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Port looking forward to constant construction

By James Vassallo

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For the past decade it's been a rough ride on the economic high seas for the Prince Rupert Port Authority, but calmer waters are on the horizon.

"Prince Rupert is known for its extreme tidal range," said Don Krusel, port authority president and CEO, at last week's annual general meeting. "I'd like to relate that to an economic perspective."

"The tide went out a number of years ago and it's now coming back." After a severe downturn in product volumes post-1994, 2005 seems to be a watermark thanks to turnarounds by both Prince Rupert Grain and Ridley Terminals Inc.

"(RTI) are working hard at bringing back their coal volumes as well as in diversification efforts that are starting to bear fruit," said Krusel.

"(PRG have) done an absolutely phenomenal job in bringing the grain back to Prince Rupert and they're looking at a favourable year this year." While those two pillars have experienced significant returns, the third pillar of the port's traditional success - Fairview Terminal - has yet to make an impact, but that's something that's in the works, he said.

The contract work to convert the facility from a break-bulk handler to a container port has been broken up into a number of areas beginning with the wharf contract, which will see Fairview extended out into the water 18 metres in order to accommodate super-post panamax shipping vessels that hold 12,000 20-foot standard size containers (TEUs). The second major contract was for terminal services, including lifting the existing asphalt and concrete and installing electrical, gas and waterlines. Components of these contracts include \$2 million for steel piles, \$1.2 million for engineering work, \$3.4 million for the wharf and \$4.4 for civil construction.

The final contract, which will be awarded in a couple of weeks, is for the construction of maintenance, administration and Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) buildings. A multi-million dollar upgrade of the electrical power line must also still be awarded. So far, more than \$80 million in contracts have been awarded with a completion date scheduled for June 2007.

The cranes are expected in July 2007 and the site will be operational in September/October of that year.

"We're about 13 months away from super-post panamax cranes sailing into Prince Rupert Harbour, and it's not that far away" said Krusel. "So next year by this time who knows, we might even have the cranes up." In terms of actual work completed at this time, some of the steel piles

have been put in the ocean bed and a 'mattress' of large boulders have been laid down to protect the underside of the facility from being scoured away.

"When the vessels come close to the terminal they kick up a lot of water, if there isn't some good-size boulders there, they can undermine the facility," he said. Workers have also placed the korbels, a concrete-steel addition that will connect the current site with the addition, done work on the footing for the rear part of the container crane - the site can accommodate six of the 1,800-tonne cranes - and lifted the existing asphalt surface to make way for the laying of the new service lines.

The move is all due to an expected 300 per cent growth in container traffic by 2020 for B.C.

"Besides our Phase 1 terminal development, to capitalize and attract some of ... that container growth we're looking at Phase Two development," said Krusel. "Based on what we're seeing right now, we hope and we anticipate that the construction crews will never leave Prince Rupert. Just as we are cutting the ribbon for the opening of Phase 1 at Fairview we'll just roll the contractors over to the next site."

"Hopefully, they'll already be started and we'll have to ask them to quiet down for the opening ceremonies." Phase two will quadruple the size of the development from 500,000 to two million containers per year. Through its four facilities, Vancouver currently moves 2.2 million containers.

If that weren't ambitious enough, the port is also investigating "Terminal 2" a third phase of container port development. The site, only a conceptual plan at this time, would be situated near Barrett Rock.

"With Phase 1 and 2 at Fairview, we will become the second-largest container port in Canada," said Krusel. "And if we ever get to this facility we'll be knocking on the doorstep of being the largest container port in this country."