Flatbed Market Outlook

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The trucking industry consists of several different types of operations and segments. While one size certainly doesn't fit all, market analysts typically breakdown the industry into three main sectors based on trailer type: Van, Flatbed, and Reefer.

It's good to know the current conditions of the freight market, but it's also important to understand what the future holds, especially for your segment of the industry.

To examine the Flatbed market outlook, we will look at:

1. **Demand** shows us how many trucks the market needs to move freight.
2. **Rates** illustrate how much the average owner-operator can expect to earn.

We will also examine four key economic indicators that directly impact the flatbed market:

1. Total Construction Spending
2. Highway and Street Construction Spending
3. Housing
4. Advanced Retail Sales: Building Materials

Demand: Flatbed Load-to-Truck Ratios

The big picture: Load-to-Truck Ratios represent the number of loads posted for every truck posted on DAT Load Boards.

- The Load-to-Truck Ratio is a sensitive, real-time indicator of the balance between spot market demand and capacity

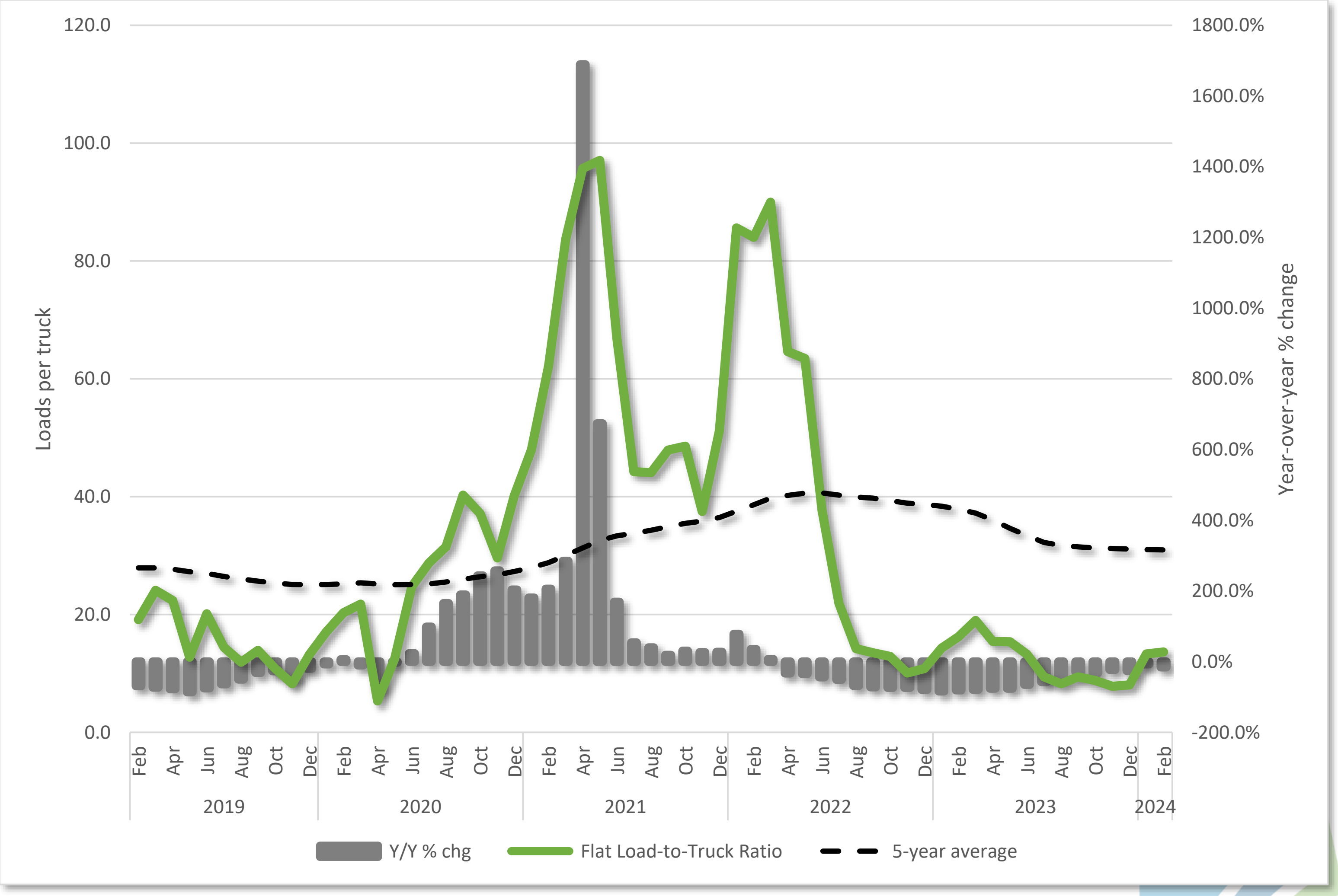
Why it matters: Changes in the ratio often signal impending changes in rates.

