Additional information from Canada

A note to follow-up on related matters from the June 4 ITF virtual meeting.

First, "flash estimates" or what may be also called "leading indicators" are an attempt to improve timeliness by providing partial estimates faster. So on April 18, we were able to report on the number of international residents (and returning Canadians) arriving at Canadian airports during the first quarter of 2020; just those airports with electronic kiosks that capture the data at customs, one component of our more comprehensive Frontier Counts program (subsequently released on May 22).

Leading Indicator of Arrivals by Air: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200414/dq200414c-eng.htm

With "nowcasting", an estimate of March GDP (-9%) on April 15 was based on a modeling exercise whereby subject matter analysts provided national accountants (i.e. your BEA) with percent changes in revenues, hours, employment and other indicators. For example, we asked the Canadian Urban Transit Association, the Railway Association of Canada and the Canadian Trucking Alliance what they were hearing from their members. Note actual March GDP (-7.2%) was released on May 29.

Gross Domestic Product Nowcast: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200415/dq200415a-eng.htm

In other cases, aircraft movement statistics for example, we simply were able to provide more timely data (e.g. 12 days after the reference week) by enhancing frequently.

Weekly Aircraft Movements Statistics: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200507/dq200507d-eng.htm

Second, comments on the need to produce more timely indicators while, at the same time, retaining traditional programs was very apropos. For example, during the meeting Mario Lapointe mentioned how Transport Canada was investigating more real time indicators of the impact of COVID-19 on transportation for policy and operational reasons as well as to inform the Minister of Transport. At Statistics Canada however, in addition to creating new and more timely metrics, we must also continue to produce statistics for validation and historical benchmarking.

And we have created a Transportation Data and Information Hub that combines the subject matter expertise and performance metrics of Transport Canada with the benchmark statistics and dissemination infrastructure of Statistics Canada:

Transportation Data & Information Hub: https://www144.statcan.gc.ca/tdih-cdit/index-eng.htm?HPA=1

Third, a key lesson for Statistics Canada going forward is the need for the use of modelling in our statistics. For example, the National Travel Survey (NTS) had to suspend collection in March and will require some imputation for first quarter estimates. With the second quarter,

there will be even more modeling since collection has not yet resumed. This may rely partly on payment processor data for example (you were correct to point out that historical patterns and covariates become less useful in modeling when confronted with one time economic shocks such as COVID). And by the way, we are now just getting back to finishing up processing the fourth quarter from 2019:

National Travel Survey, 3rd Q 2019: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200226/dq200226c-eng.htm

In providing an overview to the National Transportation Data Committee (ABJ10) at the TRB in January, I mentioned to Rolf how the new Canadian Centre on Tourism and Transportation Statistics, combining household-based travel surveys from tourism with carrier-based measures from transportation, is now more closely aligned with the BTS.

I hope this helps to answer query during the discussion on how the virus has changed what and how Statistics Canada is doing. We certainly benefit from these exchanges of information and statistical practices.

Regards,

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