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The inventory-routing problem of returnable transport items with time windows and simultaneous pickup and delivery in closed-loop supply chains

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Abstract

Reducing environmental impact, related regulations and potential for operational benefits are the main reasons why companies share their returnable transport items (RTIs) among the different partners of a closed-loop supply chain. In this paper, we consider a producer, located at a depot, who has to distribute his products packed in RTIs to a set of customers. Customers define a time window wherein the service can begin. The producer is also in charge of the collection of empty RTIs for reuse in the next production cycle. Each partner has a storage area composed of both empty and loaded RTI stock, as characterized by initial levels and maximum storage capacity. As deliveries and returns are performed by a homogeneous fleet of vehicles that can carry simultaneously empty and loaded RTIs, this research addresses a pickup and delivery inventory-routing problem within time windows (PDIRPTW) over a planning horizon. A mixed-integer linear program is developed and tested on small-scale instances. To handle more realistic large-scale problems, a cluster first-route second matheuristic is proposed. Keywords: Returnable transport item, Closed-loop supply chain, Inventory routing problem, pickups and deliveries, time windows.

1. Introduction

Following the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 and other summits on the subject, the paradigm of corporate environmental responsibility has

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