Our thoughts: Load posts increased again in February, which is fairly typical for this time of year. The ratio is still 13.6% below 2019 levels.

- The Flatbed Load-to-Truck Ratio increased 2.6% month-over-month to 13.65, after jumping 65.1% last month.
- The ratio has decreased 15.8% compared to last year when there were 16.22 loads for every truck. The ratio has declined year-over-year for 23 straight months.
- The ratio is 55.9% below the 5-year trend.

When looking at the different regions across the country, ratios were more favorable for carriers operating in the Southeast, Lower Atlantic, and Carolina regions, respectively.

- 7 out of 16 regions experienced an increase in load-to-truck ratios for flatbed. The greatest being the South Central region, which jumped from 6.21 to 11.12.



Source: DAT Trendlines | https://www.dat.com/industry-trends/trendlines | Monthly

Rates: Flatbed Spot and Contract Rates

The big picture: Rates are market averages from DAT's RateView, which provides real-time reports on prevailing spot market and contract rates.

- RateView's database is comprised of more than $110 billion in freight bills in over 68,000 lanes

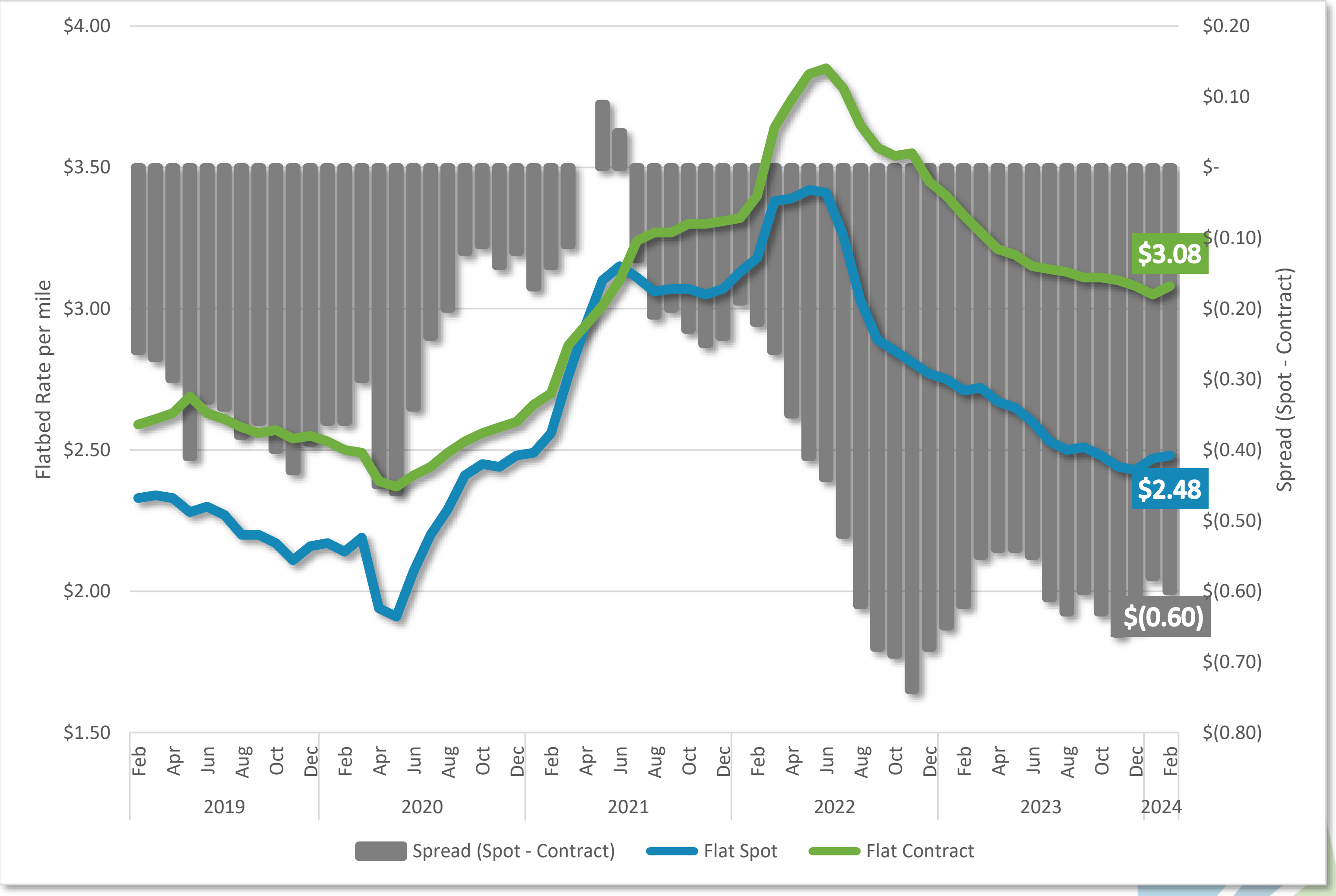
Why it matters: These rates reflect the condition of the freight market in real-time. Please note that they include fuel surcharges.

