A Branch-and-Price Approach to the Feeder Network Design Problem

In this paper we consider the problem of designing a container liner shipping feeder network. The designer has to choose which port to serve during many rotations that start and end at a central hub. Many operational characteristics are considered, such as variable leg-by-leg speeds and cargo transit times. Realistic instances are generated from the LinerLib benchmark suite. The problem is solved with a branch-and-price algorithm, which can solve most instances to optimality within one hour. The results also provide insights on the cost structure and desirable features of optimal routes. These insights were obtained by means of an analysis where scenarios are generated varying internal and external conditions, such as fuel costs and port demands.

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