

Fraser River Port enjoys 24% hike in container traffic: China is responsible for a large part of the increase over the past six months, a port official says

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Container traffic at the Fraser River Port Authority during the first six months of 2004 increased by 24 per cent over the same period last year.

In second-quarter figures released Wednesday, the port showed year-to-date growth in both imports and exports. International and domestic cargo totalled 9.4 million tonnes, an increase of nearly 580,000 tonnes over the same period last year.

The port handled 75,150 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units, the standard measure for container loads) in the second quarter, an increase of 8,576 TEUs over the first quarter. In the first six months, the port has had a 25-per-cent increase in container imports, and a 22-per-cent increase in container exports.

"We're seeing a steady growth in container traffic, and that's a global trend," says Mark Erdman, spokesman for the FRPA, second in Canada for cargo volume behind the Vancouver Port Authority.

"There's a trend toward containerizing things for shipping," said Erdman. "Places like Fraser Surrey Docks are increasing their capacity to handle more containers."

Last year, the river's shipping channel was deepened to accommodate larger vessels.

Earlier this spring, the Fraser Port, along with partners Fraser Surrey Docks Ltd. and IDC Distribution Services Ltd., announced a \$190-million upgrade, which would include the purchase of two new gantry cranes, bringing Fraser Surrey Docks' crane total to five.

The expansion is expected to be completed next June, at which time the dock capacity will reach 415,000 TEUs.

"Deepening the channel gave us more stability with the types of vessels we could bring in to the river," said Ed Kargl, vice-president of business development for Fraser River Port Authority.

Even though container traffic increased significantly, the number of ship arrivals between April and June decreased from 396 in 2003 to 360 this year, meaning the ships carried larger container loads.

Another trend the port has seen is an increase in traffic from China.

"China has been a major part of the increase [in business]," said Kargl, adding that major retailers in B.C. import a lot from that country.

"The major importers, the Canadian Tires, the Home Depots. ... If you buy a screwdriver at any of these places today, chances are it was probably made in China," said Kargl.

The Vancouver Port Authority has also seen a huge increase in business with China.

"Goods going to and coming from China and Asia have increased," said Anne McMullin, director of corporate communications and public affairs at the Vancouver Port Authority.

"The Chinese economy has been very strong. It has a high rate of growth, and the demand for Canadian goods is very high."

The VPA has experienced steady growth for the last 15 years and, like the FRPA, saw record container shipments in the

first six months of 2004. During that period, the VPA had total container shipments of 809,456 TEUs, up from 2003's mid-year total of 756,879.

Biggest second-quarter increases at FRPA were in international general cargo, which jumped from 70,362 tonnes in 2003 to 157,216 tonnes this year. Domestic inbound log shipments jumped from 975,610 tonnes in 2003 to 1,244,676 tonnes.

Kargl feels the improved provincial economy is mostly responsible for the port's busy year.

"The overall B.C. economy is very strong," said Kargl. "We seem to be cooking at the moment. The port is a reflection of what the economy is doing."

The Fraser River Port Authority has port properties in Surrey and Annacis, land properties in Richmond and connects with other port facilities along the Fraser River.

SERIOUS SHIPPING:

Total international and domestic cargo traffic through Fraser River Port reached 9.4 million tonnes in the second quarter, up more than six per cent from the same period last year. Much of the growth came from lumber, wood products, and general cargo shipments.

DOMESTIC CARGO

7.9 million metric tonnes

+4% over Q2 2003

INTERNATIONAL CARGO

1.5 million metric tonnes

+19% over Q2 2003

CONTAINERS

75,150 TEUs

+13% over Q2 2003