Our thoughts: Spot rates ticked upward again in February, after increasing $0.04 per mile last month.

- The spot market increased $0.01, or 0.4%, to $2.48 per mile month-over-month, and is $0.23 lower year-over-year when it was $2.71.
- The contract market increased $0.03 to $3.08 per mile following adjustments, which is $0.25 lower than last year.
- The spread between contract and spot grew $0.02 to $0.60, which is 3.2% better than a year ago.

DAT's ratecast predicts that spot rates excluding fuel will tick upward but then descend back down so that rates will reach where we started as we get into the middle of April.

- DAT's extended forecast predicts that flatbed spot rates excluding fuel will plummet $0.14 in March and then steadily decline until June 2024.



Source: DAT Trendlines | https://www.dat.com/industry-trends/trendlines | Monthly

Construction: Overall and Streets

The big picture: The U.S. Census Bureau measures the amount of spending that goes toward new construction every month.

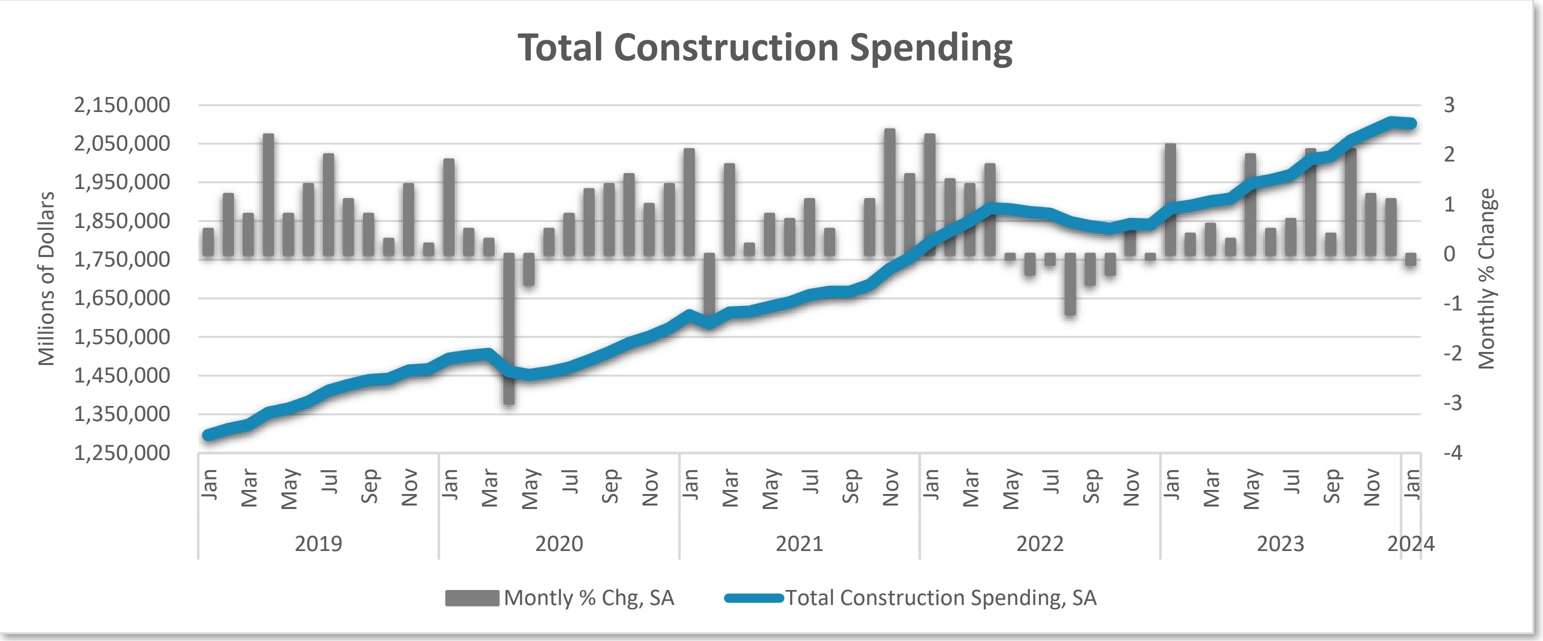
- Construction spending encompasses various expenses, such as labor and materials,
- and sectors, such as highway and street spending.

Why it matters: Construction spending helps boost the economy, especially spending that is dedicated to building roads and bridges.

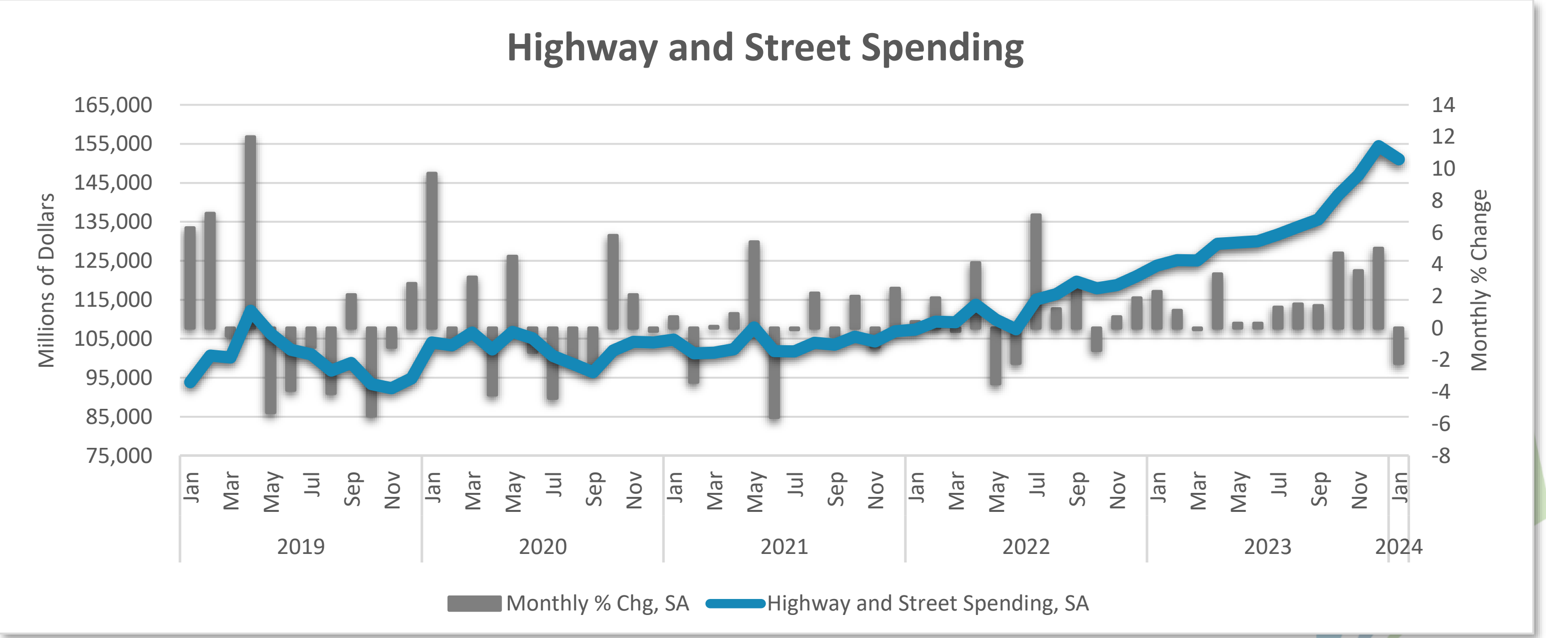
- It also is a good indicator of future demand for those owner-operators pulling flatbed trailers, as a variety of materials and goods are transported this way to construction sites.

