



## **'If we build it, they will come': Houston sees 'an opportunity to serve an entire continent'**

The Vancouver Province  
Wed 24 Nov 2004  
Page: A35 / Front  
Section: Money  
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Source: The Province

Vancouver has the opportunity to become the transportation hub for North America, Capt. Gordon Houston, president and CEO of the Vancouver Port Authority said yesterday.

But Houston, who recently returned from a trade mission to Asia, warned the lofty goal would only be attained if there is a concerted effort from all elements of the economy to make it happen.

Houston said China and Asia are clearly driving the global economy.

"The people are hell-bent on business. And I believe the growth we are seeing today will not slow down or flatten out in the foreseeable future," he said.

"They want to do business with us. They want to ship their North American export goods through our gateway. And they want access to Canadian export products."

Although the port has an ambitious \$1.4-billion plan to triple its container capacity, time and speed are of the essence, he says.

Houston said Asian customers "like our plans. But we need to move faster.

"We're behind, and if we can't deliver the additional capacity quickly enough they will go somewhere else," he said.

"The capacity has to be there -- in our ports, on our roads and in our rail systems. And it has to be there in time to facilitate the growth of Asia-Pacific Trade," he warned.

"If we build it they will come. But if we can not accommodate their growth, we will be left behind as they seek other gateways," he added.

Houston said the port's importance to the economy should not be underestimated. He said the container business offers huge economic opportunities for the region.

"While our bulk cargo business is almost entirely export-related, the container business is equally balanced between import and export goods. And so the growth in container volumes presents an opportunity for the port to do more than just facilitate Western Canada's resource economy.

"We now have an opportunity to serve an entire continent," he said.

"I believe it's critical that we stop thinking about transportation industries in Canada as simply facilitators of trade. We are economic engines in our own right -- particularly with growth of Vancouver as a gateway between North America and Asia."

He said it is not just ports that require capital investment to handle future container traffic. "It's our road and rail infrastructure as well."

Currently Canada provides about 1.1 per cent of China's imports and receives about 1.3 per cent of its exports.

"Imagine the implication for our economy if we were to double our market shares. Imagine if we could increase to three, four or five per cent."

"I think we can do much better and that we should be developing strategies and programs to tie our economic growth to our trade relations with China and other Asian nations," he said.

Houston had praise for the provincial government for its vision. Victoria is currently developing a province-wide ports strategy.

But Canada needs a national strategy, he said. "That a nation like Canada does not have a cohesive strategy to optimize economic opportunities with the world's fastest-growing and most dynamic trading economy [China] is just not acceptable," he said.

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