

Baltimore Sun

Key commodities at port of Baltimore rebound

Automobile cargo up 26 percent; pulp up 13 percent from fiscal 2009

By Lorraine Mirabella, The Baltimore Sun

While cargo volume at Baltimore's public marine terminals fell slightly in the past fiscal year, key commodities at the port are rebounding after the recession, state officials reported Wednesday.

Two cargo categories saw steep declines in the fiscal year that ended in June — farm and construction equipment dropped 31 percent and paper products fell 27 percent. Overall, the port handled 9.1 million tons of cargo in the past fiscal year compared with 9.2 million tons the year earlier.

But other business saw an uptick. Automobile cargo rose 26 percent compared with the year-earlier period, while pulp cargo used to make facial tissues, paper towels and napkins was up 13 percent. Container business rose 2 percent compared with fiscal 2009, according to the port.

"We encountered an extremely challenging economy, one that has not had this downward effect on our commodities going back several decades," said Richard Scher, a spokesman for the port of Baltimore. "While we are not all the way back to where we were pre-recession, we are seeing signs that we are beginning to make that turn back."

Increased consumer demand for autos and new business that offset the loss of other auto business helped to boost tonnage, Scher said.

"Automobiles are a good barometer when it comes to the economy," he said. "People will buy cars when they feel confident in their own lives. It's certainly a good sign that our auto numbers are up."

In January, a new contract took effect in which BMW will ship 50,000 vehicles through the port each year for the next five years. The port also won new business from Ford Motor Co., which over the summer began shipping Ford Fiestas here from Mexico, adding 17,000 vehicles a year. And Ford has begun using the port as its main point of entry for "transit connect" vans, a service vehicle version of a minivan.

The new business offset the loss in May of Hyundai and Kia business, about 40,000 vehicles per year, which moved to Philadelphia's port.

Last year, the state approved an agreement with Ports America to operate Seagirt Marine Terminal and build a 50-foot-deep berth. The port also extended contracts with two major international container companies in 2008 — MSC Mediterranean Shipping Co. for six years and Evergreen Marine Corp. for a decade.

Gov. Martin O'Malley said in a statement that "2009 was a very tough year for the maritime industry, but the port of Baltimore has been able to maintain a solid position," partly because of the long-term contracts.

In the first six months of the year, general cargo tonnage rose 8 percent compared with the first half of 2009, port officials said. That includes containers, automobiles, forest products, farm and construction equipment and steel.

The port maintained its market share for most of the key commodities in 2009 despite an overall decline in tonnage then. Baltimore's port ranked No. 1 in the U.S. for handling imported roll on/roll

off cargo — mainly farm and construction equipment — as well as for handling imported forest products, imported sugar and imported gypsum.

The port had the second-largest market share in the nation for exporting autos and importing iron ore. And the port's cruise business is growing, with the 2010 cruise season expected to set a record with 91 home port sailings and about 190,000 passengers. The port has 112 home port cruises scheduled for 2011.

BALTIMORE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Automobile cargo rose 26 percent last year at the Port of Baltimore

by Scott Dance Staff

View Larger Cargo volume at the state-owned Port of Baltimore terminals fell 2 percent in fiscal year 2010, but is showing signs of a rebound after a strong second half of the year.

The port handled 9.1 million tons of cargo in the fiscal year, which ran from July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010. That was down from 9.3 million tons in the previous fiscal year.

The decline was weighed down by declines of 27 percent and 31 percent in paper products and roll-on/roll-off cargo, respectively. Those are two of the port's key niche cargos. The so-called "ro-ro" cargo includes farm and construction equipment and is deeply affected by a slowdown in new building across the country. Paper cargo has been impacted by declines in magazine and newspaper readership.

But other categories saw strong improvement. Automobile cargo rose from 521,000 tons in fiscal 2009 to 659,000 tons in fiscal 2010, a rise of 26 percent. Paper pulp rose 13 percent from 426,000 tons to 483,000 tons.

