Ship routing and scheduling: the cart before the horse conjecture

The literature on ship routing and scheduling has grown substantially over the last few decades, with many papers authored by top experts in this area and examining various versions of the problem. Many publication outlets have hosted these papers, with a broad variety of problem formulations, solution approaches, and application contexts. Equally broad is the range of angles of these papers, spanning the wide field from mostly theoretical analyses, focusing on specific methodological tools, all the way to applied studies, focusing on specific real-world applications. The basic hypothesis of this paper is that we are increasingly seeing papers that are more of theoretical than practical value, and in fact some of them often place the solution approach before real problem definition. As a result of this approach, the connection between these papers and reality is sometimes distant or elusive. To investigate this hypothesis, this paper tries to explain some misconceptions, refers to a limited sample of such papers, and suggests possible ways to rectify this situation in the future.

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