



Nation's No. 2 port in growth mode

The Vancouver Province
Thu 26 Aug 2004
Page: A31 / Front
Section: Money
Byline: Brian Lewis
Source: The Province

A robust B.C. economy, buoyed by hot global-commodity markets, is helping Fraser River Port build impressive cargo growth numbers, new figures released yesterday show.

The port, Canada's second-largest by volume behind top-ranked Port of Vancouver and the direct employer of more than 12,000, saw its quarterly inbound and outbound cargo numbers increase significantly over this point last year.

International cargo exports jumped by 22 per cent over the first and second quarters last year while imports increased by 15 per cent, the Fraser Port Authority said.

Total cargo throughput reached 9.4 million tonnes during the second quarter, while year-to-date the port has handled a total of 17.6 million tonnes.

And container traffic alone jumped by 24 per cent over during the same period.

"The infrastructure improvements we're doing are starting to bring more customers and that's reflected in the new numbers," said Ed Kargl, the port authority's vice-president of business development.

"We expect these strong volume increases will continue and it should be a record year for total cargo volumes," he added. "A stronger B.C. economy is definitely helping us."

The federally regulated port authority announced a major expansion last spring that is expected to double its current container traffic at Fraser Surrey Docks by June 2005. The port also is the primary North American entry point for Asian-made automobiles.

While Fraser River Port has also seen significant increases in other commodity shipments such as lumber, pulp and newsprint, the latest issue of Victoria-based M. Murenbeeld & Associates Inc.'s monthly B.C. Monitor economic newsletter calls for a currently hot commodities market to continue for a little longer.

"Strong markets for nearly all types of commodities this year will not only add to economic growth but will also give the B.C. economy an advantage over the rest of Canada, since B.C. is relatively more reliant on natural resources," says Murenbeeld economist William Tharp.

Lumber and copper prices have shown particularly strong growth of more than 50 per cent.

But Tharp warns that future commodity price gains are expected to moderate. "We've either peaked or we're close to the peak," he says.

blewis@png.canwest.com