Our thoughts: Total construction spending (TCS), highways and streets (HSS) spending, and non-residential spending (NRS) decreased in January.

- TCS decreased for the first time in 13 months by 0.2%, or $3.36 billion, to $2.102 trillion, which is $220.2 billion, or 11.7%, higher year-over year, and 25.1% above the 5-year trend.
- HSS decreased for the first time in 15 months by 2.2% to $151.08 billion after being adjusted upward in December, and is up 22%, or $27.28 billion, year-over-year.
- NRS, not pictured, fell 0.4% to $1.19 trillion, ending 19-months of consecutive increases. NRS is up 17.1% year-over-year, and 30% above the 5-year trend.



Source: FRED| https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=TTLCONS,MPCTXXXXS, | Monthly



Source: FRED| https://fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?id=TLHWYCONS,MPCT12XXS, | Monthly

Housing: Starts, Under Construction, Completed

The big picture: The U.S. Census Bureau publishes monthly estimates on the number:

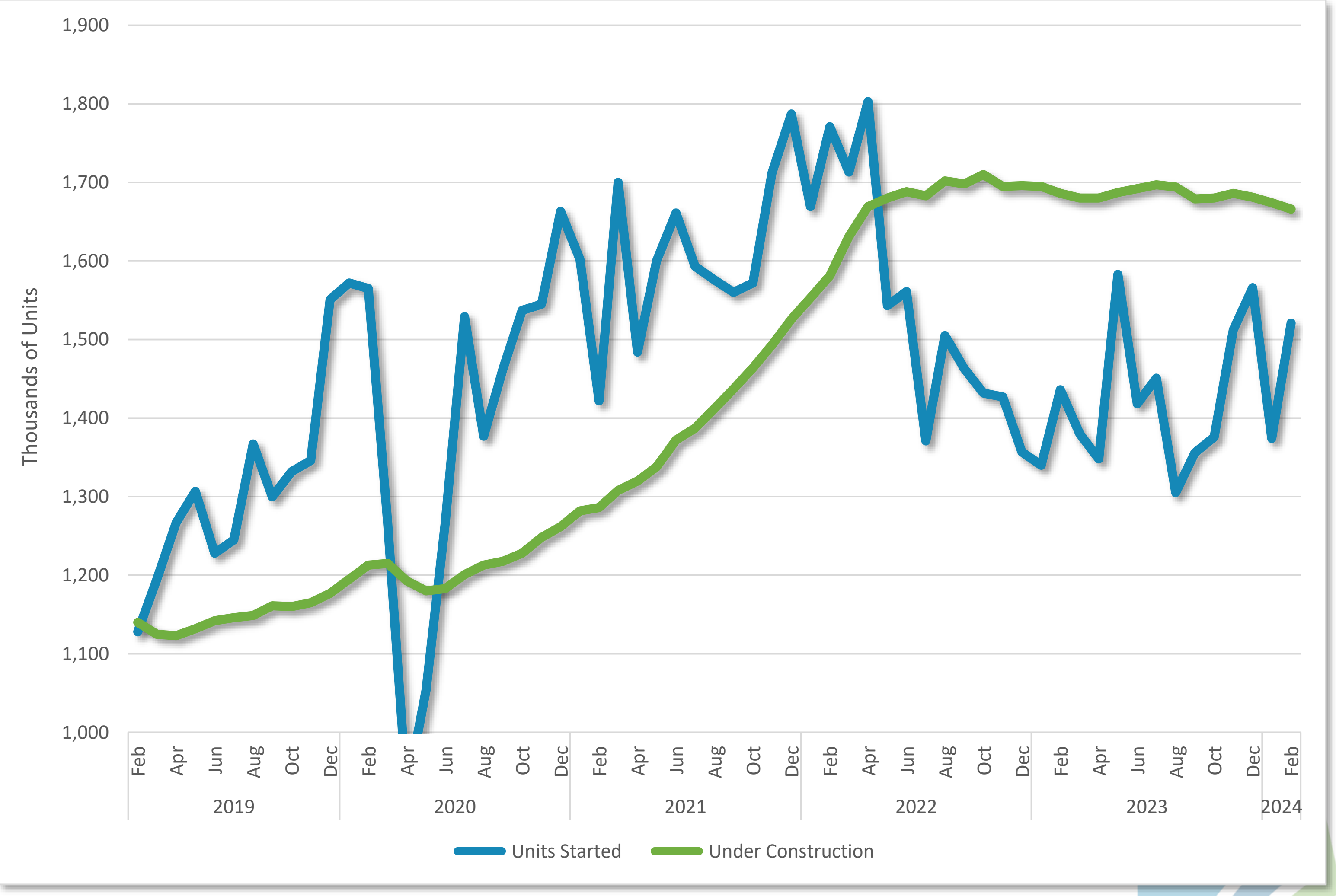
- Housing starts, and
- Housing under construction.

Why it matters: New housing is an important capital good that spurs additional consumer spending on appliances and furniture.

- It's a key economic indicator, especially for the flatbed trucking sector, which hauls a variety of building materials.

Our thoughts: Housing starts jumped in February following a 12.3% plummet in January after adjustments. Housing continues to remain resilient even despite the higher interest rates, and perhaps because of the higher interest rates. Homeowners are more likely to stay in current homes because they were able to lock in lower rates, meaning that the only option people have is to build new homes due to low inventory of homes on the market.

- New starts increased 10.7%, or 147,000 houses, month-over-month to 1.521 million, and are up 5.9%, or 85,000 homes year-over-year (Y/Y).
- Houses under construction ticked downward 0.5% to 1.666 million, and are 1.2% lower Y/Y.
- Completed houses jumped 19.7% month-over-month and are up 9.6%, or 152,000 homes, Y/Y.



Source: FRED | https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/HOUST and https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/UNDCONTSA | Monthly

Advanced Retail Sales: Building Materials, Garden Equipment, Supplies Dealers

The big picture: Retail sales capture in-store, catalog, and out-of-store sales of both durable and non-durable goods.

- These are broken down into several categories, including building materials, garden equipment, and supplies dealers (BMGESD).

