1	5.6	1.3	6.5
441	Motor vehicle & parts dealers	2.7	9.6	-3.0	2.0	0.8	5.6
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers ..	2.8	9.9	-3.1	1.7	0.8	5.6
442	Furniture & home furn. stores	-0.4	12.3	1.1	8.9	0.9	9.7
443	Electronics & appliance stores	0.5	12.3	0.2	11.6	1.1	11.6
444	Building material & garden eq. & supplies dealers.....	0.0	14.7	-1.0	8.6	0.4	12.3
445	Food & beverage stores.....	-0.5	3.7	2.1	4.1	0.8	3.7
4451	Grocery stores	-0.8	2.7	2.0	3.4	0.7	3.0
446	Health & personal care stores	-1.2	5.3	0.5	7.3	0.5	7.1
447	Gasoline stations	-0.1	2.2	2.8	6.2	3.0	4.5
448	Clothing & clothing accessories stores	0.4	9.6	2.1	7.1	2.9	7.4
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book & music stores.....	-1.2	2.1	1.4	1.8	1.1	1.3
452	General merchandise stores.....	1.3	7.2	1.2	8.5	2.2	7.2
4521	Department stores (ex. L.D.).....	1.2	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.5	-0.3
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	-1.4	4.3	1.3	3.4	1.0	3.4
454	Nonstore retailers	-0.2	5.6	0.3	9.3	2.3	7.7
722	Food services & drinking places	0.1	10.9	1.4	10.9	3.2	10.2

(p) Preliminary. (r) Revised.

(1) Percent change rounded to nearest tenth.

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use, \$300

Source of Data and Reliability of Estimates

Source of Data: The Census Bureau conducts the Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey each month to provide an early indication of sales of retail and food service companies. The Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey is a voluntary survey of a sub-sample of about 5,000 firms selected from the Monthly Retail Trade Survey. Firms responding to this survey account for approximately 65% of the dollar volume estimate.

Reliability of Estimates: The reliability of the estimates is a function of sampling and nonsampling errors. The margin of sampling error, as included on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90% confidence

interval. If for example, the trend estimated is +1.2% and the standard error is 0.9%, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.65 \times 0.9\%$ or $\pm 1.5\%$, and the 90% confidence interval is -0.3% to +2.7%. If the interval contains 0, it is uncertain whether there was an increase or decrease. For monthly level, the coefficient of variation (CV) is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value $\pm 1.65 \times CV \times$ (the estimated value). Estimates of sampling variability are given in Table 3. Nonsampling error, on the other hand, can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of retail businesses, and response errors. Although not directly measured, precautionary steps are taken to minimize nonsampling error. Additional survey information is available at www.census.gov/retail.

Table 3. Measures of Variability of and Revision to Advance Estimates for Level and Trend

NAICS Code	Kind of Business	Level of sales: Median CV ⁽²⁾ for Current Mo. (%)	Trend (percent change): Median standard error ⁽²⁾ for			Revision for month- to-month change ⁽¹⁾	
			Current Mo. to Previous Mo.	Current Qtr. to Previous Qtr.	Current Mo. to Current Mo. Last Yr.	Average revision	Median absolute revision
	Retail & food services,						
	total	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.3
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts) ..	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.2
	Retail	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.1	0.2
441	Motor vehicle & parts dealers	2.0	1.5	0.7	1.8	-0.1	0.6
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers	2.1	1.7	0.8	2.0	-0.2	0.6
442	Furniture & home furn. stores.....	3.6	1.3	1.2	1.9	0.5	0.9
443	Electronics & appliance stores	1.7	0.6	0.5	1.6	0.2	0.6
444	Building material & garden eq. &...						
	supplies dealers.....	2.1	1.0	0.8	1.4	0.1	0.5
445	Food & beverage stores.....	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.3
4451	Grocery stores	0.8	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3
446	Health & personal care stores	3.0	0.5	0.4	1.0	0.0	0.2
447	Gasoline stations	1.7	0.6	0.6	1.2	0.4	0.5
448	Clothing & clothing accessories						
	stores	1.4	0.6	0.5	1.1	0.4	0.7
451	Sporting goods, hobby, book &						
	music stores.....	2.4	1.7	1.2	1.8	0.1	0.8
452	General merchandise stores.....	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1
4521	Department stores (ex. L.D.).....	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
453	Miscellaneous store retailers	3.9	3.2	1.7	3.5	0.4	0.7
454	Nonstore retailers	4.5	2.1	0.9	2.6	0.2	0.8
722	Food services & drinking places ..	2.2	0.8	0.8	1.5	0.3	0.4



(1) These columns measure the difference between the estimates of trend for the same pair of data months, i.e. the difference between the Advance/Preliminary ratio and the Preliminary/Final ratio estimates. Revisions are based on estimates from the 12 most recent months.
 (2) Medians are based on estimates from the 12 most recent months.