Containerized cargo, which includes many consumer goods that have been slower to sell in the recession, rose 2 percent, from 6.5 million tons to 6.7 million tons.

More detailed figures show that the results would have been worse but for a strong uptick in the second half of the fiscal year, from January to June. General cargo tonnage was up 8 percent during that period compared to the same months of 2009. General cargo includes containers, autos, forest products, roll-on/roll-off cargo and steel.

"The improved performance of some of our key cargos at the Port of Baltimore's public terminals is a positive sign as we continue to bounce back from the worst economic period since the Great Depression," Gov. Martin O'Malley said in a statement.

The port is estimated to generate about 16,700 jobs, \$3.7 billion in personal income and nearly \$400 million in state and local taxes.

WBAL Radio

Port Sees An Uptick In Business

September 22, 2010

Steve Fermier

Business seems to be bouncing back, into and out of, the Port of Baltimore. The port administration said tonnage was up 8 percent this year so far compared with last.

Baltimore is rated among the top busiest ports for autos...and saw a 26 percent increase so far this year compared with a similar period last year. General cargo includes autos, forest products, steel, and roll on/off goods. The port is ranked second for exported autos and third for imported autos, aluminum, and exported coal. Officials also said they expect the cruise business to set a new record with nearly 100 cruises and 190,000 passengers being booked.

Last year saw 167,000 passengers which ranked Baltimore number six on the East Coast behind only Florida cruise ports and New York city.

JOURNAL OF COMMERCE

Ford increased imports, BMW to bring 50,000 cars per year

Joseph Bonney

A resurgent automobile industry helped push vehicle imports through the Port of Baltimore to 250,515 units during the first eight months of this year, a 72 percent increase from a year ago, the Maryland Port Administration said.

The increase was aided by increased imports by Ford and the start of a contract by BMW that's expected to bring 50,000 cars a year through the port.

Autos are among several cargo categories showing increases from last year's depressed levels, when general cargo tonnage at the port declined 18 percent to 7.3 million tons.

Container imports through August rose 9 percent to 328,000 TEUs from 301,000 a year earlier.

General cargo, which includes non-bulk commodities such as containers, autos, forest products, steel and roll-on, roll-off cargo, was up 11 percent to 5.3 million tons during the first eight months of this year.

For the port's July-June fiscal year, general cargo increased 26 percent to 6.7 million tons.

AMERICAN SHIPPER

Baltimore: General cargo down, containers up

The Port of Baltimore said that although overall general cargo volumes fell 2 percent in the fiscal year ending June 30, container, automobile, and pulp volumes were up.

"The improved performance of some of our key cargos at the Port of Baltimore's public terminals is a positive sign as we continue to bounce back from the worst economic period since the Great Depression," said Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley. "2009 was a very tough year for the maritime industry, but the Port of Baltimore has been able to maintain a solid position."

The port said general cargo volume was 9.1 million tons. Container tonnage rose 2 percent to nearly 6.7 million tons. The port said volumes improved in the first six months of 2010, when general cargo volumes rose 8 percent over the same 2009 period.

During the fiscal year, the port handled 658,713 tons of automobiles, a 26 percent increase. Baltimore benefited from BMW's decision to import 50,000 cars per year through the port and new business from Ford -- Ford Fiestas imported from Mexico and exports of Ford's Transit Connect Van, port spokesman Richard Scher said.

Pulp also had good growth last year to 482,977 tons, 13 percent more than in the prior fiscal year. The port said those volumes were offset by lower amounts of paper and heavier roll-on/roll-off cargo, though the port said it is still the leading port in the nation for those two commodities as well as bulk products such as sugar and gypsum. The port is also the third-largest U.S. export center for coal, behind Norfolk and Mobile.

Scher said work is proceeding on a 50-foot berth at Seagirt Terminal, which is operated by Ports America and includes Mediterranean Shipping Co. and Evergreen as tenants. He said work is to be completed by 2012, two years in advance of the widened Panama Canal.