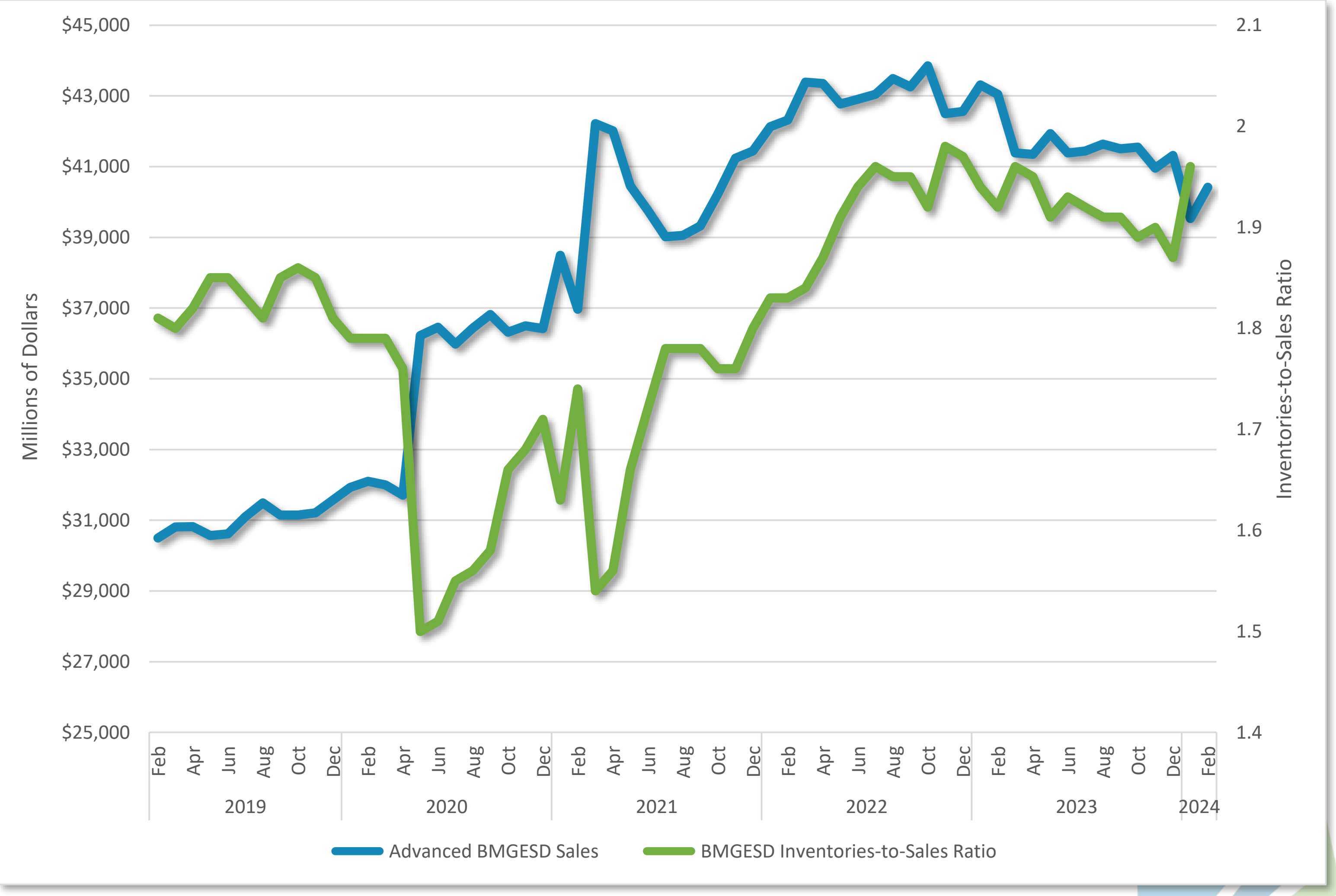
Why it matters: Retail sales give the owner-operator a pulse of the economy and its projected path toward expansion or contraction.

- **Advanced Sales** categories provide us an early snapshot from large retailers.

Our thoughts: BMGESD sales rose in February after decreasing 4.3% in January following adjustments, but inventories also increased in January even as retailers continue to right-size their inventories.

- The BMGESD retail sales increased 2.2% month-over-month to $40.42 billion, and are 6.1%, or $2.6 billion, lower year-over year.
- Sales are $2.1 billion higher than the 5-year average.
- Inventories-to-sales ratios jumped 4.8% to 1.96 in January, and are 2.1% higher year-over-year.

BMFESD retailers continue to struggle with high inventory levels. In fact, inventories are 7.3% above 2019 levels. This a headwind for future freight demand, as demand overall remains low.



Source: FRED | https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/RSBMGESD | Monthly